

**Presentation  
Feminist Seminar  
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**WOMEN AND PRECARITY (urban poor)**

**I would like to comment on the Portuguese situation concerning unemployment and precarity; and after, locate how the feminists' fights are looking at the many faces of labour demands in Portugal.**

To start with, we have to look at the dark face of the optimistic narrative which the Portuguese government is building around the idea of Portugal, a country which survived the crisis and now finally found the right charming prince to marry! The problem is: first, Portugal is a Republic, so no charming princes are allowed to rule the country and second, we are not a straight country, and we are having problems coming out of the closet.

At the beginning of the negotiations between the Portuguese Government, hold by the Socialist Party (and our prime minister António Costa) and the left parties (Bloco de Esquerda and the Communist Party) in 2015, the Socialist Party presented itself with the most neoliberal programme in its own history. Bloco de Esquerda was able to establish minimum conditions and block some of those measures. I believe that you had the opportunity to discuss these part of our recent history with other Portuguese Comrades in some other meetings, so I will just briefly point out some of the measures which were meant to curb the process of the country impoverishment: to give back the pensions; stop the labour legislation which facilitates the employees dismissals; prevent the direct increase of taxes on essential goods and labour.

But still, these were and are the minimum conditions. This is not a socialist programme, and moreover, it's not the Socialist Party who is going to propose and implement the fair distribution of income and struggle for a social transformation.

What we live now is: a mediocre economic growth but a mediatic apparatus which is deceiving the public opinion and misleading the sense of growth. And it's working. Two months ago, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of May, the Portuguese people woke up with all the newspaper headlines talking about the miracle: the 3 Fs Myth from the dictatorship times: Fado, Football and Fatima. First, Papa Francisco for the first time led an enormous religious ceremony in Fatima, the sacred place where Virgin Mary supposedly appeared for the first time at the 13 May 1917 for three young shepherds; second, a Portuguese singer won the Eurovision contest for the first time in history;

and last but not the least, Benfica, one of the major football teams, won the championship. And everything at the same day: the day of the Lady of Fatima, our own version of Virgin Mary, the 13<sup>th</sup> May.

**Moving forward, So what we face concerning precarity?** Let's take a look at the data. Portugal is one of the countries in Europe with a higher rate of precarity jobs. Furthermore, we can admit that half of the work force in Portugal is precarious or unemployed. Most of the new jobs created are precarious (low wages and temporary contracts) and, as well, we are one of the countries with lower salaries and more working hours.

Also, we are not being able to confront the demagogic paradigm: "A nickel's better than nothing". Therefore, these strategic moves which benefit the holders of the great capital, sustain the workers exploitation, and are deteriorating the working conditions and deepening social injustice.

**Moving now to the second point of my contribution to the debate today, how is the relation between women and precarity in Portugal?**

The unemployment rate in Portugal is around 11%, but for the young people we have a higher rate of unemployment: almost 27% of young people has no job. Another general problem who affects both women and men concerning lack of jobs is the long-term unemployment. Although the numbers have fallen for the last 3/4 years, still, 6,2% of the population is unemployed for a long period.

Almost half of the work force in Portugal is performed by women and still women get, in average 16,7% less money for the same job performed by men, which actually represents 61 days of non-paid work per year.

Concerning the top position jobs, we have more men performing those jobs although we women in Portugal, have a higher education than men.

Besides the statistics, is in the symbolic aspects of labour organization and in the sexual division of labour that we find the most problematic gender gaps. Why does the State itself pays more to a municipality engineer than to a social worker from the social security system?

The Feminization of labor is still very present in our society, both in the public and the private spheres, both in the paid and non paid work.

If we add the hours that women work outside and inside their homes, they work more hours than men. In Portugal, a woman performs no paid work (domestic work and care work) 29% more than man. It means that a woman, during her day (before and after

paid work) works around 4 hours and 23 minutes, and a man who does some housework and takes care of children or other dependent adults, will work 1h 45min. And, not a surprise, even when in a heterosexual couple, both man and woman have a job outside home, still is the woman who is in charge of all the domestic and dependent people issues. Then when we analyse the care network we find that Women normally will get support from other women: grandmothers or older sisters.

In Portugal we have a very poor public system to provide care of the children until the age of 5 years old. Either there exists a family income enough to pay for a private nursery, either the family has other relatives available to take care of the child or at the end the man becomes the economic provider and the woman stays at home taking care of the children. More and more unemployed women declare that the reason they are not looking for a job is “someone has to take care of the child” than unemployed men. And the recent data tell us that in heterosexual couples is with the birth of the first child, that the feminization of the roles in the family gets deeper. Our maternity legislation prioritizes the mother as the one in charge for the survival aspects of the child, and the father is expected to play a second role, be the “helper”.

The scenario is worst for migrant women, afro-descendants and roma women. A lot of employers take advantage of migrant women due to their vulnerable situation to exploit and blackmailed them. (legal documents for example, and for not having an extended care network). And these relations with employers and often with the state employment services are marked by racism and xenophobia. The colonized relationships between afro-descendants women and white middle class women is still very present. Specially in the suburbs of Lisbon, where the afro-descendants community is bigger, most of the women work as housekeepers in the houses of white middle-high class women, where they started to work as young girls. And these women are considered “part of the family/the second mother for the children” but most of the times they don’t have job contracts, they eat at the kitchen and have their room next to it. When they retire they get the minimum pension and if they have their own daughters, those girls are highly expected to replace their mother when they get to old to work, even if the girl is attending university.

Now, getting back to how the feminist and the women movement are facing precarity and sexual division of labour, we are facing some constrains. First, the radicalization of the feminist movement, nowadays getting their strength through some international feminist movements against violence against women like Ni una Menos, the 21 January Women protest or the 8 March, are being under attack from a most liberal,

meritocratic centred feminism. This feminism teaches young women that they should buy a feminist t-shirt from H&M, that their empowerment comes from their individual will to succeed in the capitalist world. The main goal is to be able to be the C.O. of Google, because if they work hard, they will get there like any other white middle class man. And this is the kind of discourse which is widely spread through media channels ( Like, Successful business woman, she is the superhero, because she is a marketing manager at L'Oreal, she is able to take their children to tennis and ballet classes three times a week, and still has time to go the gym 3 days a week and have a perfect marriage). These type of women rights and empowerment approach, which reaches every women in the country through tv shows, trendy magazines, institutionalized gender equality organizations and public programmes, doesn't put into perspective the class issue and excludes every women who doesn't fit the white middle class model, literally and symbolic.

**So, some of our constrains are related with:**

- The misrepresentation of Women at the Trade Unions, which are highly lead by men and are very conservative organizations in Portugal;
- The difficulty to create a class identity within precarious workers, and precarious women workers and then engage in a large, consistent precarious movement with women demands and resolutions;
- Create alliances between the young women radicalized feminist movement with other groups of women (working class, migrants, roma women, sexual workers, women in prison, etc);
- The need to create social conflict within a context of pos-crisis scenario, where constantly is replicated the discourse: we survived austerity, we are a welcoming country with gentle habits, with no racism, sexism, homophobia, lesbofobia, transfobia because we got the basic rights.
- The secondary thought that is given to the sexual division of labour, the double working day and the feminizations of some labour sectors. Usually taken like, if we get all the labour rights to the workers, consequently the patriarchal system of domination within the private sphere will fade away.

To finish some good news concerning labour rights.

- April this year, there was an historic agreement in the shoe sector. The sector signed a collective contract that shall guarantee that both women and men earn the same salary for the same function;
- Around a month ago, public companies must have 40% of Women in top positions until 2019.
- Last week it was approved a new labour regime concerning sexual, psychological and moral harassment at work. The main resolutions are: now the law is more clear about the different types of harassment behaviours; improve the mechanisms to people (specially women) to present a complaint; protection to the victim and the witnesses; consider legally abusive the dismissal due to harassment complaints; all the health costs in result of an harassment situation are paid by the companies (not the health public system); and the cost of “image”: the company which is complicit with the harassment episodes is revealed in a public black list.