

SILVA, M. C.; LIMA, M. L.; SOBRAL, J. M.; ARAÚJO, H. & RIBEIRO, F. B. (EDS.) (2017). *DESIGUALDADES E POLÍTICAS DE GÉNERO*. V.N. FAMALICÃO: HÚMUS.

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Desigualdades e políticas de género (Inequalities and gender policies) is a book edited by Manuel Carlos Silva, Maria Luísa Lima, José Manuel Sobral, Helena Araújo and Fernando Bessa Ribeiro – who are renowned Portuguese Social Sciences researchers, from different disciplines: Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology and Education Sciences. The book, around 300 pages long, presents a plurality of perspectives and studies, focused on concrete situations of persisting gender inequalities. The work therefore focuses on gender studies, which is currently regarded as “a field of great vitality: there has never been such a strong interdisciplinary referral system within the academic community” (Silva & Tavares, 2001, p. 133).

The work is based on a project on gender (in)equality in the work place and the home, developed by several of these researchers, which culminated in an international colloquium in 2011, whose name subsequently served as the book’s title: *Desigualdades e Políticas de Género*.

The book is divided into two main sections, spanning eleven chapters. Section One includes contributions by the guest speakers in the colloquium. Section Two includes texts by the team’s members, as explained in the introductory chapter.

“Gender inequality dates back many years” (p.9) is the phrase that inspired the book’s editors to provide a brief historical overview to explain the basis of the gender inequality that persists today. They analyse the contributions made by the feminist movements, in their various currents, and their achievements. They nonetheless underline the fact that,

although women’s current situation is far from that which prevailed a few decades ago, the outlook is still very difficult. Even in more developed countries, women find it more difficult to rise to higher-paying professions and positions; the majority of poor households are headed by women, and neo-liberal policies of destruction of the Welfare State have had particularly dire effects on women’s rights and social conditions. On the other hand, conservative political and social forces persist, sometimes denying, sometimes reversing fundamental women’s rights, such as abortion (p. 15).

In the introduction, the editors also emphasise that further analysis is required -articulating questions of class and gender and the various forms of inequality inherent to

them. They also mention that “the struggle for the rights of women is inseparable from the struggle, in which women are also an interested and active part, to achieve a more just, free and emancipated society” (p. 13). It is therefore clear that the book incorporates a Marxist feminist approach, which has often been marginalised or even omitted in the framework of gender studies.

It is also worth stressing that the tension between laws and practices is evident across the various chapters, since the justification that there are legal guarantees and that gender equality has been consecrated is often used to erase other struggles and silence situations of inequality which persist and which inevitably mark our daily lives, as confirmed by the book’s empirical research.

Several approaches and themes are discussed. The first chapter is a text by Sara Falcão Casaca that presents a theoretical analysis of gender relations. The author uses several paradigms, highlighting the articulation between constructionism and several structural aspects. She discusses the role of the State in gender relations, especially in the labour market, and ends by stressing that “different perspectives are aware of the historical, dynamic and contingent nature of gender relations” (p. 42).

The Spanish researchers Capitolina Diaz and Sandra Moreno then discuss the various dimensions of gender inequalities in Spanish homes, from an intergenerational perspective. Their study highlights some of the changes currently underway, which are not normally considered in Spanish or European statistics, since they do not consider the diversity of existing families, or aspects related to domestic care and banking transactions, amongst other issues (pp. 54-55).

Joanna Schouten analyses time management in the home, where women continue to occupy more household management tasks and domestic work (p.74). In terms of the introduction of new technologies in this field, in line with other studies (e.g. Perista, 2010; Wajcman, 2000), Schouten stresses that “it is not the technology itself that leads to change” (p. 73) since the use of technology is to a large extent inspired by gender norms.

Aleksandra Queiroz, Manuel Carlos Silva, Ana Reis Jorge and Maria Canelhas then present an analysis on employment and unemployment in the European Union, and in Portugal in particular, which emphasises that the difference between paid work and unpaid domestic work reveals a gender asymmetry, that is detrimental to women’s interests (p.103). They highlight the gap between current legislation and actual practices in organisations and suggest that existing measures should be reinforced (p.104).

The final chapter in Section One is by Ana Paula Marques, who presents a study on the potential of entrepreneurship for young women, and stresses that solutions “for economic growth and the fight against unemployment are not limited to entrepreneurship *tout court*” (p. 127). She also mentions that female graduates are more vulnerable when compared to their male counterparts and that gender inequalities are still visible in the choices made in educational trajectories and in the labour market.

Section Two presents the main results of the project, *Gender Inequalities and Policies*, developed in mainland Portugal. The opening chapter is by Manuel Carlos Silva and Helena Araújo who try to provide a socio-demographic classification of the persons

interviewed, which highlights the fact that many own their own home and have low to intermediate levels of schooling, i.e. with few qualifications, which runs counter to the idea of “massification of higher education” (p. 157).

This is followed by an empirical study presented by Maria Luísa Lima and José Manuel Sobral on how gender stereotypes continue to play a decisive role in structuring inequalities. In this they state that benevolent sexism is extremely insidious and dangerous, because it paternalistically demeans women and ensures male supremacy, and is often accepted by women. The authors use current-day examples in various contexts which demonstrate that this is “an efficient ideology in maintenance of traditional gender roles” (p. 186) and therefore “sexism in contemporary society is here to stay” (p. 185).

The manner in which religious values, in particular Catholic values, are related to politics and influence behaviour, and are associated to issues of gender and class, is discussed by Manuel Carlos Silva and Fernando Bessa Ribeiro. The authors conclude that the women surveyed in the study have stronger ties to religious beliefs and practice. In addition, there is greater trust in non-partisan institutions than in political parties, which the researchers say “is fatal to building a progressive and emancipatory political agenda, also in the field of gender policies” (p. 209).

The final two chapters address inequalities in marriages and divorces. Ana Reis Jorge and Manuel Carlos Silva analyse judicial divorce proceedings and conclude that women tend to be more penalised than men. When women file for divorce, the motivations are typically related to situations of violence, lack of sharing of household tasks or absence of monetary contribution from men. When men file for divorce it tends to be due to the need to regularise a *de facto* situation of separation (pp. 262-263). Parental responsibilities and the related experiences, from a gender perspective, are also discussed by Ana Reis Jorge, in the final chapter. It should be stressed that traditional gender norms experienced prior to divorce seem to persist afterwards, with women assuming a much greater role in terms of care and education (p. 292).

This book sheds light on various gender inequalities that, notwithstanding the changes that have occurred in society, continue to be well rooted and manifest themselves either explicitly or subtly. The analyses presented in the book are crucial, inclusively because we constantly hear people say that gender equality has already been achieved and that since there are so many public policies dedicated to this goal many struggles and demands no longer make sense. This is what Banyard (2010) calls an “illusion of equality” - which is extremely dangerous and difficult to break down, especially given that many forms of sexism are benevolent, subtle, and concealed, as explained by Maria Luisa Lima and José Manuel Sobral. On the other hand, sexism is here to stay because gender issues have been instrumentalised. They have entered the mainstream and are yet another appropriation of the neoliberal academic universe. This panorama leads to the question: What changes have occurred in power relations, in structural terms, and in terms of discourses? This work demonstrates that very few changes have actually occurred.

In relation to gender policies, and especially public policies in this field, this collection of studies also raises many discussions, on various areas and with different

approaches, some of which are more descriptive, others more analytical, but which always harbour a political dimension, raising questions and posing the need for social change.

The areas covered are of the utmost importance since they articulate theory and practice. Obviously, the work should ideally incorporate gender-neutral or inclusive language in all its texts and use graphics that can overcome the gender binary. The scientific debate opens up new paths for research issues that remain unanswered with the data and reflections presented. I therefore consider that this book provides an additional contribution to reflections that should be recognised and understood.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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* Submitted: 26-05-2017

* Accepted: 19-06-2017