

BREAKING THE CHAINS OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION?

The influence of affective inequality in education

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Abstract: This article¹ focuses on the *idiosyncratic* pathways of the social and/or professional inclusion of women through a minimum income scheme, emphasising the impact of education and training in the attempt to break the cycle of social exclusion. The study of women's inclusion takes into consideration the complexity of dispositions as well as their affective relations of care and/or carelessness, neglect or abuse. We present preliminary data from in-depth interviews, collected in northern Portugal, with women on welfare benefits who have been *activated* to education and training. We conclude highlighting the intersectionality between different dimensions of inequality, such as love, care and solidarity, and the impact of the economic context on the education of these women.

Keywords: education, women, social exclusion, affective equality, minimum income schemes

QUEBRAR O CICLO DA EXCLUSÃO SOCIAL? A INFLUÊNCIA DA DESIGUALDADE AFETIVA NA EDUCAÇÃO

Resumo: Este artigo incide sobre os percursos singulares de inclusão social e/ou profissional de mulheres através do Rendimento Social de Inserção (RSI), salientando o papel da educação e da formação na rutura do ciclo de exclusão social. O estudo da inclusão social de mulheres destaca a complexidade das disposições sociais, bem como das relações afetivas relacionadas com o cuidar, a negligência ou o abuso. Apresentamos dados preliminares de entrevistas em profundidade, realizadas no norte de Portugal, com beneficiárias de RSI que foram alvo de políticas de ativação, através da educação e da formação. Concluímos destacando a interseccionalidade entre as diferentes dimensões da desigualdade, tais como o afeto, o cuidar e a solidariedade, bem como o impacto do contexto económico na educação destas mulheres.

Palavras-chave: educação, mulheres, exclusão social, igualdade afetiva, regimes de rendimento mínimo

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BRISER LES CHAINES DE L'EXCLUSION SOCIALE? L'INFLUENCE DE L'INÉGALITÉ AFFECTIVE DANS L'ÉDUCATION

Résumé: Le présent article porte principalement sur les parcours singuliers de l'inclusion sociale et/ou professionnelle des femmes bénéficiaires du revenu minimum d'insertion (RSI), et prétend souligner le rôle essentiel de l'éducation et de la formation pour rompre le cycle de l'exclusion sociale. L'étude de l'inclusion sociale des femmes met en avant la complexité des dispositions ainsi que leurs relations affectives en termes de soin et/ou de négligence ou encore de violence. Nous présentons dans cet article des données préliminaires issues d'entretiens approfondis recueillies dans le nord du Portugal auprès de femmes bénéficiaires du RSI et participant à des politiques d'activation par le biais de l'éducation et la formation. Nous concluons cet article, en soulignant l'intersectionnalité liant les différentes dimensions de l'inégalité, tels que l'affection, le soin et la solidarité, et l'impact du contexte économique sur l'éducation de ces femmes.

Mots-clés: éducation, femmes, exclusion sociale, égalité affective, régimes de revenu minimum d'insertion

Introduction

The main objective of this paper is to focus on the *idiosyncrasies* in the inclusion and exclusion pathways of women recipients of SII (Social Insertion Income), analysing the role of education and training in breaking the cycle of social exclusion. The perspective intends to incorporate gender and citizenship issues, acknowledging the existence of power and gender inequalities linked with the condition of exclusion. It confers visibility to the «human action of women as active beings producing social life and social relationships» (Araújo, 2002: 106; Araújo, 2007), with the aim of understanding the heterogeneity and diversity of the pathways of SII women.

The notion of *idiosyncratic character* is outlined in Bernard Lahire's (2005) sociology of dispositions. The author proposes a critical perspective of Bourdieu's work at the individual level, with the aim of analysing the intra-individual variation of behaviours and attitudes. In this way, the unpredictability of social behaviour, given the diversity of social contexts and the very inner plurality of the individual, who is subjected to different socialisation contexts, becomes explicit.

The work of Baker, Lynch, Cantillon, and Walsh (2004) also contributes to this research, as it argues for the recognition of the importance of affective relations in framing dispositions, the centrality of love, care and affection and the vulnerability of the women's lives living in such conditions. Both contributions will be clarified in the first part of the paper. A description elaborating the proposal for sociological portraits follows, together with some reflections included in the research diary. Excerpts of three sociological portraits of the women who were interviewed will be presented. In keeping with this approach, the methodology seeks to gain an understanding of «a politics of voice... by listening to the meanings of women in their

own words» (Araújo, 2007: 109). Finally, conclusions and ideas for further work are presented, concerning the impact on the lives of women receiving SII.

1. Dispositions and the contribution of Bernard Lahire

Lahire (1995) presents a critical interpretation of Bourdieu's work and his definition of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1997) and proposes the sociology of dispositions. He refers to the existence of an *individual disposition stock*. He states: «the properties or capitals only exist in the interdependent social relationship, embodied or mobilised by the concrete social beings who shape themselves through this type of relations» (Lahire, 1995: 288).

The dispositions assimilated will depend on socialisation: the more the individual is exposed to heterogeneous or contradictory social contexts, the more he or she will have a stock of non-homogeneous and non-unified dispositions. The unpredictability of social behaviour, given the diversity of social contexts and the very inner plurality of the individual, who is subjected to different influencing forces, becomes visible, ultimately, a multi-socialised and multi-determined individual.

The heterogeneous and often contradictory socialisation principles that the person incorporates as well as the social conditions in which dispositions are produced may shed light on the idiosyncratic pathways of women SII recipients and interpret poverty and/or exclusion. In fact, this interpretation requires an analysis of economic conditions and dispositions, as well as a study of contexts, social networks, the connection between different spheres of activity (family, work, school) and the moments of crisis in which the person's wishes (for example, to continue with studies) may be controverted by the actual situation, and finally, to individual factors (see Abrantes & Amândio, 2014).

Additionally, the contribution of equality studies is certainly relevant since similar attention is given to social conditions as to individual ones, and affective equality enters the terrain as we will present in the next section.

2. Affective equality from the perspective of equality studies

The perspective of equality studies (Baker et al., 2004)² in the sociology of education provides another central contribution to this article. According to Lynch (2006), the critical tradi-

² In this perspective, there are five key dimensions that interact to facilitate or reduce inequalities: respect and recognition (accepting differences, from a critical intercultural approach); resources (income and wealth, social capital and cultural

tion in the sociology of education is very different from critical thought in the 1970s and 1980s, as it challenged «the simple correspondence models of reproduction» and «recognized the importance of non-class forms of social exclusion (gender, ethnicity, race, etc.)» (p. 90). Egalitarian theories challenged it by addressing ethical issues regarding the purpose and value of the research (Lynch, 2006). What Lynch highlights is the importance of affective relations (those of love, care and solidarity) in framing people's capacities both inside and outside of education. According to Lynch, Lyons, and Cantillon (2007), the distinction between emotions and reason is false, and the «emotional work involved in the reproduction of humanity (...) has been hidden behind a veil of ignorance» (Lynch et al., 2007: 2). Moreover, policy makers and the «care-free» academic world make «care-free» assumptions, based on Cartesian thinking. Lynch et al. (2007) highlight the integral role that dependence and interdependence play in framing capacities and dispositions and argues that the question of what constitutes relevant knowledge has been answered in patriarchal terms, silencing affective issues. In neo-liberal policies, in particular, the model is that of the citizen as a rational economic actor, and knowledge serves the economy, with no consideration being given to the vulnerability and dependency of human beings. In fact, it is dangerous to consider economic autonomy «as a founding principle of education», because many people are excluded from full citizenship by being economically dependent.

According to Lynch et al., equality is an ethical issue. The question has to be whether researchers want to domesticate inequality or change it. Critical and feminist theories have addressed those changes by introducing reflexivity. Regarding school and equality, Lynch et al. (2007: 14) stress:

In a care-driven educational system, the impact of schooling would not be measured simply in terms of individual student academic performances; a schooling which is compulsory must also be assessed in terms of its impact on the student's sense of self-worth and well-being.

What is the impact of affective inequality in education? Kershaw, Pulkingham, and Fuller explore «the implications of an employment-oriented vision of active citizenship for the gendered dimensions of welfare regimes, observing how this vision distracts attention from male violence against women and male neglect of childrearing responsibilities» (2008: 184).

capital, educational credentials); love, care and solidarity (care work which is facilitated and equally distributed, education about love, care and solidarity relations); power (to reduce power inequalities by endorsing civil and political rights, to extend democratic principles to family); and working and learning (limits and/or compensation for unequal burdens of work and recognition for paid and unpaid work) (Baker et al., 2004; Lynch, 2006; Lynch & Baker, 2005).

According to the authors, male (in)activity results in the introduction of many single mothers into welfare, thus increasing their representation in the caseload. As children depend on them, they are forced to prioritise childrearing at the expense of their own careers and personal goals. The government fails to recognise the contribution of these women to society, because activation policies do not often consider the importance of affordable childcare services, support through shelter allowances (that enable women to escape men's violence), or meaningful training opportunities. Kershaw et al. (2008) propose to «challenge male citizenry dysfunction at the systemic level» by lowering the financial obligations of low-income or unemployed fathers and encouraging the role of men as carers. Based on the idea that caregiving can be an expression of «resistance» and «empowerment», and that it forms healthy identities for both women and men, new activation policies are needed to include women victims of violence and working mothers, but also the «dysfunctional male who struggles to act without violence» and wants to be a responsible carer (Kershaw et al., 2008: 202-203).

Also Maeve O'Brien (2008, 2009) has studied the impact of economic, social, cultural and emotional capital on mothers' love and care in education. The author suggests that «working class mothers, and those more marginally positioned, have to [invest] greater emotional capital in their children's education than middle class mothers, although their investment often produces fewer results» (O'Brien, 2009: 162).

In fact, they have fewer financial resources to buy school materials and to pay for extra-curricular activities, and they have poor knowledge of the school system. These mothers have little access to economic, social and cultural capital, so they try to compensate with emotional resources (energy). The lack of those resources negatively impacts one's ability to care, not just financially, but also emotionally, as individuals tend to feel anxious, depressed, lonely and burdened. Although cultural capital is highly significant, material resources also have a strong impact. Moreover, having the former, but lacking the latter creates additional anxiety for mothers. It also leads to inequalities in time distribution, as carers suffer from stress about their time and sometimes compromise their health and wellbeing.

Finally, Lynch and Baker (2009) raise a rather important question related to rectification: if failures in love and care harm people emotionally, and have an immense effect on other aspects of their lives, how should these people be compensated?

To sum up, education and welfare policies should consider that the starting point is not just the cognitive level of these women, but also their affective context, which has an impact on the meaning that they attribute to education and training. In fact, nurturing capital enables the development of a mentally stable human being, as well as social skills and emotional resources. Consequently, the affective system is one of the most important dimensions of people's lives. Martha Nussbaum has stated the urgency of taking a stand on defending «the

role of emotion in good human functioning» against «the view of rationality that dominates our public life, (...) economic Utilitarianism» (1995: 361).

The contributions mentioned above are based on two distinctive traditions in the sociology of education: the French and the Anglo-Irish-American. Lahire's main concerns are the development of a theory of a plural actor, the plurality of logics of action and the ways in which the social is embodied, while Lynch's perspective, within an egalitarian framework, addresses ethical issues, is socially engaged and has a transformative dimension. Lahire and Lynch have two very different languages in their perspectives. As Lynch and Payet (2011) mentioned, the issue of care is not present in the French tradition of the sociology of education, namely in its intersection with education.

3. Activation to work and Social Insertion Income³

Linked with that utilitarian view of the human being, activation policies (such as some minimum income schemes) are based on the idea that welfare recipients must commit to actively contribute to society. Some authors (Bosco & Chassard, 1999; Geldof, 1999; Hespanha, 2008; Hvinden, 1999) have identified several strong points for activation, such as the improvement of qualifications, increases in employment and self-esteem, decreases in a culture of dependency and the citizens' concern with the right to work, thus elevating «the work ethics to a central pillar of society» (Hespanha, 2008: 11). However, these authors also underline their weak points, namely their punitive character, their restrictions on autonomy and freedom and «the conduction of tasks that are socially undervalued or even degrading» (Hespanha, 2008: 12).

Qualification improvement is the foundation of these policies. The people who receive SII must follow training courses from the perspective of lifelong learning and the acknowledgment and validation of competences. As mentioned by Rodrigues (2010: 149), «right from the start, education is a central aspect in the vulnerability process of important population layers». This author considers the qualification deficit to be a social immobilisation process. By itself, addressing the qualification deficit will not «magically» solve Portuguese problems regarding basic training. Although the recreational and social value of training as well as the learning of

³ Guaranteed Minimum Income (RMG) was created in 1996 (Law No 19-A/96, June 29th) and was later called Social Insertion Income (Law No. 13/2003, May 21st). It universally granted the right to a minimum level of subsistence in exchange for insertion in several areas (namely employment, professional training and education). In 2015, the SII values (per month) were: € 178.15 (holder); for additional adults € 89.07 (50% of the total value); and for individuals younger than 18 years old € 53.44 (30% of the total value) (Instituto da Segurança Social, IP, 2015: 4).

useful skills for everyday life are recognised as having a positive impact on women's lives, they live in social contexts in which there are scarce practical opportunities to use such qualifications in employment.

4. Listening to women...

The empirical work presented in this section is based on preliminary findings from 9 in-depth interviews⁴ with women from northern Portugal, in order to elaborate sociological portraits of women based upon Bernard Lahire's methodology⁵. Sociological portraits are based on conducting in-depth interviews, divided by grids (concerning the main socialising universes or matrices, i.e., family, school, work, social networks and leisure).⁶ Portraits are distinguished from life stories primarily in that the portrait interviews are based on a firmly structured working hypothesis. At least three in-depth interviews were conducted with each of the women SII (ex-)recipients, each with an approximate length of one hour and, whenever possible, at their residences. The free consent of the interviewees was essential, preceded by an explanation regarding the availability of time. The women selected for this paper were socially comparable in their age range, and in their social, economic, academic and professional backgrounds. At the time of the interviews, one of the women was employed and the other two were not.

Over the course of the interviews, ethnographic notes and a research diary were written about the circumstances, emotions and thoughts in the interaction. In fact, this procedure enables an analysis of the subjectivity involved in the interview situation: the proximity, trust and power between the interviewer and the interviewees. Indeed, the age proximity between the interviewees and the researcher, also a woman (age range between 30 and 40 years old), makes it inevitable that life pathways were compared and invites us to reflect on socio-economic and cultural inequalities within the same generation and gender.

In this project, the interview situation and the questions asked were confronted with attempts on the part of some of the interviewees to try to turn it into a therapeutic session. Situations of attentive listening were created about everyday problems and advice on commu-

⁴ The project involved 56 interviews with women from northern Portugal in 2012-2013.

⁵ The main concern behind the creation of sociological portraits, as proposed by Bernard Lahire (2002), is to understand, through empirical research, how the study of dispositions and habits, competences and skills, stock of dispositions, and their updating, pausing and combinations or struggle may influence theoretical reflection on sociological perspectives.

⁶ Script grids were inspired by Lahire (2002), Duvoux (2009) and Paugam (2003).

nity resources. Sometimes, the interviewer returned to specific issues in order to encourage reflection, particularly in cases of conflict with children or companions. We will present quotes from the interviews organised in a diachronic perspective, starting with the women's childhood and subsequent life periods.

Estela

Estela was born in 1976 (she was 36 years old when she was interviewed). She first left school at the age of 12, after completing the 6th grade. At the time of the interviews, she was attending a traineeship. She describes herself as an excellent student during the early grades, before her parents' divorce:

I remember my elementary school teacher and a friend of mine; she is now a lawyer. She is my best friend from school. In the morning, I always went to her house. Her mother used to take me to school, and she always gave me breakfast: Belgian cookies and toast with butter. And also, my teacher, I always did my homework at her house. I still can smell the scent of her house. We were the best in our class. I remember that when I went to live at my grandmother's house, I failed the 3rd grade... I went from being the best student to being the worst.

In 1988, she dropped out of school (6th grade) to work at a shoe factory, to help provide for her brothers and sisters. She evaluates her return to school (on a sales workers course) as important in advancing her qualifications. She enjoyed the classes, teachers, peers and subjects, although she would have preferred a cookery course, which was not available at the time.

Estela has two brothers and one sister, and her parents are separated. Her mother assaulted her with a knife when she was a child, so Social Services sent her to live with her grandparents, with whom she stayed until she was 23:

It was because I broke a plate that was a wedding gift. She asked my brother and me to wash the dishes. And he and I started to fight. We wanted to play... We were 5 or 6... And then, I remember pulling the towel. And, suddenly, I don't know how the plate fell down on the table. I didn't know who broke it, my brother or me... I just know that, when she saw it, she beat me with a stick, and, then, she held a beef knife and tried to kill me.

Domestic violence is one of the most influential aspects of her childhood. Estela's mother is described as a very anxious and disturbed woman, who always had arguments with her husband and children.

She remembers spending Christmas Eve alone with her cousin when they were both children and regards these as happy moments:

I've always spent Christmas alone with my cousin. We had those candles that are used in cemeteries. My grandmother always spent Christmas at my aunt's house, and my cousin and I would spend Christmas alone... She and I stayed at her house. We had candlelit dinner. We set beautiful tables. We were about 8 or 9 years old. Our Christmas was always like that. Our family didn't care about any of that!

She became a mother at 27, and when the child was 9 months old, the couple broke up because her partner was «too obsessed, jealous, wouldn't let me go to work or go to the supermarket alone». Currently, she lives alone with her son.

Estela continues to receive SII while she completes her traineeship at a store. She considers the social worker at the housing project to be a «mother, friend and confidante, the sister I've never had». She takes care of Estela's son when Estela is ill (he suffers from diabetes) or when she has to go to work. She feels that she has been the subject of discrimination due to her son's illness, as she has lost three jobs and a scholarship due to absenteeism. Her son and her success in her own education are the positive aspects she finds in life.

Although she has qualified for social housing and has returned to school, she collapsed and was institutionalised at a mental hospital after trying to attack her sister (also with a knife). She suffers from depression (spends long periods of time sleeping) and, following her institutionalisation at a mental hospital, she has been highly medicated with antidepressants and anxiolytics. Currently, when she is not depressed, she spends a large amount of time on the Internet, mostly on *Facebook* and doing research about diabetes, as well as talking to doctors, nurses and other people. She is now a member of the diabetics association at a hospital. She is also a member of the National Advisory Council of *EAPN Portugal* (European Anti-Poverty Network), and she volunteers at the social services facilities in her neighbourhood.

In the future, she would like to enrol on a hotel and restaurant catering course, and she dreams about becoming a cook.

Olga

Olga was born in 1979, and she completed the 6th grade in adult education. She works as a geriatrics assistant at a day centre for the elderly. She lives with her husband and two daughters and has a close relationship with her parents, whom she sees every day, and with her siblings. There were books at her parents' house when she was growing up that her family liked to read and they stayed informed about the news.

She dropped out of school when she was 13 years old (in 1992) after completing only four years of schooling. She justifies this outcome by pointing to the fact that she was often

beaten by the teacher with a wooden ruler, and, at the same time, she wished to be financially independent from her parents. Later, she attended, but did not finish, a sewing course, as well as a geriatrics assistant course (6th grade equivalent).

While she was studying at school, she worked part-time cleaning houses and in agricultural work: «I wanted to earn my own money, to be self-reliant. My parents only allowed me to work when I was 16 years old, but, before that, I worked part-time cleaning houses or helping in the fields...».

She considers that leaving school was a «mistake»:

When I dropped out of school, I think I was 12, 13 years old... Maybe I felt very old; I looked like my colleague's mother, which also made me feel bad. I failed several years, and I asked myself what I was doing there... I was afraid when the teacher beat me or screamed at me. That didn't help... I didn't think it through. But later, I thought: «Oh my God, why didn't I stay in school?»

At 16, she became a worker at a shoe factory. Then she had multiple unqualified jobs until she got pregnant and applied for SII. While she was receiving SII, she took a course to become a geriatrics assistant. She currently works at a day centre for the elderly: «This was my dream: taking care of the elderly. I've always enjoyed it. And it became real! I've made it happen. I'm here now!».

Olga shows great concern regarding her daughters' education:

I tell them to study, to make a life for themselves. I tell her to study, to do her homework. I always check her homework, what she has to study. I think they have to grab the opportunity, because it's the future! Without school, there is no work. If they study, they can have a position somewhere. Like me, if I hadn't taken the course, I wouldn't have a 6th grade education.

I have books, storybooks. I tell them many stories, and I give books to my daughters for their birthdays.

For Olga, SII meant the opportunity to extend her education from the 4th to the 6th grade, as well as to improve her employability. It also meant a boost in her self-esteem and her social network:

I did some courses, always went to occupational programmes. Then, I was called for an interview here, and, when they told me it was for a position at the day care centre for the elderly, I didn't believe it. I cried with joy. This is my chance! And I did it! I seized the opportunity, never said no. Whenever there was a course, anything, there I was... I never refused a job, because I didn't want to be living on welfare. When we've got a job, we have a salary, we pay for Social Security. It's very different.

Elvira

Elvira was 35 years old when she was interviewed (she was born in 1977) and is currently unemployed. She undergoes psychiatric therapy and is not receiving SII. She receives her daughter's government allowance, food and financial aid to pay for other expenses.

Her mother had a drinking problem and relied on prostitution for her income. She has eight brothers and sisters. Elvira was institutionalised when she was 10 years old. Her father went to visit her at the institution until his death. Her mother, on the other hand, never visited her, although she never authorised the children to be given up for adoption. Elvira lives alone: her only daughter went to live with her aunt as the result of a court order.

Regarding her first years in school, she mentioned that there was not enough money to buy school materials:

We had no books. I had a plastic bag, a notebook and a pencil, nothing else. My father told me to do my chores first, to pick weeds, and then, to study. We never studied. The other kids at school had books. We didn't. My father had no money to buy books.

Elvira began attending school when she was 8 years old. At 17 (in 1994), she dropped out of school after completing the 6th grade:

I never passed 1st grade; I always failed, because we didn't study. Then, I went to live at an institution. There, I had more help; I got involved and started to work more, and I was able to study a little more, but with effort.

At school, she felt isolated from her peers because of the problems she had at home. She wept frequently. Physical punishment also occurred often:

It was the teacher: she beat me with a cane because I didn't know the multiplication tables, I couldn't learn them, just counting with my fingers. I thought she was wrong: she beat me on the head, and nobody learns that way.

Her mother did not want her children to study. She preferred that they work. When Elvira was institutionalised, she was forced to attend school.

Undoubtedly, Elvira's childhood was decisive in her situation of social exclusion. She and her sister went to live at a children's home, where they went through rehabilitation for alcoholism. Elvira was 10 years old.

She talks about the poverty she had to face when she lived with her family:

I had serious problems in my family. I cried a lot. Hardship, starving, we just had flour with cabbage or beans to eat. Nowadays, people have meat, they have everything, they have too much, they even throw it away! If we had soup, we ate the soup, if we had potatoes, we ate potatoes: only potatoes or potatoes with pasta. We never had meat. Meat was just at the weekends, only a little chicken on Sundays. The rest of the days, it was almost always the same food. There was no milk – there was no milk, as there is now. Our milk was a bowl of barley with combread. Sometimes it had mould, but we ate it anyway.

Her living conditions were also very precarious: «I never had a room just for myself. We had a room, and we all slept there. It was kind of a living room and kitchen, and we all slept in that space. We bathed in a basin».

She also mentioned feeling very lonely and sad:

We didn't play much. I had many family problems. I felt sad, alone. I had nobody to talk to. Nobody asked me «What's the matter with you?». Nobody cared. My mother never asked «How was your day at school?». Never asked me: «What's up with you?». It was like we had no mother, nor did we have anyone else.

Later (when she was already receiving SII), she took some courses on house and personal hygiene, parental education, computers, job search techniques and health and safety at work. She has worked as a maid, performing all kinds of chores. Her first employer was a woman that physically and verbally abused her: «She was always hitting me; she treated me badly». After that, she lived in other people's homes in exchange for work, and she had no set working hours. Her last job was cleaning at an institution (an occupational programme for the unemployed).

When she was 25, her daughter was born. At 31, she was institutionalised for psychiatric treatment. Recently, pursuant to a court order, her 10-year-old daughter went to live with her aunt. Elvira had a male «friend», about 40 years old, who approached her in order to be around the child. He only visited her and offered her gifts and money when the girl was present.

Nevertheless, for her, education plays an important role, especially concerning her daughter's future:

I want the best for her, that she studies more, a future. I want her to study, to have good grades, to show interest in school, to value it and to complete the 12th grade.

I ask for help from people who know more than I do: social workers, psychologists. Everything that is in my power I ask for her, so that she has better life conditions. In school, I ask teachers for their opinion about ways to help her. I also talk about her behaviour at school, with the other kids, and about her grades. I ask about her needs.

Being an SII recipient and returning to education also enabled Elvira to improve her self-esteem and her social network:

I gained more knowledge, new things. For me, it was nice. I met friends and people, new faces, people that wished us well, who were there to help us... To teach us how to do things. I think it is important that we understand each other.

As we have seen, the SII was essential so that these women could continue their education and even complete their compulsory schooling (in Olga's case); it was also essential to enable them to maintain their sons/daughters in school in compulsory schooling and, more importantly, to keep their opportunities for study open, as well as to broaden their horizons.

5. The relevance of findings

These interviews with women who were receiving SII are relevant in several ways. Our analysis will focus mainly on the issues concerning school disengagement and school dropouts and processes of socialisation, i.e., concerning families' culture of care. As we have seen, these women's early experience of care and the way that Estela and Elvira internalised patterns of abuse are a part of their stock of dispositions and, as such, influence their future relations of care including caring for their own children.

In fact, we consider that care is learned. When people are in an abusive relationship with the State, the community, the school and the family, they will not be able to learn how to care and, ultimately, as far as they may not derive many benefits from the activation policies (Feeley, 2014).

School disengagement and children's work

The interviews have revealed the ways in which school education enters the women's lives. Their school pathways and engagement/disengagement with schoolwork are evident in their stories. The experience of labour follows school dropout. Estela and Olga left school and start to work early to help their families. It may be said that school dropouts of those who start to work represent the «triumph of the work over the school» (Pinto, 1998: 130). Child labour enables youth to have access to adult status and to obtain an income and, thus, to contribute to their households (see also Stoer & Araújo, 2000; Lisboa & Malta, 2009) and a certain social power within their families (Pinto, 1998).

In a report about early withdrawal from school, Dale (2010: 5) states that such individuals «are more likely to be unemployed, to be in precarious and low-paid jobs, to draw on welfare and other social programs throughout their lives». It is »a tremendous waste of potential» and, in sum, «it perpetuates the cycle of which it is a part» (2010: 5).

The interviewed women attended basic education in the 1980s when, according to Stoer and Araújo, in Portuguese schools, there had not been an «internalisation of human rights», but rather a bureaucratisation «of human and social rights», due to a failure to implement the latter (2000: 145)⁷. In 1991, the government was active in combating this phenomenon and fixed the minimum age for employment at 15 years. In 1997, that age was increased to 16 years. From this period on, there was a concentration of efforts towards concerted policy action between work-related organisations, social action and education.

Modalities of family and school socialisation and affection

According to Lahire's (1995) conceptual framework, the modalities of family and school socialisation frame these women's dispositions towards education, although moments of crisis may change their initial dispositions. There are disturbing elements of a diverse nature in these family configurations that resulted in the variations in the interdependent relationships among the people involved, namely, violence and divorces, which lead to instability. In this sense, not only economic conditions and dispositions are relevant to the interpretation of social exclusion. In fact, given the plurality of dispositions in a person's life in contemporary societies, which are characterised by strong labour division, multiple spaces for interaction, and heterogeneous and even rival principles of socialisation, the habitus can be updated. We cannot deny the relevance of the lack of economic resources when discussing social exclusion and, thus, the importance of minimum income schemes to tackle basic survival needs. However, we have empirically identified, through the analysis of these women's pathways, other dimensions of people's lives, such as the affective domain (often neglected in sociology) that can have a decisive role in challenging exclusion. In fact, inequalities intersect, challenge and compound each other. Economic deprivations confine people in cultural, political and affective terms. Equally, when people are seriously affectively (care) deprived, they often also lack the capacities to engage with others meaningfully due, for example, to a lack of emotional capabilities. The implications of this intersectionality for educational and social policies are therefore more complex than those derived solely from rankings or *workfare*.

Since the 1990s, there has been constant discourse and policies directed towards activation and the need for welfare recipients to «give back» to society. However, it is often forgot-

⁷ The first edition of this book dates from 1992, revealing the problem of child labour in a region 40 Km north of Porto. In Portugal, it was only in 1979 that conditions were created to ensure 6 years of effective schooling. In 1986, the Education System Basic Law established that «the mandatory frequency of basic education ends at 15 years of age». Compulsory education was extended to 12 years in 2009.

ten, as Lynch, Baker and Lyons argue (2009), that many of the recipients cannot be seen within the logic of the economic, autonomous and rational citizen. In fact, the study of these women's pathways has revealed that their vulnerability and dependency have persisted since childhood. Both Estela and Elvira had moments of crisis during that period when they were taken away from their families because of the violence and neglect of their parents. Their pathways then suffered crisis and change. As adults, both Estela and Elvira still struggle with the violent episodes that occurred in their childhoods. The affective issues, namely the abuse and neglect, have had a profound impact on their present lives.

In terms of the five key dimensions of equality in condition (Baker et al., 2004), it can be considered that, especially in Estela and Elvira's cases, there is a deficit in the fulfilment of all five conditions. The gap is especially acute when considering resources, love and care, and working and learning. In fact, regarding the last condition, all of the interviewed women had difficult relations with school. Olga even dropped out before completing compulsory schooling, and she and Estela both started working before reaching the legal age. This disengagement from school is due to the strong appeal of work, either to help the family household or simply to escape severely impoverished situations, in which studying was a «luxury» their families could not afford. Estela mentioned that her grandmother wanted her to drop out of school to help provide for her brothers, revealing that no value was attributed to the school experience. Olga's parents wanted her to stay in school, but her teacher's aggressive behaviour, which was so different from the environment she had experienced at home, and the lack of financial resources, made her «decide» to drop out. Elvira remained in school until she was 17 years old, with frequent grade repetitions, but only because she was living in a state institution.

As mentioned above, concerning family and affection, the belief systems of these women are linked to domestic values, especially their children's future, health and education, and, therefore, social and educational policies should take this into consideration. The effects of domestic violence in early childhood as well as attitudes of the male partner should be taken into careful consideration as a factor related to social exclusion. A loving and stable relationship acts as a protective factor. There are serious health issues, namely mental illness (depression and anxiety) that should be closely considered. In the case of Elvira, she suffered from violence inflicted by her mother, her teacher and her employer. Moreover, the pattern of violence and the lack of affection, care and love play a key role in understanding mental illness, and as a result, social exclusion.

The return to education is seen as very positive by these women because it provided the possibility for them to advance their qualifications and achieve their goals. Classes, peers and teachers are rated very positively. However, with regard to activation measures, the supply of training programmes often does not coincide with the demand, and, thus, the women are not

always motivated to attend courses they have not chosen. Also, frustration sometimes arises, as the increase in qualifications does not necessarily mean inclusion through obtaining a (better) job. SII is seen as temporary and just as a support during difficult situations. Most of the women who were interviewed are ashamed to admit that they are living on welfare.

One can ask about the role of the State in these women's lives in tackling inequality. It was shown that, in the neglect and abuse situations, Social Services intervened. Elvira was institutionalised in a state facility, where she lived until she was 17. She finished compulsory school (6th grade) and only started to work at that age. Nonetheless, loneliness and depression were part of their lives when they were children, specifically because issues concerning love, care and solidarity were not properly addressed.

When one considers the impact of affective equality in education, one has to take into account that adult education and welfare policies should consider the position of the recipients in all the dimensions of their lives, i.e., not only age and educational level, but, rather, in terms of economic conditions, family, affection and care.

People are not disconnected economic, cultural and political actors, they are relational beings, tied in their education and socialisation to families, networks and institutions (schools especially in this case) that are either caring, careless, neglectful or abusive. They are also located in States. Authors have shown how more caring and economically equal States have more healthy societies. Portugal is demonstrated to be one of the most unequal countries (within «wealthy countries») regarding social and health issues (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010), that implies a lack of support services for children and families.

Food for thought... Final considerations...

Care is a continuum. Activation policies need to be based on a care ethos, concerning the broader picture of people's existence or they risk merely replicating old patterns of exclusion (Feeley, 2014).

The interviews with SII recipients have introduced new research questions that need further analysis. What impact can education and training have on dealing with and discussing issues involving self-esteem, care and affection? There should be a discussion of whether the pattern of activation policies and economic and financial challenges enable us to deal with the vulnerability of the human being, especially those whose childhood has been stolen. Activation policies place education at the centre of the inclusion debate, as the neo-liberal vision of education focuses on capital gains. This line of thought downgrades both the education of those who are not economically productive, as well as non-marketable work that is

related to care. In fact, as we hope we have shown, care and affection are central to issues such as education and equality.

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