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HUMANISMO Y CIENCIAS SOCIALES 4

**Género, Igualdad y sus lecturas
en el s. XXI.**

**Coordinación:
Cinta Gallent Torres
Encarnación Ruiz Callejón**



BEYOND THE PIONEERS: VISIBILITY, CANON FORMATION AND EXCEPTIONALISM IN THE FEMINIST HISTORIOGRAPHY OF PORTUGUESE ARCHITECTURE

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This paper is situated within the framework of the Research Centre for Architecture, Urbanism and Design (CIAUD), contributing to research in Architectural History and Theory and cross-disciplinary approaches to culture, society and the production of space.

For much of the twentieth century, architectural historiography was shaped by a paradigm centred on male authorship, individual genius and heroic exceptionalism. Within this framework, women were largely excluded from historical narratives, their professional trajectories rendered invisible or marginal. In recent decades, feminist scholarship has played a decisive role in challenging this model, contributing to the recovery of women architects' biographies and to the revision of canonical architectural history. In Portugal, this shift has enabled the identification of the first formally qualified women architects and the recognition of their pioneering roles within the profession.

While this process represents an essential step towards a more inclusive historical narrative, it also raises new historiographical challenges. This paper argues that early feminist revisionist accounts, despite their critical intent and scholarly merit, tend to reproduce a logic of exceptionalism by focusing predominantly on a limited number of pioneer figures. In doing so, the traditional figure of the male hero architect is replaced by that of the "pioneer heroine", leaving largely unexamined the broader, collective and heterogeneous experiences of other women who shared similar educational, professional and social conditions.

The primary objective of this study is to critically analyse the mechanisms of visibility and canon formation operating within the emerging feminist historiography of Portuguese architecture in the twentieth century. Specifically, it aims to: (1) identify recurring narrative patterns and hierarchies of relevance in recent historiographical texts; (2) examine how the category of "pioneer" is constructed and mobilised; and (3) assess the unintended effects of these narratives in generating new forms of invisibility within a discourse oriented towards inclusion.

The research adopts a qualitative methodological approach grounded in historiographical and meta-historiographical analysis. It is based on a critical comparative reading of key academic publications and research outputs addressing women architects in Portugal, informed by feminist theoretical frameworks applied to architectural history, with particular attention to the concepts of canon, exceptionalism and visibility. Rather than expanding the corpus of biographical data, the study focuses on the interpretative structures through which historical knowledge is produced and legitimised.

The paper concludes that, although feminist historiography has been successful in disrupting the historical silence surrounding women architects, it risks consolidating a restricted alternative canon if its own narrative structures remain insufficiently questioned. Advancing towards a more inclusive and critically robust history of architecture requires a shift away from exceptional figures towards an acknowledgement of multiplicity, discontinuity and collective presence, strengthening the methodological foundations of feminist architectural historiography.

Keywords: Feminist historiography, Portuguese architecture, Visibility, Canon, Pioneers.