

## Weaving a Spider's Web

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As I began to think about my experiences over two decades of relationships with geographers in Catalonia, the image came to me was of a spider's web. Spiders begin weaving their webs with a single thread that attaches to one point and serves as a bridge to future connections. The web gradually becomes more complex, with interconnected threads going in multiple directions. The threads are fine and delicate but the web has strengths. As I thought more about it, the notion seemed appropriate to me, hence the title for this short reflection.

Though most of my relationships with Catalan geographers have involved those engaged with research and teaching about gender at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, the first thread in the web was built in a conversation with Agustín Hernando of the University of Barcelona. We were participants in a symposium of the International Geographical Union Commission (IGU) on Geography and Education held in Freiburg, Germany in 1984. The symposium theme was "Perceptions of People and Places in Media." I chose to present my paper on ways in which gender, ethnicity, life stage, and class could be seen as categories for analysis in studying perceptions, rather than adopting a perspective in which implicitly the white, middle-class, middle-aged man was assumed to be the norm from which other groups such as women and children deviated. Agustín quickly responded to

my interests, and recommended that I make contact with Maria Dolors Garcia Ramon while in Paris at the upcoming International Geographical Congress. At that Congress, with the support of some others, I organized an informal session to explore interest in creating a gender group within the IGU and began a mailing list of interested parties. That session and list provided an important starting point for a half-day session on gender organized with the collaboration of Professor Garcia Ramon and colleagues at the 1986 Regional IGU Congress in Barcelona, which I believe to be the first session of papers on gender and geography at an IGU Congress. That Congress was my first visit to Barcelona. I chaired the gender session and more threads in the web began to be woven. Since that time I have visited Barcelona and other parts of Catalonia repeatedly and a number of Catalan geographers have spent periods of varying length at the University of Arizona. We have met and traveled together in other parts of world, shared perspectives, read one another's work, and collaborated in writing. Though I have not conducted research on Catalan geography, in what follows, I will address four aspects of the ways in which being part of a web has enriched my geographic work and thinking about international relationships.

## Place and Perspectives

It has become increasingly common in the social sciences to recognize that a scholar's "positionality" influences the nature of their work – the questions they ask and the ways they approach studying them. Conversely, there is also an increasing concern that dominance of the English language in international scholarly publications is creating a hegemonic discourse, especially of theoretical perspectives, eclipsing the variety of schools of thought and traditions. Having received my early education in Australia in the 1950s, I am sensitive that in many ways I received a "colonial" view of the world dominated by British literature and British and European history. My graduate education and subsequent career in the United States subjected me to another dominant culture. I have been aware of having being an outsider to these dominant contexts and to some extent also in my own choice of topics for research – small scale localized research on indigenous people and on Asian immigrants to Australia, in rural areas in Puerto Rico, early attention to women and gender, and on the teaching of geography at the university level. As I began my career, American geography was preoccupied with the urban and larger scale quantitative analysis. There was not really an arena in which I could readily articulate my thoughts about being marginal. Conversations with Catalan geographers about their work, especially in rural and gender studies, offered an opportunity to clarify these impressions. They are developed more fully in three publications that grew from those associations.

"Place Matters: Comparative International Perspectives on Feminist Geography" was initially prepared for an Erasmus course on gender and geography at the Autonomous University of Barcelona in 1993. First published in English (Monk, 1994), it was subsequently published in Catalan (1995) and Italian (1996). The article explores in which parts of the world feminist geography had developed to any extent at that time or where it was generally absent, and how the character of the work varied from place to place, reflecting, for example, professional networks, research funding, and national traditions in the discipline. Although the translations might be viewed as an exercise in taking a (dominant) English-language work into another setting, I think of such translation more as one way of becoming part of an international but not monolingual community. Clearly, there should be opportunity for movement in the reverse direction.

The second example refers to the politics of publishing "international" (that is, not Anglo-American) work in what purports to be a journal seeking to build international dialogue. Together, Maria Dolors Garcia Ramon and I co-authored an editorial for the *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* (1997) on "Infrequent Flying." We noted the discrepancy between the journal's stated goals and its performance, reporting that it had a predominance of subscribers outside Britain but a predominance of British authors. We discussed such issues as the predispositions of referees to value particular approaches, the need to provide more context for in writing for an international than for a local audience, and pedagogical approaches that had been found useful in teaching in multilingual ERASMUS courses. Similar thoughts have been recently aired by other geographers. Raising of linguistic issues by us and others with editors of another journal where we have long-standing ties, *Gender, Place and Culture*, has now resulted in abstracts of articles being published in Spanish as well as in English.

The third example relates to an opportunity I have greatly valued, of co-editing the book *Women of the European Union* (Garcia Ramon and Monk, 1996). Although I am not a specialist in European geography, this editing experience, to which I brought my experience of editing as a native speaker of English, assisted with bringing work originally presented in Barcelona by Catalan and Castilian, French, German, Danish, Dutch, British, Italian and Greek researchers into a book series that has wider international circulation than would be likely if it had been published in any one of those locations. It also offered a chance in to discuss how definitions, such as "typical" and "atypical" work unquestioningly present a northern European (and masculine) bias.

## **Presenting Catalan (and other) Voices**

Another view of the “web” that I wish to address relates to the benefits of becoming familiar with the work by Catalan (and Galician) geographers so that I have been able to draw on it in diverse settings, not only in writing but also in teaching and conference presentations. I will mention two examples. In 1998 I held a short-term visiting professorship at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand. I was asked to give some presentations in a class that would deal with rural women in Europe. Knowing the work published in English and Castilian that examined differences in gender roles in rural work in Catalonia, Galicia, and Andalucia made this the obvious choice for my teaching. Cooperation from colleagues in Catalonia made it possible for me to acquire not only qualitative and quantitative information to develop into classes that engaged students with analyzing data, but also to obtain photographs to augment the presentations. Such collegial sharing, that today can be facilitated by electronic communication is an important way to introduce students to international perspectives on places and processes. It is notable that the international collaborative teaching project currently sponsored by the Association of American Geographers has brought students at Pompeu Fabre University taught by Antoni Luna into dialogue with those in and to his collaborative preparation of teaching unit on nationalism that integrates research on Catalonia.

A different example of amplifying diverse voices and perspectives comes from an opportunity I had at the 2002 Meeting of the Association of American Geographers in Los Angeles. Eager both to showcase different visions and women as leaders in geography, I invited Ruth Fincher (President of the Institute of Australian Geographers), Audrey Kobayashi (President of the Canadian Association of Geographers), Maria Dolors Garcia Ramon (President of the Catalan Geographical Society), and Jenny Zorn (President of the California Geographical Society) to speak at the Plenary Session I hosted as 2001-2002 President of the Association of American Geographers. Their theme, “Points of View, Sites for Action” addressed the perspectives on challenges to our discipline that they were able to bring from their national and regional locations.

## **Reciprocity and Friendships**

The relationships that have developed over these two decades, like the spider’s web, have had multiple strands and directions. In addition to the examples I have mentioned, I have enjoyed opportunities to spend extended periods in Barcelona for work and study on several occasions. Nor have the travels been one way. A number of Catalan geographers have visited and studied at the University of Arizona (Mireia Baylina, Alba Caballé, Eva

Jiménez, Maria Dolors Garcia Ramon, Antoni Luna, Soledad Morales), some giving research and/or presentations, others taking classes or conducting personal research. A chance conversation with María José González at an informal gathering of Barcelona geographers and demographers facilitated a connection with colleagues at El Colegio de la Frontera Norte in Baja California that led to several years of joint interdisciplinary research between scholars in northern Mexico and Arizona (Manning *et al.*, 2002; Denman *et al.*, 2004). Relationships made between Catalan geographers and faculty and students they met in Arizona have resulted in joint participation in conference sessions and to co-authored publications. But perhaps most enriching are the ongoing friendships, developed over time, sustained by visits between Barcelona and Arizona, by participation in international meetings and field trips, by vacation travels, and by extended periods in one another's homes. It is these connections that enrich international scholarly work and offer rewards beyond those of the simply "professional." It is rewarding to be caught in the web.

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