

Feminine geographies: social adequacy and gender role on the production of Brazilian geographical knowledge

Patricia Aranha p.aranha2909@gmail.com

Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of History, Universidade de São Paulo - USP / FAPESP

This presentation offers a preliminary reflection on the trajectories of the pioneer women geographers based on interviews conducted over the past three years. The issues that guided this work permeates national and international, private and public scope: What did it mean to be a woman scientist in the early twentieth century, within society, within families, within academia? And how was it to deal with the “double stigma”: to be a Brazilian geographer and a woman? The goal of this research is to support the construction of a science History highlighting the importance of these women in the development of Brazilian Geography.



“I was called to the expedition to cook. To be chosen I said I knew how to cook and give injections.”

Miridan Falci, on the selection process to the second expedition to Rio Branco Territory as a History and Geography undergraduate student at Universidade do Brasil in the 1950's.

Human Geography. The place of women?

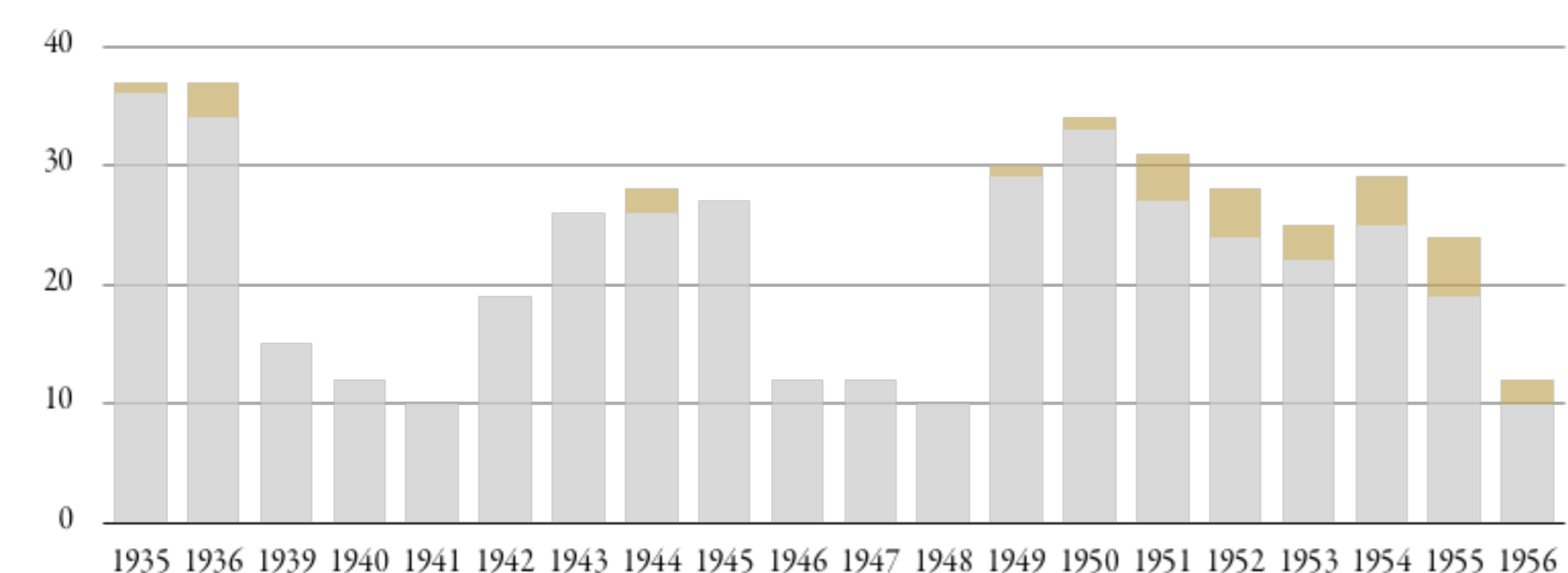
“... I remember that on the expedition buses geomorphology sat at the front, with human geography at the back. In one of those occasions there were not enough horses; the geomorphologists took them and went ahead, riding, and the women, that is to say, the human geography, had to climb the mountain on foot and were furious.” Pedro Geiger, Geography undergraduate student at Universidade do Distrito Federal, Rio de Janeiro, from 1940 to 1942. Geographer Pedro Geiger’s metonymic misunderstanding between human geography and women is a clear example of the substantial role gender had in the professional choices of early women geographers, as well as in the way their male colleagues viewed them. The women interviewed were fascinated by geomorphology and field studies, but they worked in human Geography. Why? This is the main question about this “gender choice”.

Women’s self-representations

Personal memories constitute privileged sources by which interviewees tell us not just about themselves, but about the History of their field and its dynamics in remote beginnings. Interviewees also inscribe themselves in a “geographical tradition”, and, therefore, give meaning not only to their own history but to the History of Geography.

Authorship in geography reviews

Gender analysis of authorship in Geography publications showcases the discrepancy between men and women in the establishment of Geography as a profession in Brazil. In the main Brazilian Geography magazine, Revista Brasileira de Geografia it took twelve years before a woman signed an article. We can also see that female contribution did not obey a stable pattern of growth or greater prominence over time. It oscillates between a shy presence and a notable absence. It’s interesting to note that this was not for a “lack” of women graduating in Geography: between 1934 and 1955 women were almost 60% of the graduates.



Authorship by gender in Brazilian geographical reviews

■ Men ■ Women

Women’s silent science

This research focuses on those “erased” from Geography’s historiography in these previous discourses, and not for having not carried out important work. This is the case of Miridan Falci, selected for an expedition for lying about “cooking and administering injections”. She took important and extensive field notes which later resulted in a book, “Expedições geomorfológicas no território do Rio Branco” (Geomorphological Expeditions in the Rio Branco Territory), whose authorship was credited only to her professor, Francis Ruellan, illustrating the exclusion of women’s research from official narratives.

Teachers or professors

Recurrent in the interviews with these women geographers is the goal of teaching in primary education: “When I chose Geography and History I wanted to be a teacher; at that time it was very dignifying for the woman.”, said Miridan Falci. Women’s expectations were, thus, limited from the outset, and the Geography course remained without female professors from its creation, in 1934, to 1955. The proportion of male and female teachers in the University was as follows:



Geography professors by gender in Brazilian Universities, 1955.

Future challenges

Women were historically the majority of the undergraduates in geography. They are also a majority in masters degrees and half of the candidates for doctorate degrees. Despite this, the proportion of female professors in Geography courses in Brazil is significantly lower than half:



Geography professors by gender in Brazilian Universities, 2017.

A progressive reduction of the feminine presence becomes evident when we visualize the educational system as a pyramid with undergraduates at the base and professors at the top. Likewise, this applies to participation and leadership of research groups, as well as citations and impact indexes of works. This problem is not exclusive to geography, women often abandoning high-level knowledge production circles. The construction of an alternative approach to the history of the constitution of Geography, valuing “forgotten” geographers, could help academia to cease being a space of “white men” and becoming a space of more fertile and plural knowledge production.