

Gender studies call scientific & academic authority into question

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Research news

One of the main goals of the special report included in the latest issue of the journal *Arenal: Revista de historia de las mujeres* is to challenge the hierarchies and criteria underpinning the concept of scientific authority; a concept which has traditionally been formulated and shaped by men throughout the history of science. As its central analysis method, the issue explores the biographies of women scientists from a feminist perspective.



The main authors of the issue, titled 'Historias biográficas: género y científicas en España' are Dr. Ana Romero de Pablos and Dr. María Jesús Santasmases, both of whom are researchers at the Institute of Philosophy (IFS) of the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC). Prof. Teresa Ortiz, a lecturer in History of Medicine (UGR), Dr. Montserrat Cabré, a lecturer in History of Science (UGR) and Marta Velasco, a doctoral candidate at the Institute of Philosophy (CSIC), also contributed to the special issue.

These authors have analysed the relationship between biographies and history, researching the lives of Spanish women scientists. The historiographical value of this approach lies in the focus placed on the individual's experience in their own historical time and space. The aim, according to Dr. Santasmases, Dr. Cabré and Prof. Ortiz is to bring about "a transformation of science from the perspective of women".

By presenting the lives of Spanish scientists, the issue aims to "reflect on the adaptation strategies of women and the origins of their authority". As Dr. Romero de Pablos explains, this approach "challenges, from a gender perspective, the hierarchies and criteria developed by academic and scientific authorities".

As part of the issue, Dr. Santasmases developed the article 'Gender, interest and merit: a biography of Sara Borrell Ruiz' (in Spanish: 'Género, afición y mérito: una

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biografía de Sara Borrell Ruiz'), a paper calling for greater recognition of this woman scientist who carved out a career for herself during the Franco dictatorship and who produced outstanding work in the fields of chemistry, biology and biomedicine. From a gender standpoint, the article focuses on her ambitions and merits, with a view to explaining the construction of her identity as a scientist and as a woman in a discouraging social and political context.

Likewise, Dr. Romero de Pablos analyses the research career of Piedad de la Cierva and María Aránzazu Vigón during the Franco dictatorship, with the aim of "enriching the analysis of the past and making it more complex and plural."

Marta Velasco, meanwhile, writes about María Monclús Barberá, an expert on entomology who documented two new species and whose research was influential to the study of the population genetics of the *Drosophila* fly. She developed a significant deal of her research with her husband, which to some extent has hampered the full acknowledgement of her contributions within the history of science.

The same issue of *Arenal* contains other papers written in a similar vein. The study carried out by Prof. Ángeles Egido León, a full professor of Contemporary History at the UNED, is titled 'Memory of repression: female names for history' (in Spanish: 'Memoria de la represión: nombres femeninos para la historia'). It addresses the history of women imprisoned during the Franco era for their militancy against the dictatorial regime.

As a result of these diverse papers, this monographic issue encompasses several different contexts and historical turning points. The article 'Between sisters, between women: the everyday lives of Olga and Leticia Cossettini between 1950 and 1980' (in Spanish: 'Entre hermanas-entre mujeres: la vida cotidiana de Olga y Leticia Cossettini, Argentina, 1950 y 1980') was written by researchers Micaela Pellegrini Malpiedi and Agustina Gualalupe Mosso. It draws on data from the Cossettini Pedagogical Archive and oral history to explore the everyday lives of these renowned pedagogues and intellectual sisters who, in spite of the normative family structures of the time, decided to live together.

The paper 'Love, emotions and masculinity among the working classes in interwar Madrid' (in Spanish: 'Amor, emociones y masculinidad en el Madrid Popular de entreguerras') was developed by Cristina de Pedro Álvaro and analyses a suicide letter resulting from legal proceedings that took place in 1923. Using this text, the article explores notions of love endorsed by urban working classes in Madrid during the first decades of the 20th Century, assessing how such notions influenced the evolution of gender identities.

Since 1994, Arenal: Revista de Historia de las Mujeres has been published twice a year by the University of Granada Press and the team behind it is made up of historians from different Spanish Universities.

Bibliographical reference:

De Pablos, A. y Santesmases, M. J. (2017). Historias biográficas: género y científicas en España. Arenal. Revista de historia de las mujeres, 24 (2).

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