

Género, Direitos Humanos e Desigualdades

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COLEÇÃO ESTUDOS DE GÉNERO



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Speak truth to power: representation and discipline in feminist studies

Adriana Bebiano

1. Education, representation and blind spots

It is not by accident that, besides citizenship rights, access to education for women was first and foremost on the agenda of first wave feminisms. Since the Enlightenment, education had been perceived as an empowerment tool — albeit under other names —, with a crucial role in creating citizens as well as subjectivities. In 1792, long before the first feminist organizations came into being, Mary Wollstonecraft wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, centered precisely on the claim for education as a woman's right.

Though feminist agendas have changed hugely in the last century — and indeed today they vary according to the historical, social and cultural contexts —, education is still on the frontline: feminist research and production is engaged in political change, and education is one of our major areas of engagement, impervious to changes in fashions and the proliferation of new issues. It does not come as a surprise that, at academic level, it also features in quite a few conferences and scholarly anthologies, regardless of their general theme. One might presume that, in the western world at least, women have reached equality as far as formal education is concerned, and it may then seem paradoxical that in Portugal, as

well as in other western European countries, education is still on the agenda. This can only be read as a symptom that there remains quite a lot to be done.

In “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”, first published in 1970, Louis Althusser identified Family, Church and School as three of the “state apparatuses”, in other words, mechanisms by which bodies and minds were disciplined, made docile and complicit with the state’s hegemonic ideology (Althusser, 1970). In abstract and very broad terms this theory still makes sense: it is comfortable, to the extent that is a clear and reasonable explanation for the shortcomings of democracy and the persistence of social injustice and power asymmetries such as those pertaining to women’s subalternity. However, in the West at least, almost fifty years after this theory was put forward, all these three institutions are perceived as crumbling or, at the very least, undergoing a crisis, which is first and foremost a crisis of authority. On the other hand — and against Althusser — “School” has been mainly approached as an emancipatory tool by feminist projects. Having got here, one must ask whether it still works as a tool of domination or, quite the opposite, if it can still be thought of as a place of resistance to the savage assault of neoliberal capitalism, which devalues all knowledge deemed to be “useless” in market terms. This is a struggle that may well be happening within the sphere of feminist studies, which we, as feminist scholars, like to look upon as special or even exceptional, given its explicit politics.

I speak from a western and southern European country and point of view, that is, from a place where a naïve eye could surmise that all that needed to be done towards women’s full citizenship has been done already. In fact, in the Portuguese Constitution, adopted in 1976 in the post-revolution context, women are granted full equality by law. It is common knowledge that law and social and cultural practices do not coincide; as Monteiro and Ferreira argue, “the remarkable legal framework nevertheless contrasts with a disjunction that exists between legal and political formalism and de facto social situation”. (Monteiro and Ferreira, 2016, p. 459) It is at the level of social practices — and, I would argue, of the representations that co-exist with or even precede them — that most work is still to be done.

Particularly regarding education, equality goals may seem to have been achieved; when one realizes that, in Portugal, most undergraduate students in Higher Education, as well as most PhD students, are women, one feels tempted to agree with this perception. However, data does not speak for itself: it needs

a reading grid. A higher number of woman students does not make for a better representation, either in the sense of occupying places of power or in the perception of what “women are like” and the social roles they should or should not be playing. While 60% of the people with a university degree in Portugal are women, women still earn on average 14.9% less than men, and work an average of 1 hour and 13 minutes more than men each day in caring for home and family (Perista et al., 2016).

If school is a state apparatus, in the derogatory sense intended by Althusser, a mechanism for disciplining bodies and minds, it can also be one at the service of a just community, engaged in educating children and young adults for ethical and responsible citizenship. The acknowledgment that education is political — and not simply a transmission of information or skills — is a given in any discussion of gendering education, that is, an education bringing gender equality issues — as well as other equality issues — into any debate on pedagogical and policy-making strategies.

All this came to mind when addressing the round table on education which took place at the CIEG Gender Studies Conference in Lisbon, “Pathways and Challenges and interdisciplinary perspectives”, in May 2016. Cristina Vieira (Psychology, University of Coimbra) and Rosemary Deem (Sociology, Royal Holloway University of London), were the speakers and I myself, respondent. While Vieira addressed the curriculum, educational policies and practices in Secondary Education in Portugal, Deem addressed managerial practices and institutional politics in Higher Education in the United Kingdom; one focused on gender representations and how to change them, the other, on career mobility and hindrances for women in academia, their access to power and possible ways of effecting a lasting change. Coming from different directions and tackling different aspects of the same Big Issue, these two talks had in common the statement that, regarding gender equality, not everything has been achieved in either country. In fact, as Deem claimed, to effect lasting change the first barrier to overcome is the general perception that “all necessary gender reforms were done and in place”.

This is a perception that permeates discourses and is present at all levels of our lives, from academia to media discourse and to discussions in social networks, as quite a few of us keep finding out to our chagrin and in no uncertain terms. Research projects that provide data are certainly important to prove that this perception is incorrect, and figures do have the capacity to produce a reality

effect that no other form of representation possesses. However, confronted with hegemonic discourses and with the average person's perception of this issue, one should ask oneself who reads these figures apart from other academics and, if we are fortunate, policy makers. The problem is the connection between academia and society; the issue of the audience — who *listens* to us? whose lives do we want to change? — is not a minor one and I will get back to this later.

Looking for a common ground and for conceptual tools that may enable dialogue between what may seem very different problems, I would argue that, at the Lisbon conference, Vieira and Deem addressed two key issues in Feminist Studies which can be expressed by “darstellen” and “vertreten”, as first discussed by Gayatri Spivak in her influential essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988). These are two different German words for “representation” — “representação”, in Portuguese, producing the same problem as in English, namely collapsing two different issues into a single word. In fact, “darstellen” is “to represent” as in “to portray”, “to depict”, as in art, philosophy, media, school manuals and so forth; “vertreten” is “to represent” as in “to speak in the name of”, “to speak for”, as in politics, institutions and so on. Portrait and proxy are, as Spivak argues, discontinuous but related: we need to address the ways in which “darstellen” is deeply implicated in “vertreten” and vice-versa.

Within Feminist Studies, this problem may be tackled by putting into dialogue what the humanities do and what the social sciences do, looking for ways for “supplementing one another”, in a common effort which again Spivak calls for in *Death of a Discipline* (2003). It should be added, however, that a call for the bridging the two cultures — refigured here as the humanities and the social sciences — has been going on for some decades now: its point of origin may be identified in the 1970's, at the beginning of the “cultural turn”. Yet this is still an ongoing course fraught with contradictions, uncertainties and conflict. At an early stage of the process, Clifford Geertz (1983), moving away from positivist epistemology and groping for a methodology to validate new approaches for the social sciences, focused his reflection in the writing modes chosen by researchers, a focus which I find crucial and particularly congenial. In the essay “Blurred genres. The Refiguration of Social Thought”, after giving examples of both “facts”, presented by the social sciences, and “analogies” coming from the humanities, the author states: “I not only think that these things are true, I think they are true together”. (Geertz, 1983, p. 21). I find this an excellent motto for approach-

ing “darstellen” and “vertreten” as two key problems for feminisms and Feminist Studies.

“Representation”, in the sense of “to portray” or “to depict”, is at the core of women’s subalternity: depicted by culturally resilient stereotypes as either weak / tender / nurturing / good, on the one hand, or over-strong / threatening / castrating / bad, on the other, these pictures provide the rationale for community hierarchical organization and justify male dominance. Stereotypical representation is at the heart of patriarchy. This sounds like very old stuff, and indeed it is; however, one has only to look at the media with gender lens to realize that it still sticks, naturalized and unquestioned (see Silveirinha, 2004). As far as compulsory education goes, one has only to take a glance at the curriculum to identify stereotyping (see Vieira, 2013 and Vieira, Nogueira and Tavares, 2013), a form of cognition that naturalizes gender roles and thus helps to perpetuate power asymmetries.

Stereotypes still very much endorse a patriarchal hierarchal sex-gender system that names women as “the second sex” (Beauvoir, 1949), the Other of men. The masculine is “the sex-that-is” or the yardstick for all other possible sexual identities and identifications-in-progress (Ramalho, 2001), also because this hierarchy has been made “natural” by all manners of representation, from the arts to school curricula and media discourse. If this is to change — and it is changing — will we need more “Vertretung”? Furthermore: if there is more “Vertretung”, more women in places of influence and power, will we get a better “Darstellung”, better portraits of women putting forward a different figuration of the feminine? Not necessarily, as both men and women are products of the same ideology, and one should not demand of women a higher awareness of that ideology. Thus the importance, now as in the past, of “consciousness raising”, in which education has a crucial role to play.

However, one should bear in mind that representation — in both senses of the word — must be qualified or even queried: which women are represented in what manner? Which women are underrepresented? Which women represent which women? The category of “woman”, even when rewritten as “women” to account for diversity, is still under dispute — most fiercely by Queer Theory — and this is not the place for this discussion. Yet it needs to be stated that if we give up altogether on the category, we are left with no subject to emancipate. Feminisms, and Feminist Studies, need a subject — or subjects — and the subjects of femi-

nisms are (mostly) women. In Feminist and Gender Studies one takes for granted that “gender” and “women” are the central categories of analysis; to give up these categories means crossing the border into something else entirely.

The question of “which women?” has, however, to be asked daily. The discussion, started by African American feminists in the 1970’s, has been growing consistently, to include, besides race or ethnicity, other factors of subalternity, such as sexual orientation, class, age, and disabilities. It is impossible, nowadays, to address a women’s related issue without being aware of the need for an intersectional approach and without addressing the hierarchy of oppressions. However, depending on the country and local political circumstances, one or two of these factors of oppression take precedence over the others. In Western Europe as a whole, taken at a glance, LGBT rights are, if not taking precedence over other rights, at least becoming more visible — even conspicuous. This agenda may well be more apparent at the level of activism, but it is also reflected in academia, where the appeal of seminars, classes and research projects is very much connected with whatever is happening in activism and influenced by the political agenda. One would think that an intersectional approach would work as a solution, but in fact, at each instance, there’s always the possibility of someone calling attention to some feature which has been left out of the debate.

Kimberlé Crenshaw is credited with formulating the notion of an intersectional approach in a now famous article of 1989, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Sex and Race: a Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”, which addressed the specific case of marginalized coloured women in the American judicial system (Crenshaw, 1989). Born at the intersection of sex and race, denouncing the shortcomings of the use of a single category to address the problems of women, intersectionality became an increasingly more useful category of analysis, expanding to include class, religion, sexual orientation, age and other categories. The increasing complexification of the category “women” cannot be ignored at this stage, and — as is often the case with interdisciplinarity — everyone accepts the need for intersectionality, but this does not necessarily entail a practice. In Portugal, this is very much the case of “race”.

It is still acceptable — in fact, it is perceived as natural — that the race issue is not addressed in a study of women: race is a non-issue in Portuguese academia in general. If one reads the syllabus of History and Literature subjects, for in-

stance, race is almost absent, though Portuguese “Expansion” — another name for colonialism and Empire — is addressed. Or when studied, it happens in the specific field of the Other: African women writers, for instance, with a special focus on Portuguese former African colonies, for historical reasons which are easy to understand. Two of our colleagues in the Feminist Studies PhD programme at Coimbra do research on this line, an awareness that has led to the creation of the seminar “Women, Race and Ethnicity”, focusing on representations within Literature and Cultural Studies; that is, we deal with the issue in the sense of “Darstellung”.

If changes in “Darstellung” are taking place, as far as “Vertretung” goes Feminist Studies in Portugal are still very “white” (Portuguese Academia as a whole is very “white”). Though I do not possess any hard data that might support this statement, this perception is supported by “*A luta pela descolonização continua*”, a feature article by Joana Gorjão Henriques (Henriques, 2017), published in *Público* on the 19th March, and which includes quite a few interviews to people in the field. As a witness of my own circumstances, I only became aware of the whiteness of Portuguese academia by having it pointed out by Brazilian students at Coimbra (Brazilian students come to Coimbra in all hues, though still with a disproportionately high percentage of whiteness, when the demography of the country is considered).

With an ethnically mixed population, increasingly so after the decolonization process (1974-1975), Portuguese coloured people can be seen in the streets or at services, but are nearly invisible in high-profile positions, politically and otherwise. As of October 2015, Francisca van Dunen was the first black person to become a government minister in Portugal. The country’s (much sung) diversity, however, is only apparent in sports and in music — a classic situation — and the whiteness of academia is only a dimension of it. What does this absence mean? Shouldn’t the race issue be addressed in gender studies? How can we decolonize gender studies? Is there a process of “whitening” in universities and in gender studies as well? Speaking of the Netherlands, Gloria Wekker talks of “white innocence” (Wekker, 2016) to refer to the process by which Dutch people, as a rule, speak of themselves as non-racist, in what amounts to blindness, given the pervasive naturalized racist representations as well as the absence of black people in places of power or of social high profile, such as universities. Though I am unable to identify the dimension of the issue in Portugal, it is important that

we recognize this absence, in order not to create silences around certain experiences and certain bodies. In discussing what he calls the “sociology of absences”, Boaventura Sousa Santos denounces the production of nonexistence (Santos, 2014, p. 171-175) in mainstream social sciences: “Nonexistence is produced whenever a certain entity is disqualified and rendered invisible, unintelligible, or irreversibly discardable.” (Santos, 2014, p. 172) One must, therefore, look for “absent knowledges and absent agents” (Santos, 2014, p. 161) and be on the alert for forms of production of nonexistence, in each case having in mind both the gender as well as other (possible) forms of discrimination.

This does not come easily. We are creatures of habitus, “history turned into nature” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 78), each of us born to a certain culture and bound to reproduce the values — i.e., the ideology, in the Althusserian sense of the concept — of the culture in which we have been socialized. This is not to say “destiny”, nor is it denial of a dimension of agency. Social and cultural change do also play a part: cultures exist in time, and are thus subject to change, although slow and quite often not perceived with the naked eye while it is taking place. Thus, each culture’s blind spots are also the blind spots of a certain moment in history and a certain cultural and political context. As new perspectives are brought to the foreground, denouncing a specific blind spot, the whole body of what is acceptable or unacceptable changes accordingly. This happens within Feminist Studies too: our field is saturated with contradictions and subject to constant changes also coming from within; we need to be open to self-criticism and listen to the different voices in the field. Contradiction is the root of all movement and vitality, and thus not to be feared or smoothed over.

2. The power of disciplines

When we think of “speaking truth to power” we usually have in mind Feminist / Gender Studies opposing the establishment, the state or academic institutions, those who put forward all kinds of obstacles to gender equality and who resent, belittle or deride any feminist work. “They” are the ones in power; “we” are at the margins, looking in and wanting our place. We tend to think of ourselves as “marginal”, fighting to “get in”, to achieve legitimation for our work, our goals, and our places in the different hierarchies of power in the institutions. This is, of course, quite true — up to a point. However, it is not the whole story. For the “whole story” we might need also an autoethnographic approach, that is,

stories that tell and show personal experiences in order to understand cultural experience. This is a writing genre closer to literature than to the social sciences, providing “new ways of thinking and feeling” and help people “make sense of themselves and others” (Ellis, 2011, p. 00) — and one from which we might profit.

In October 2016, at the University of Coimbra, the PhD programme in Feminist Studies hosted a postgraduate Conference entitled “We must all be Feminists”. This is a (mis)quotation from the title of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s famous TEDX Talk, “We should all be Feminists” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hg3umXU_qWc>), as most people will recognize immediately. Yet, one forgets that it is not as easily recognized by those on the outside of our own culture and interests, who read it quite differently: as an imperative, a “will to power”. Present at the Conference’s inauguration ceremony, the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities took exception to this title. To be fair, as Dean he has proved friendly to our work, giving support whenever asked, including for the conference. However, in his opening remarks he stated quite fiercely that “no, we must not all be feminists”, and went on to argue for the legitimacy of producing knowledge outside a feminist framework. Furthermore, he went on to make a difference between “politics” and “science” and to claim the authority of orthodox disciplines and the validity of doing science outside a feminist framework. Which, theoretically, is an acceptable position — and one still supported by most people.

Caveat: I’m quoting by heart and interpreting; other people who were there may well have a different memory and a different reading of what was said. A measure of autoethnography comes into play here, and as Ellis and Bochner (2011) tell us, an autoethnographic approach “recognizes the importance of contingency”, that “memory is fallible” and that “people who have experienced the ‘same’ event often tell different stories about what happened”. Storytelling is a way of making sense of experience, as literature — my field of origin — has taught us. To get back to my story of the opening ceremony of the Conference in October 2016, my reading is that the Dean identified in our title a “will to power”, a will to engender all disciplines, all fields of knowledge, and felt the need to resist it and thus, up to a point, to reduce our scientific legitimation, because (supposedly) based on political grounds; or, to put it bluntly, to produce Feminist Studies as “easily discarded or made invisible or irrelevant.” (Santos, 172).

On the other hand, I am interested in the self-interrogation: don’t we want to engender all disciplines? To bring a gender lens to all research in all fields and

all issues? As feminist scholars, we do look for the absence or presence of women whenever we come across any piece of work, in any field; we look for gender-biased and gender-blind readings and — quite rightly too — want to bring a gender lens into it. For feminist scholars, there's always a flaw, a lack, in any work which does not take into account the category "gender"; and this bespeaks of "a will to power". There are territories still to be conquered, irrational spaces into which we want to bring our rationality and our ideas or order. Quite a lot of what we do — no matter the field — is precisely in this direction: identifying the absence and filling it in.

As an interdisciplinary field, Feminist Studies faces different obstacles. Curricula are still built up around traditional disciplines: interdisciplinarity, though frequently named, is difficult to find in practice — indeed, it's difficult to put it into practice. Conceptual categories do not travel well from one discipline into another, given that all academic work is governed by "regimes of truth" (Foucault, 1999). When speaking of disciplines, their borders and guardians, it is always useful to go back to Foucault. More than forty years have gone by since his now famous inaugural lecture, "The Order of Discourse", at the Collège de France on December 1970, yet it bears revisiting: "It is always possible that one might speak the truth in the space of wild exteriority, but one is 'in the true' only by obeying the rules of a discursive 'policing' which one has to reactivate in each of one's discourses (Foucault, 1981, p. 61).

As an interdiscipline, Feminist Studies may well speak the truth from "wild exteriority"; yet, if it is to be recognized and become power within the academy, it still needs to speak from within a discipline framework. This dilemma — which is, in fact, a double-bind, as defined by Spivak (1988), that is, a choice that is simultaneously right and wrong — is addressed by Anthje Lann Hornscheidt and Susanne Baer in their essay "Transdisciplinary Gender Studies: Conceptual and Institutional Challenges" (2011). The authors take as their main referent the interdisciplinary practices at the Zentrum für transdisziplinäre Geschlechterstudien at Humboldt Universität, Berlin. In fact, what the authors do, along with the authors of the other essays in the collection *Theories and Methodologies in Postgraduate Feminist Research*, is to identify constraints that are still very much in place — the "guardians of disciplines" as well as the hierarchies within disciplines —, turning them into challenges calling for an interdisciplinary collaboration. Furthermore, they give examples of what might be done — between law and

linguistics, for instance — though here they are perhaps over-cautious in citing this as an example of “might be”, rather than of what has been done already.

The problems of implementing an interdisciplinary practice are also addressed by Nina Lykke in “This Discipline which is not One: Feminist Studies as a Postdiscipline”, an essay included in the same collection. Lykke offers a synopsis of the problems faced by the “discipline transgression work” (Lykke, 2011, p. 129) being done by Feminist Studies since the 1970s, attempting to define and distinguish “multi- inter-, trans- and postdisciplinary issues”, while calling attention to the existence of other areas of research which face the very same problem (Urban Studies is a case in point). Lykke distances herself from Hornscheidt and Baer’s defense of transdisciplinary work — defined as an “interdisciplinary integration of knowledge”, in which “theories and methodologies from different disciplines reflect upon how they contribute to a complex analysis of a research problem” (Lykke, 2011, p. 131) — and argues for postdisciplinarity as a better and more comprehensive term, surpassing the difficulties of telling apart the minor differences between the existing options.

What comes first? The name or the practice? They feed on each other, surely, in a process that happens over time — is *happening* over time — and for which there is no definitive solution: only strategies, methodologies and good practices. In this, as in many “objective” and “scientific” practices, we play it by ear. What do we call good practices? What is the relationship between the “word” and the “thing”? There is no definitive solution: the “solution” is asking the question and the process following it. Having said this, we do need a name to work in the field, be it in class, in organizing a publication, applying for funding or organizing a conference. Truth be told, these variants — inter-, trans- and even postdisciplinary — are quite often used interchangeably, without much attention being paid to their precise definition: it’s the authority of the word that counts, not its accuracy.

Juliet’s claim “What’s in a name? that which we call a rose / by any other name would smell as sweet” proved tragically wrong in William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. However, the disconnection between “word” and “thing” may come either as illusion — as in Juliet’s case — or as a simple device, a subterfuge to endorse epistemic authority to a variety of practices. I choose “interdisciplinarity” in the context of the academic culture I work in as well as being, in fact, closer to our practices at Coimbra. Interdisciplinarity might well be a buzz word, rhetori-

cally promoted by scientific and evaluation boards in academia, often present in the titles of monographs and collections of essays, but the fact is that it is very difficult as a practice. In this, as in other matters, in Feminist / Gender Studies we tend to think of ourselves as different, or even exceptional. Yet we must ask ourselves how much of the power dynamics between disciplines within academia reproduces itself — or, rather, is reproduced by us — within this field which is not a field.

If there is no consensus regarding naming, it would be safe to claim that in Feminist / Gender Studies we all use standpoint theory (Haraway, 1988) and “strong objectivity” (Harding, 1993), explicitly grounding the process of knowing in the concrete experiences of women (Harding, 1991), no matter how each of us places herself towards this theory — or theories, I won’t be splitting hairs here (see Hartsock, 1997 and Hekman, 1997). Further down the road, it is mostly differences, controversies and fierce debate that are to be found.

3. Feminist studies at Coimbra and interdisciplinary practices

I find this a useful starting point for reflecting on the interdisciplinary practices of Feminist Studies at the University of Coimbra, taking as referent the ongoing Feminist Studies PhD programme, of which I am the current director (thus also grounding my reflection on my personal experience in this role).

Looking into our practices at Coimbra, I find quite a few paradoxes, contradictions and splits that tell us of the difficulties of an interdisciplinary praxis. Our own programme includes six curricular seminars, compulsory for all students, and taught by scholars coming from different orthodox disciplines: “Feminist Theories and Epistemologies”; “Women, Race and Ethnicities” (cultural and literary studies); “Women in History” (history); “Gender, Language and Communication” (discourse analysis and media studies); “Sexualities, Law and Gender Violence” (sociology) and “Social Perspectives on Work and Family” (sociology). Though originating in the Anglo-American Studies Sector within the Department of Languages and Literatures — the history of the field plays a role here, given that Gender Studies were born in literature departments in the USA — we strained to achieve an interdisciplinary curriculum. The weight of sociology in the study plan, reconfigured in 2015, may be explained by the fact that, in Portugal, gender and feminist studies are stronger in sociology than in any other field. In each seminar, assessment follows the methodology from the core discipline;

yet, we have to be flexible and make allowances for the fact that students do not (necessarily) have prior skills in the methodologies and theoretical frameworks of a particular discipline, given that anyone with a Master's degree in any field can apply and be accepted.

Interdisciplinarity cannot be defined by a collection of disciplines that remain in their pigeonholes, but as a border place: the border as the productive place of exchange and the possibilities of a new science (Nunes, 2001 and Nunes 2002). And yet the euphoric use of the concept of border should not go unexamined: can its use erase the hierarchy between disciplines and their power dynamics in the field? (Bebiano, 2001). Hyper-specialization (of orthodox disciplines), as well as the use of a rhetoric that aimed to define them as better science — meaning “hard science”, in the positivist paradigm of science —, characterized university practices in the last decades of the 20th century, in what may have been the last gasps of the scientific paradigm, which had been resisting the paradigm shift (Kuhn 1962). With this (quite recent) history, it should not be surprising that interdisciplinary practices find it difficult to take root and become the norm.

In our Feminist Studies programme, we are much aware of how much is left out in what we offer; but it should be noted that what is “left out” can be named more in terms of disciplines than in themes or issues, that is, what we offer is mostly humanities and sociology based while covering a wide range of issues. What we perceived as our (inescapable) deficit in other disciplines is supplemented by the promotion of regular “Open Seminars”, in which guests from across different fields present their work to be discussed and engage in interdisciplinary dialogue. The debates can be quite intense, often with a very good turnout of both students and staff. In our Open Seminars, as well as in the Gender Workshop Seminar — which takes place once a month at the Center for Social Studies, to which most of the staff is affiliated —, again with guests and participants from all over, dialogue across the disciplines happens and makes for good practices. As perhaps is to be expected, however, a gap between the humanities and the social sciences quite often emerges in these debates, with sociology centered in the present and in an empirical approach to social practices, grounding its truth value in figures and empirical data, while the humanities people tend to look for patterns and “the figures in the carpet” — to use Henry James' metaphor —, in-depth historical time and representations. The contradictory pull between abstraction and

experience is powerful: it needs to be addressed and not denied. We must talk across it, knowing that to surpass it is neither desirable nor possible.

It should also be said that over the years — The Gender Workshop is now on its 8th edition — I have found that the audience is also very much split by disciplines. If, say, it's a seminar in law on women's prisons in Brazil, the participants will come mostly from law; if it's a sociological approach to women's prisons in Brazil — same issue — the participants will tend to be from sociology. I regret to say that the literature and or arts seminars are, as a rule, the ones with the lowest level of student attendance, regardless of the fact these are probably the most open in disciplinary terms. It is as if “Darstellung” did not matter — when so much of it is at the root of gender discrimination.

Debate makes for good practice; but this does not mean that we have all become interdisciplinary scholars: each of us comes to the table with our specific skills — which is fine — but, apart from this, each one brings to the debate one's particular truth regimes and our particular brand of legitimacy, recognition and place of authority, all of which are grounded, almost exclusively, in each one's discipline of origin. “Disciplines are powerful tools: they define what knowledge is” (Hornscheidt and Baer, 2011, p. 156), and what is expelled to the wilderness as non-knowledge, to get back to Foucault's notion, is the Other of one's own discipline. This happens between traditional disciplines and Feminist Studies, but as well *within* Feminist Studies. The question has to be asked: “What is the status of different forms of disciplinary knowledge production in a transdisciplinary approach to gender studies?” (Hornscheidt and Baer, 2011, p. 165). The question can only be discussed in the field, in our practices; there's no answer, only process.

The issue is not confined — nor confineable — to the pull between different disciplinary fields and their specific status in a hierarchy of knowledge that still privileges hard sciences, despite standpoint theory and other epistemological positions which aspire to surpass and deconstruct this hierarchy. If gender as a category of analysis and standpoint theory create a common ground to the disciplines in the field, the common ground comes with complex interrelations with other systems of identification and hierarchy, perhaps the usual global ones, already identified and discussed, such as ethnicity, religion, class, age and others. But there are also systems operating locally, in closed communities, and which are more difficult to pinpoint because they are elusive in the sense that they cannot be subjected to “proof” and thus cannot be verified. And since these systems work

at local level, any analysis of their mechanisms cannot readily be generalized and applied to different communities. One can approach the power regimes within academia by pondering the number of women in powerful positions, the obstacles they face in accessing them, the possible different policies they promote. Yet I would argue that one has also to ask further questions: who are these women? Even if avowed feminists, what other features do they possess apart from their skills and whatever can be measured by the parameters of merit? Concepts such as “social capital” and “symbolic capital” need to be brought in.

Context and situation are quite different from those analyzed by Pierre Bourdieu in his *Homo Academicus* (1988). For one, under international audit culture, even in France today, social and symbolical power will surely have different sources; the conceptual model is quite useful, yet it has to be thought through locally, in time and space, and, furthermore, it has to take into account the specificity of Feminist Studies and its obvious connection to a political project, namely, the empowerment and full citizenship of women. At the moment, at Coimbra, symbolical capital can be sourced from a PhD done abroad, preferably at a prestigious university; from a career made in a prestigious traditional discipline; from the “family name” (be it father or husband); from belonging to a local social and cultural elite and from an “adequate” social behavior. This statement is grounded in my experience and perception — I am unaware of any study done in this line. However, I would also claim that, when addressing issues of power dynamics in academia, much of what happens and is relevant does not show up in figures, excel sheets, data analysis and other quantitative methods subject to “proof”: the stories we tell are relevant knowledge which, if unheard, will not come into the light — and thus the whole story will be left untold.

Amongst qualitative methods of research, “life stories” have become an acceptable methodology in Feminist Studies; yet, they are only validated in the form of interviews within sociology or other orthodox disciplines’ methodological frames, thus still a step short of in-depth grounded and detailed stories. In *Feminist Studies. A Guide to Intersectional Theory, Methodology and Writing* (2010), Nina Lykke discusses possible genres for feminist research writing that move away from a positivist epistemology. Lykke includes narrative strategies coming from literature and creative writing in her range of possible modes of writing and argues for the advantages of “polyphony”, “embodiment” and a “reflexive approach to the act of writing” (Lykke, 2010, p. 163-185). Following Lykke, I would

claim that we would be able to get richer information and knowledge were we to accept as valid different forms of writing, including stories grounded in experience — highly subjective, yet a form of “strong objectivity” —, personal and embodied. The example that comes to mind is Nobel Prize’s winner Svetlana Alexievich’s book on USSR’s women fighters in World War II, titled *War’s Unwomanly Face* in the English translation. First published in Russian in 1985, it came out in Portugal only recently, as *A guerra não tem rosto de mulher* (2016). It defies genre classification; it’s certainly non-fiction, but it has been called “polyphonic novel”. The volume’s blend of true testimonies with literary writing methods has met resistance and criticism, and its claims to “truth” are under suspicion from different quarters, in what I read as orthodox disciplines closing ranks and policing their borders. Having read the many testimonies in dozens of women’s own voices included, I would claim that they offer insights into the concrete experiences of war — smells, tastes, sounds, embodied pains and feelings, the tangible details of life, as well as gestures which have no place in epic master narratives — that could not be known under a different form.

To the best of my knowledge, in Portugal the closest we get to the stories of what is happening in the field is very much framed by sociology’s methodology; Maria do Mar Pereira (2011) would be a case in point. Addressing the issue of internal debate within Feminist Studies in Portugal, and based on interviews to a number of scholars, the author identifies a lack of debate within the field, explaining it with the smallness of the country and of its academic community, the concomitant connections and interdependence. From the interviews collected, Pereira also identifies a split between a cordial attitude in public contexts very much in contrast with a severe critique amongst peers in informal contexts. Santos and Pereira (2014) also pinpoint this practice, and a concomitant absence of debate, as a handicap for the advancement of Feminist Studies, an evaluation which my experience — particularly all the conversations I have had in informal contexts — validates up to a point. Yet this does not apply everywhere and to every circumstance; and there are other factors that come into the equation.

I would say that the “lack of debate” in Portuguese academia in general is received knowledge often disproved — at Coimbra, at least. Debates in the (both already mentioned) Feminist Studies Open Seminars and in the Gender Workshop are often fierce — and thus, satisfying. Quite often the debate is connected with conflict and negotiation around disciplines and methodologies: people dif-

fer in their conception of what constitutes valid knowledge, each bringing to the debate the accepted categories and methodologies of their own disciplines. Each of us brings to the debate the categories that ground our own work inside these disciplines because it is there, and not in feminist studies, that we build our scientific legitimacy. This is double-edged: while it reinforces disciplinary surveillance, it also functions as a meeting across borders and is also highly productive.

4. Audit culture and whose lives are worth changing?

Two issues trouble me in Feminist Studies in Portugal today: the fences and hierarchies between disciplinary fields, as already discussed; on the opposite end of the spectrum, the self-referential “theory” which I keep bumping into in quite a few seminars and other events, which is baffling, irritating and worrying. This is what Geertz feared and called an “elaborate chatter and high nonsense” (Geertz, 1983, p. 23). I mean the repetition of buzz-words, a kind of “newspeak” in loop, a self-referential speech which, paradoxically, produces talk quite similar to other (previous) papers and mirrors previous texts, in a quotation frenzy that has lost the (real) referent somewhere along the way. This is not particular to feminist studies: it is happening across all fields, and I would claim it is one of the perverse effects of audit culture.

In the essay “Words”, arguing for the importance of a clear language for intellectual work, the historian Tony Judt states: “The ‘professionalization’ of academic writing — and the self-conscious grasping of humanists for the security of ‘theory’ and ‘methodology’ — favours obscurantism.” (Judt, 2010, p. 151). I could not agree more, and insist on this aspect in my teaching: words have to refer to *something*, besides other words.

As far as “methodology” goes, in the humanities it can simply be summarized in two words: reading and thinking. Yet I find myself writing jargon in each “methodology” box in each assessment or application: audit culture rules. Judt — a Cambridge King’s man — certainly belongs to another time: “My supervisors were supremely uninterested in public performance of any sort. (...) It’s hard to imagine such people today, if only because they would be doing the college a disservice in the face of the Research Assessment Exercise, whereby the British government assesses ‘academic output’ and disburses funds accordingly” (Judt, 2010, pp. 139-140). Judt was writing as a historian, intellectual and observer of the Brave New World of audit culture, lucky enough to have escaped it, while man-

aging to write quite a few wonderful and knowledgeable books. It is a matter of timing: we are creatures of our own time. As Santos and Pereira (2014) acknowledge, the dependence on financing policies and publishing pressure are also part of the dynamics that keep Feminist Studies bounded, and, I would add, constitute a hindrance to interdisciplinary work. Both FCT, the government agency which finances public research, and A3ES, the Quality Agency which assesses all higher education programmes regularly, are still very much organized by disciplines — which entails quite a few problems for interdisciplinary projects when going through assessment or applying for funding.

When thinking about prospects and strategies for the future, we should start by looking at the present institutional constraints but also looking at how far we give in to those constraints, in some ways abdicating from a feminist project which is valid for society at large and women in general, that is, beyond our academic concerns. In other words, to think through the possibility of the institutionalization of feminist studies amputating our difference, making us more like other disciplines in our academic and cultural practices. Making us tame, notwithstanding some of us being involved in activism. The case may well be that we keep insurrection and fight for our activist selves, while being docile in academic culture.

Speaking of Portugal, I would say there's a measure of "bad timing" in Feminist / Gender Studies coming into its own in the Universities, which happened here only in the 1990's, much later than in the UK or the USA. In her "Portugal Report" for SIGMA, back in 1995, Maria Irene Ramalho found herself in the position of having to write mostly about the absence of Feminist Studies in Portuguese institutions, although there were quite a few scholars doing feminist research individually, in different fields, and APEM (Associação Portuguesa de Estudos sobre as Mulheres) had already been founded, in 1991 (Ramalho, 1995). The first postgraduate degree was created in Lisbon, at the Universidade Aberta, in 1996 (Masters degree "Estudos sobre as Mulheres"); the first feminist scholarly journal, *ex-aequo* — published by APEM —, dates its first issue from 1999, while the University of Coimbra started its postgraduation programmes in "Estudos Feministas" in 2007. Again, while quite a few of the research centers in Portugal do include feminist research projects and approaches, CIEG (Centro Interdisciplinar de Estudos de Género / Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies), at the university of Lisbon, is the first and, so far, the only Gender Research Center.

This is not a full survey of the field in Portugal: only a highly personal list of what can be regarded as some of the landmarks; it serves the purpose of illustrating our “timing”, which corresponds roughly to the implementation of “new managerialism”, one aspect of which goes by the name of “audit culture”.

There’s ample bibliography on the subject, quite a lot pointing out the perverse effects of it. In a genealogy of the concept and its implementation in different institutions — the university being only one of them — Cris Shore and Susan Wright (2015) locate the rise of audit culture at universities across the globe precisely in the 1990s, with Britain, Australia and New Zealand winning the dubious honour of having been the pioneers, in the 1980s. Writing in 1997, about “new managerialism” in Higher Education in the UK, Rosemary Deem states that “until quite recently”, the notion that universities’ activities and cultures “either required managing and were, in any meaningful sense, ‘managed’, would have been regarded as heretical.” (Deem, 1998, p. 47). Twenty years on, the “heresy” has become the paradigm and it is here to stay, at least in the foreseeable future. Scholars such as Deem have written extensively on the subject, pointing out its handicaps and errors, yet stressing the benefits of Higher Education evaluation and working towards the improvement of the system (see Deem, 2016). Recognizing the need for some form of evaluation — which entails accountability and brings credibility —, we should, nevertheless, pay attention to its perverse effects, identified by Shore and Wright (2015): “organizations and people are transformed into ‘auditable’ entities that focus their energies in doing ‘what counts’”, with the effect that “organizations reshape their operations and values around what can be measured.”

It should be obvious that “government by numbers” is particularly serious when applied to universities, which should be places of critical thinking and require “slow learning”, or “slow scholarship” as well as independence from funding-oriented constraints governed by a neoliberal capitalism notion of “utility”.

Accountability, ethics and scientific merit are (supposedly) guaranteed by what we have come to call audit culture and which has its merits; however, having lived under this regime for the last twenty years — in Portugal, increasingly so in the last ten years — by now most of us realize its perverse effects: while it does not guarantee quality, its control tools, quantitative metrics and inflexible formats — which do not take into account the specificity of the different methodologies and research fields — validate ideas “for their success in attract-

ing outside funding” with “outputs becoming end-goals in themselves”, as Marc Spooner argues (2015, p. 213), while “time consuming research, alternative forms of scholarship, putting time into one’s teaching (...) are devalued and left out of the evaluation all together” (Spooner, 2015, p. 217). In the humanities, at least, there’s a rhetorical consensus around this perception — centered around a discourse of lament for “the end” of the humanities — while we go on submitting to this regime, as needs must. Spooner’s essay goes on to claim that these tools of accountability are “sites of subjugation”: audit culture has transformed the universities from spaces of debate and critical learning into sites of subjugation for a “domesticated academy”, a concept which I strongly claim we should keep in mind in our daily practice as scholars and teachers who work in a field that claims to be “subversive” and with the ethical imperative to speak truth to power.

As a subversive and politically engaged field of studies, we must turn a critical gaze inwards and ask whether, or how far, ours has also become a “domesticated” space, just another “academic tribe”. A quick glance at the calls for papers, advanced training courses and seminars will identify several events dedicated to “publish or perish” and other career management strategies, which means that, at least up to a point, audit culture rules. And realistically, could it be otherwise?

Have we become just another academic tribe, just a part of “domesticated academy”? Only an ethnographic survey could begin to answer this question, and that is far beyond the scope of this paper. I shall limit myself to picking up a thread and asking a single question — one that I find particularly relevant to our field. The question is: what do we mean by “transfer of knowledge”? To put it differently, who is our audience and who are the recipients of our acquired knowledge? Given that the science we do is targeted towards creating an equal citizenship and that, to achieve it fully, quite a lot has still to be changed, whose lives do we want to (help) change?

Under audit culture, only classes, lectures and talks given within an academic context “count” as “transfer of knowledge”. Quite a few of us go on giving talks and workshops in informal contexts, in different venues for different audiences – student unions, public libraries and such like —, but we do it at our own peril as we realize whenever we are hit by yet another staff performance evaluation and have to fill in the boxes and count the points. Getting back to autoethnography, a little story should do as an example of this ethical dilemma and the double bind it entails. In Spring 2016, I went to Manteigas, a small town in the Serra da Estrela,

to give a talk on feminism at a local book fair, for a small audience — though larger than some academic seminars —, 50% of which were retired women, actually a few indeed old women. After two hours of talk and very lively debate, I left with a “Queijo da Serra” — local farm cheese, highly appreciated — and a bottle of local spirits, which was rewarding in itself; yet, far more rewarding, was being told by a rather old lady at the end of it: “I am a feminist; I did not know it until today, but I am a feminist”.

Rewarding it may be; but there’s no academic recognition for it: it does “not count”. Only formal education counts: informal education cannot be measured. This kind of experience takes knowledge, time and energy, and yet it is “worthless”. Much the same could be said for the Preface I wrote, also in May 2016, for a poetry Fanzine of the inmates at Cadeia Feminina de Santa Cruz do Bispo, a Portuguese prison for women (no cheese or spirits involved): it does “not count.” Should I — should we — give up on doing this kind of (public) service? The double-bind (Spivak, 1988) is that if we do it, we “waste” time and energy that should be going into doing something “useful”; yet, if we don’t, we’re failing as feminists. As feminist scholars, I believe that it is our responsibility to go on doing “knowledge transfer” in informal settings; in fact, we might well have more impact on the actual lives of those who listen and take part in debates in such settings than on “outputs” written in academic jargon, which are read only by other scholars, which stay within the circle of a happy few and effect little changes in what they already think and act, with very little impact in the communities in which we live. Though these are unquestionably important — difficult political questions both spring from the ground and from academic research —, a balance needs to be struck between these two features of our work. Responsibility towards the community and academic achievement are not necessarily incompatible, if we do not allow the neoliberal notion of “achievement” to tame us.

Perhaps we should ask ourselves how much words such as “subversion”, “transgression”, “different”, “heterodox”, “margins”, “silences” and other words from the semantic area of the “outlaw” or “the outsider”, have become fetish words in our field of work. We must turn our gaze inwards and consider whether this is little more than a rhetorical gesture and how much of it does is reflected in our praxis; and, furthermore, whether this is a fantasy, in the psychoanalytical sense of the word: something that provides symbolic satisfaction. There’s comfort and self-satisfaction in the way we take delight in imagining ourselves as outlaws and

transgressors, inhabiting a place of counter-power, a comfort not to be found in inhabiting a place of power. Where are we now?

Perhaps we should also ask ourselves how powerful are the institutions and discourses that constrain us, and how much domestication and discipline is produced by ourselves alone.

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