

---

# The Place for Gender Research in Contemporary Portuguese Science and Higher Education Policies within the Context of Neo-liberalism

Amélia Augusto, Catarina Sales Oliveira, Emília Araújo and Carla Cerqueira

---

## Abstract

This article will discuss the place of gender research and gender studies in universities under the current neo-liberal modes of governance. Although gender studies has a considerable history within academia and science, gender studies' contributions in several fields were either kept invisible or just voided. The current neo-liberal rationale has promoted commodification in higher education, individualisation, excessive workloads and performativity in academia. How can these new issues associated with the neo-liberal university be articulated with 'old' issues related to gender inequality and to the affirmation of gender studies? Critically analysing the trajectory of science policymaking and the evolution of gender studies in Portugal as well as gender mainstreaming policies implemented in recent years, we argue that it is possible to promote a gender science policy that is able to resist and ultimately make a transformative difference in the neo-liberal university.

---

## Keywords

Gender, Science Policy, Neo-liberalism, Gender Studies, University, Gender Mainstreaming, Gender Equality Plans

## 1 Introduction

In recent decades, as a result of transnational influences, the science policies and consequently the higher education policies of European countries (including Portugal), have undergone profound transformations. These have been taking place against a backdrop of neo-liberalisation and the growing precariousness of work and commoditisation, characterised as academic and scientific capitalism. According to Hark (2016), the triangle formed by the state, the market and the university has become completely dominated by neo-liberalism, with the university being increasingly pushed towards the market. The university has become more like a business, increasingly geared towards producing responses to emerging needs dictated by the market's rationales and seeking to position itself in terms of global competitiveness. However, the state, instead of intervening as a regulator, has been creating conditions for market competition, while the market forces the appropriation of state assets (Naidoo 2008 in Naidoo 2016, p. 220). Gill and Donaghue (2016) also believe that the combination of the withdrawal of the state coupled with an increasing individualisation and the introduction of market logic are part of neo-liberalism as a political and economic rationale.<sup>1</sup>

Under these principles, which underpin the capitalist mode of governance, the issues which are targeted for research and the methodologies applied in scientific work as well as in research and educational activities are largely conditioned by the logic of rationalisation, specialisation, accumulation and standardisation (Martins 2015). According to this logic, the impact of science is overshadowed by the principles of internationalisation, indexed publications and patenting. This is a process that puts humanities and social sciences in general under great pressure to align with the ideals and modes of the production of science. This pressure, along with cuts in spending, also threatens some disciplines and creates competition between them, which puts interdisciplinary collaboration, and thus gender studies, in a difficult position (Fahlgren et al. 2016). In fact, gender studies tends to be still seen in the scientific arena as a minority field targeted at women and sexual minorities. At the same time, as noted by Pereira (2016), universities have been the institutions on which the results of such studies have had the least impact. This has happened through structural mechanisms by which the organisations themselves

---

1 We use here the concept of individualisation to account for the process that results from a growing neo-liberal focus on personal performativity, responsibility and accountability, in which both failures and success are understood as results of personal characteristics (such as autonomy, commitment, self-improvement and work capacity) and not as results of structural constraints (Bal et al. 2014; Waring 2013; Gill and Donaghue 2016; Fahlgren et al. 2016).

and knowledge are idealised which in general terms are based on the idea of the inevitability of the adoption of the model of academic capitalism.

Gender is also marginalised at the level of academic management and strategic orientation, despite all the European Commission efforts to strengthen gender equality awareness. The *She Figures* report (European Commission 2016) shows the low number of European universities with plans for gender equality, and Portugal is not an exception. Taking into account the fundamental presupposition that gender studies has produced a wealth of essential information for the understanding and discussion of multiple levels of inequality that are observed in the worlds of science and education, it is clear that these conclusions have not been the subject of sufficient consideration in the formulation of public policy for science and higher education.

In this article, we will reflect upon and discuss this process, arguing that gender studies is central to the objectives, direction and social purpose of both education and science, as both a driver for the future and for the transformation of societies. The main questions we will discuss in this text include the following: what is the impact, in terms of gender, of the neo-liberal university, increasing individualisation, excessive workload and performativity? How can these new issues associated with a neo-liberal rationale be articulated with 'old' issues related to gender inequality and to the affirmation of gender studies? What is the present situation of gender studies and gender research in Portugal, and what is their future? How can gender equality policies learn from gender research in order to contribute to the construction of a project for a sustainable, fair and affirmative university?

Using the European reality as a guideline, as well as some Portuguese specificities, we will discuss the impacts of neo-liberal policies of science and higher education on the prioritisation of scientific fields and scientific outputs, on the privilege of some modes of production of science, on the depolitisation of gender issues in the university, and ultimately on the possibilities and constraints for the affirmation and consolidation of gender studies. We will also provide a brief outline of the place and the status of gender studies in Portugal, bearing in mind the social context of its emergence and development and also discussing its future possibilities. Finally, we will analyse the recent experiences of gender equality mainstreaming in higher education and research institutions in Portugal from a critical perspective, based on the authors' experience in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of gender equality plans in Portugal.

## **2 Pillars of the Contemporary Governance Models of Science and Their Impacts on Academia and Scholars**

Gutiérrez-Rodrigues (2016) traces the context of transformations of the university in recent decades. The adoption of the Bologna Process in the early 2000s introduced the necessary conditions for the existence of comparable quality standards in higher education at the European level. More recently the adoption of austerity policies resulting from the post-2008 financial crisis led to cuts in public spending, particularly in education, that are still producing effects, namely in Portugal (Martins 2015). In addition to these aspects, public education has been increasingly subject to commoditisation, which has fostered new formats driven by market logic. A series of transnational and national processes have also transformed the modes of governance of higher education institutions. Many of the transnational changes in governance and in science policy resulted from the will to reconceptualise and reposition universities as institutions subordinate to the needs of the economy and market requirements, promoting a particular understanding of education which favours, above all, the development of a professional and technical profile adequate for the employment market (Pereira 2016).

In this scenario of corporatisation and global competitiveness, there is a proliferation of rating, measurement and quantification systems comparing individuals and universities, whether in research, education or the transfer of knowledge, and these systems score academics in various rankings. Pereira (2016) speaks of performativity schemes designed to monitor individual and institutional performance which according to Burrows (2012) are based on metrics and ranking structures that enable and legitimise a “quantified control” (Burrows 2012 in Pereira 2016, p. 100) of the different types of academic work, throwing many research activities, including publication, into contexts of new proletarianisations. There is a pursuit of excellence and efficiency of a measurable quality, and growing levels of accountability are being implemented. A culture of extensive and penetrating auditing is thus being fostered, aligned with new ideals and new methods for the production of science. It is necessary to publish more, quicker and in top journals and at the same time attract funding, transfer knowledge to both businesses and society, react to an ever-increasing bureaucratic and administrative load, and above all compete. Naidoo (2016, p. 1) says that “universities worldwide are trapped in a competition fetish”. This trend has increasingly perverse effects “on the quality of what is researched, on what is published, as well as on the fate of scientific journals” (Rego

2014, p. 330).<sup>2</sup> All this contributes to the promotion of a scenario of decreasing job security and cuts in higher education and in scientific research which is not only typical in Europe or Portugal, but also observable in several other contexts. Gill and Donaghue (2016) believe that the crisis affecting universities, besides being a matter of structural and institutional transformations on a large scale, is also a psychosocial and somatic crisis which is responsible for chronic stress, anxiety, insecurity and exhaustion, accompanied by growing rates of physical and mental illness. This is a set of consequences that Gill (2010, p. 228) called “hidden injuries of the academy”. Pereira (2016) also refers to academics who, in contemporary higher education, struggle to manage their workloads, to fulfil unrelenting institutional requirements, to balance family life with their professional life and their personal interests, and to preserve their physical and mental health and their well-being.

As previously mentioned, one of the features of neo-liberalism is an increase in individualisation.

“In neo-liberalism, people are exhorted to become autonomous, choosing, self-managing and self-improving subjects who are reliable, responsible and accountable – modalities of subjectivity that, we suggest, are highly visible within the contemporary academy.” (Gill and Donaghue 2016, p. 92)

As a result of these logics and rationales which place an emphasis on quantified performance and on individual responsibility, academics tend to perceive their difficulty in corresponding to dominant ideals as a personal failure, seeing this not as a result of structural problems, but rather as a result of personal shortcomings. Changes are therefore effected at the individual level, with academics assuming they need to increase their self-discipline and to undergo improvement, apparently choosing to alter their lifestyles in light of growing professional requirements, whilst work increasingly colonises more and more aspects of their lives.

Morley and Crossouard (2016) believe the strong competitiveness which underlies market rationale and logic is fomenting a cognitive capitalism which generates arbitrary inequalities, and that the neo-liberal project for a global academy is producing a set of exclusions and differences, considering that a fundamental difference exists between the leaders and the led. Paradoxically, there is a strong belief that universities are meritocratic and gender neutral, and that achievements or failures should be seen as the result of personal characteristics, since opportunities are available to everyone and are equally distributed. The meritocracy discourse places the emphasis on individualisation and obscures the unequal structures of

---

2 All translations into English from original texts in Portuguese were done by the authors of this article.

opportunity available to men and women. Husu's work (2004 in Talves 2016, p. 157) about researchers demonstrated how the structural factors determined by gender are hard to recognise, as it seems that women voluntarily accept the spaces institutions granted them, perceiving these positions as their own achievement. As a result, the unequal positions occupied by women seem to be of their own choice, despite being the result of the male structures in which they act. Often, putting family first or assuming the existence of tensions between work and family life are seen as matters of personal choice and not the result of gender-related constraints. Given this, women researchers tend to be considered less involved with professional goals than their male counterparts (Palermo et al. 2008). Talves (2016, p. 160–161) suggests that a strategy of gender neutrality can be used by women as a coping strategy in an environment dominated by men. According to the author, women try to deny gender issues in order to conform to the male order, which allows them to resist the idea of subordination and discrimination, granting them self-esteem.

In her study, the author found a strategy of gender neutrality expressed by the interviewees; they said that there is no difference between men and women and stated that success is not dependent on gender. The individualisation discourse, a trait of neo-liberalism, assumes in the case of gender particular contours, since it contributes to the denial of discrimination resulting from structural and institutional barriers, transforming the results of unequal relations of power into personal problems and the product of individual characteristics.

According to Morley (2006), many women saw in higher education a way to mitigate gender oppression through, for example, social mobility, financial independence, professional identity and academic authority. However, as the author stresses, this experience is accompanied by tensions and contradictions, since women experience a number of discriminatory practices, genderised processes and exclusions within the higher education institutions themselves. In all EU countries, women represent only 15 per cent of full professors, and their underrepresentation is even stronger in grant-awarding bodies, editorial boards and other important forums (Gill and Donaghue 2016).

Several studies show that gender inequalities in science are persistent, particularly among top academic positions, with a scarcity of women in executive positions and in decision-making bodies (Talves 2016).

At the same time the information available about the progress in higher education, with an emphasis on access to and on obtaining a master's degree or higher, suggests an increase in the number of women at these levels of education, in all areas (European Commission 2016). These trends are also observable in Portugal. Increasing numbers of women have had access to education after the 1970s, propelled by political and cultural changes. For example, in 1998 only 7 per cent of women

held a higher education degree, but in 2014 it was 19.6 per cent (PORDATA 2016c).<sup>3</sup> The access to higher education after the 1980s was therefore the main factor of women's social mobility, as they could now compete with men in intellectual and administrative professions. For illustration purposes, data available in PORDATA (2016b)<sup>4</sup> indicates that the percentage of women with a diploma (bachelor's degree, master's degree and PhD) was 59.3 per cent in 2014. This was slightly higher than the EU-28 average (57.9 per cent). Also, in Portugal, only 6.7 of the total number of PhDs were held by women in 1970. In 2013, this percentage was 54.8 per cent (PORDATA 2016a).<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, this has been a long journey, as the road of women with credentials in the labour market is greatly barred by many discriminatory and segregationist processes and mechanisms that are still linked to male domination. This happens across all sectors, with higher incidence in those fields that are more traditionally male dominated, such as science and higher education, and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) areas. In fact, studies indicate that despite women being more and more present in higher education, their access to decision-making positions is permanently hampered. Amongst other cultural and social barriers within the work contexts, they are still strongly pushed into taking care of household and other tasks related to family well-being. If we look at higher education and science professions, data gives us an account of the permanence of that gender bias. In Portuguese public universities in the 2015–16 academic year, women represented 42 per cent of university teachers but only 33 per cent of associate professors and just 23 per cent of full professors (DGEEC/Med-MCTES 2016). The numbers are very similar in public polytechnics, in private universities and in private polytechnics.

The multiple requirements and tensions between different social roles are clearly more evident for women, especially when there are young children or other family obligations that make it difficult to balance work and family life, largely due to persistent assumptions that domestic and family tasks are women's responsibilities.

---

3 This data refers to the population aged 15 or older. This is published by PORDATA, on the basis of information also published by national government bodies/INE. We would like to add that in 1970, in Portugal, 25.7 per cent of the population/19.7 per cent of the men and 31 per cent of the women/had no advanced educational degree. This number dropped to 5.2 per cent/3.5 per cent of men and 6.8 per cent women in 2011, the last year available (PORDATA 2016d).

4 This data is published by PORDATA, based on information also published by Eurostat, UNESCO-UIS and OCDE. These numbers refer to the percentage of women in the total number of graduates (ISCED 5-8).

5 This data is published by PORDATA, based on information also published by national government bodies/DGEEC/Med-MCTES A.

Time perception and management play important roles here, and time research is important to highlight these questions (Araújo 2015). It is also important to keep in mind that although statistics are important, they do not reveal the full spectrum of inequality. According to Gill and Donaghue (2016), gender inequality has to be analysed in finer detail, particularly in what relates to the differences felt between men and women regarding emotional work in the workplace, the perception that administrative work is unevenly distributed, the particular challenges that women can feel due to working in an environment dominated by men, and the way in which the requirement for self-promotion can promote genderised conflicts. Alongside official reports, it is worth mentioning the discussions and debates that have been held in various settings, including in social networks and other media, such as blogs, about the prevalence of the discrimination and segregation of women in science. The process of review and approval of scientific papers continues to be mentioned as an axis of discrimination against female authors. The same applies to the methods of assessment of projects for funding, including grants. With regard to this, there are discussions concerning the correctness of the criteria used, including what is considered to be an excessive concern with individual curricula in comparison with the quality of the projects themselves, resulting in the favouring of careers that are more linear and accumulative. Another topic which has been more recently discussed refers to the perpetuated stereotyped patterns of relationship with tutors (Boring 2017). Cañibano et al. (2008) highlighted the excessive importance given to international mobility in academic careers, considered a 'rite of passage', which discriminates against women. Morley (2006) also argues that, in addition to the structural barriers of discrimination, the discrimination experienced by informal agents of power should also be taken into account. The author states that many women reported ways in which they were subtly treated as different in gendered corporate cultures, despite their professional status, including the use of sarcasm, jokes, comments or exclusions (Morley 2006). Priola (2007) considers that the changes that are happening in academia coexist with the persistence of a traditional culture based on bureaucratic systems and hierarchies that are associated with the particular configurations of gender relations, highlighting the persistence of a male culture in the institutions of higher education.

To analyse and discuss gender bias in the university can be a difficult task. The theme is hardly seen as a serious matter and the university tends to be seen as the last place where this discussion makes sense, due to its meritocratic connotation. Ahmed (2012, p. 179) uses the concept of "overing" to criticise the idea that gender questions have already been overcome. Gender studies has the potential to identify old and new forms of gender inequality associated with old and new structural barriers of discrimination in universities, demonstrating that gender issues are far



from being overcome, stating the need to include a gender dimension in higher education and science policies, which are usually presented as gender neutral. Gender studies can also contribute to the deconstruction of the idea that the lesser participation of women in the leadership of education and research institutions is due to either their lesser interest in assuming the role or being less competent to do so. Knowing that women are, by and large, excluded from leadership roles, they are the biggest losers in this highly competitive, performative and patriarchal environment. From this perspective, deconstructing the prejudices related to the ideal behavioural pattern of leadership, the nature of governance models in question, as well as the mechanisms of selection of the women themselves, gender studies can trigger the implementation of measures that promote women to positions of management, differentiating them and encouraging changes in the time schemes some institutions use that are incompatible with other activities, such as those relating to family or community roles.

In a setting where the governance of higher education institutions is strongly geared towards market logic, global competitiveness, performativity and the quantified assessment of the various aspects of the academic career, there are emerging risks that promise to affect nearly everyone, but which constitute particular risks for women. Morley (2006) considers that the implications of reconciling an academic career with family life can lead to women being seen as a risk for the departments in terms of their contribution to the indexes and productivity rankings, perpetuating and strengthening the discrimination against women in academia. Gill and Donaghue (2016) also claim that the hidden injuries of academia to which they allude affect everyone, but are marked by broader patterns of inequality and injustice with regard to gender, age, class and other social divisions. The authors defend the importance of analysing the gendered impacts of the performativity and surveillance cultures, a field that is still unexplored, and stress that the solution is not merely to increase the number of women. In their view, it is necessary to make a more comprehensive critique of the neo-liberal university.

According to McRobbie (2009 in Morley and Crossouard 2016, p. 155), contemporary neo-liberal cultures tend to produce a re-traditionalisation of gender and a reinstatement of gender hierarchies by means of subtle new forms of patriarchal power. Among these is the privilege of an individualisation logic, which obscures the structural relations of power and undermines the collective political struggle against the structural and institutional barriers that women face in academia. Fahlgren et al. (2016) claim that this process of individualisation can also undermine the possibility of legitimising feminist theory.

We will now discuss the impacts of neo-liberal governance models of science on gender studies as well as the challenges and risks facing its affirmation and

consolidation in the current scientific and academic context. We will also describe the Portuguese context of gender studies, providing an analysis of its emergence, trajectories and future prospects.

---

### **3 The Impacts of Neo-liberal Governance Models in Science and in the Consolidation of Gender Studies**

We have long learned that science development is neither naive nor taken for granted. On the contrary, it is propelled by several interests, inclusively those of scientists themselves moved by the need for recognition, symbolic power and prestige. We argue following Bourdieu (2004) that science is a field of several forces struggling with each other and following the rules of the games as well as the rules of the markets. In other words, and also in line with Bourdieu's theory, science and academia are dynamic realities largely based on power relations and defined, established and cultivated by the different actors alongside their daily practices. Scientific field nominations, as well as topics to be researched and approached within the fields, are products of power relations therefore supporting their own hierarchy and stratification between themselves. In what concerns gender studies and research, its difficult path is immediately visible in the dilemmatic nomination of this field of study which has been intensely debated in recent decades by those working within and outside it. Hemmings (2006) states that choices about the field's name are contested and play out differently across national contexts (Hemmings 2006 in Pereira 2016, p. 108).<sup>6</sup>

The historical development and metamorphoses of academic institutions are therefore not dependent only on the changes in management and administration of this type of organisation. It has to do greatly, though in an invisible and implicit way, with the power relations between scientific areas whose nominations are also a political product of decisions made on the basis of the same presuppositions about

---

6 It can be argued that women's studies focuses particularly on women's issues and is critically necessary both for intellectual and political reasons. A shift to gender studies that includes a broader interest on how gender affects people and explores both men's and women's experiences can be seen as an attempt to depoliticise feminist scholarship, obscuring women as an oppressed group. However, this is not the case if we think of gender not as a classificatory category but as a relational social structure generating power differentials and thus inequality between men and women. Following Pereira (2012) and Torres et al. (2015), we discuss this field of studies encompassing women's, gender and feminist studies.

what makes a scientific field important, worthy of prestige, funds and incentive to expand. In fact, we should assume that the nominations used to classify scientific areas, despite being possibly grounded on manuals and other official documents (some of them provided by international organisations, such as the *Frascati Manual*<sup>7</sup>, and others defined by funding institutions and ministers of science), are mainly conventional; they are social constructions embedded in assumed ideas about how a national system of science and education should look.

Nevertheless, this intertwining of science and higher education is rather tortoise in practice, as models of modes of knowledge management insistently focus on rationalisation modes of operating and quick results. The overemphasis on productivity indicators, specialisation and, above all, the fixation on a science/higher education for a market-driven innovation are being strongly justified in the light of the management models which characterise the new public management of universities and research institutions in Portugal. This tendency is leading to the reconfiguration of scientific fields which struggle for their place and for their legitimacy as areas of knowledge (Martins 2015).

The impact of science is surpassed by the principles of internationalisation, indexed publication and patenting. Humanities and social sciences feel pressured to converge with the dominant and widely adopted models of the production of science. This pressure, along with cuts in spending, places some disciplines under threat and creates competition between them which situates interdisciplinary collaboration, and thus gender studies, in a difficult position (Fahlgren et al. 2016). In this scenario gender research is struggling to gain recognition, but it has long been seen as not proper knowledge (Pereira 2008).

Interestingly, gender studies has the capacity to deconstruct the foundations of these science hierarchies that sometimes are presented as being self-explanatory. To teach and to research gender in an academic context dominated by a male culture that is oriented by neo-liberal goals of performativity is a challenge to all feminist

---

7 In June 1963, the OECD met with national experts on research and experimental development (R&D) statistics at the Villa Falcioneri in Frascati, Italy. The result was the first official version of the Proposed Standard Practice for Surveys of Research and Development, which has come to be better known as the *Frascati Manual*. The *Frascati Manual* is the internationally recognised methodology for collecting and using R&D statistics. The term R&D covers three activities: basic research, applied research and experimental development. It provides an internationally accepted definition of R&D and a classification of its component activities. The manual also organises the field of science into main categories and subcategories. The definitions provided by the *Frascati Manual* have been adopted by many governments and serve as a common language for discussions of science and technology policy. In 2015 the 7<sup>th</sup> edition was published.

scholars. But this challenge is not without risk, both to scholars and to the field of gender studies. As Hark (2016) points out, how feminist knowledge is permeated by academic structures and conventions and by higher education policies has barely been addressed. Yet, she states, we urgently need to ask what kind of research in gender will survive the transformation of universities into entrepreneurial entities. And, we add, what kind of risks are academic women in general and feminist scholars in particular facing due to this neo-liberal mode of science production?

Kašić (2016) says that more and more feminist scholars in Croatia and elsewhere, in order to efficiently respond to imposed professional demands, tend to integrate some neo-liberal norms such as self-surveillance monitoring and self-discipline in their own academic routines. The need to address the increasing levels of performativity leads to a focus on individual careers. Therefore, feminism has become a way of advancing individual careers, rather than a call for collective activism or transformation.

So we must ask to what extent gender studies in academia has boosted the questioning and the transformation of the existing frameworks and modes of knowledge production, which cannot be separated from the analysis of the place and the status of gender studies in academia. As we have discussed, in a scenario of corporatisation and global competitiveness fostered by a neo-liberal rationality and where some scientific fields are judged to be more efficient and proficient than others, gender studies faces a difficult position, since it seems to be more vulnerable to all these changes. In addition to being an academically young subject, and still with little recognition (Hark 2016), operating in a male-culture-dominated environment and having to confront the depolitisation of gender issues brought by neo-liberal discourses, gender studies is mainly conducted by women who, as we have discussed, are particularly affected by the risks raised by these new ideals and models of science production.

The logic of the neo-liberal rationale leaves little or no room for the allocation of resources (financial, but not only) to scientific fields that are not seen as generators of competitiveness. As Grove suggests, gender equality is not an indicator on any table of the top league of universities. Success in these rankings does not seem to require that attention be paid to gender (Grove 2013 in Morley and Crossouard 2016, p. 153).

In what concerns the place and status of gender studies, the Portuguese case presents some particular features. While other countries have assisted in a proliferation of gender research projects and the creation of numerous courses and research centres in this area from the 1960s and 1970s onward, Portugal began this journey later on, starting in the late 1980s and with a major expansion in the past decades (Amâncio 2003; Silveirinha 2004; Nogueira 2001).

“Only from that time on, it [gender studies] starts to consciously formulate itself as gender studies and from an innovative perspective of rediscovery or new readings of the reality.” (Silva 1999, p. 17)

Amâncio (2003) highlights several factors that contributed to this specificity of the Portuguese context: women’s rights organisations arose only in the 1970s but were still invisible after a long dictatorial period in which the historical memory of feminism seemed to be absent; additionally, the Portuguese population had a low educational level (another result of the *Estado Novo* regime that further penalised women) and the financial situation of higher education institutions continued to have investment difficulties until the 1990s. Joaquim (2007) mentions that this field of study is related to the institutionalisation of feminism, particularly through the creation of the Commission of Women in 1977. This institution began with studies on women, first focusing on women who have distinguished themselves in various areas, and then from the 1980s onward focusing on anonymous women (Vaquinhas 2002). It is also about this time that women started entering academia, having more visibility as a group from the 1990s onward and representing in recent years “a notorious outbreak in universities” (Vaquinhas 2002, p. 207).

Amâncio (2003) also mentions several initiatives that contributed to the creation of what is gender studies in Portugal nowadays, always stressing the dispersion of projects and activities within the social sciences and humanities. As stated by Torres et al. (2015), despite the proliferation of books and articles resulting from research in the field, institutionalisation in the academy has been slow, marked by many difficulties and encountering some resistance. According to Pereira (2016), it was common to hear Portuguese academics state that gender studies had no value or relevance which created significant obstacles to the emergence and development of gender education and research in Portugal. In recent years gender studies focusing on gender equality has encountered more space to evolve, mainly due to the growing social visibility of the theme, particularly the issue of domestic violence. At the same time other areas continue to face resistance and even are at risk of being absorbed. In this respect Joaquim (2007) claims that it is important to legitimise women’s studies as the result of the historical fight for women’s rights and citizenship.

The existence of working groups on gender in major scientific associations of research has contributed towards enlarging the debate and ultimately the reinforcement of the field. Among the scientific areas that have promoted more gender studies in Portugal is, remarkably, sociology. The sociology of gender, although relatively new (as is Portuguese sociology itself, since it was born only in the 1970s due to the social historical condition of the dictatorial regime), is responsible for much of the studies on gender in the past decades as we can easily see in the proceedings of

the National Sociology Association's congresses (Rodrigues 2009). Many gender researchers are sociologists. On the one hand, and until the 1990s, the study of gender in sociology tended to be strongly associated with the field of sociology of the family, and subjects such as, for example, masculinities were completely absent (Rodrigues 2009) which indicates a certain conservatism. On the other hand, the emergence in 1999 of the Portuguese Association of Studies on Women and more recently some graduate courses and projects funded in this area have strengthened the importance of gender studies in the academy. We are currently witnessing the emergence of a renewed interest in this area, which is not unrelated to recent (mainly European) research funding incentives in this field.

Fahlgren et al. (2016, p. 121) say that the specific training and research in gender studies is carried out in many universities in "a room of their own" such as a centre or a department of gender studies in the university. This has not been the case of gender studies in Portugal, since gender training and research, as we have shown above, has been carried out by researchers located in various disciplinary fields of social sciences, as is the case with sociology, and as part of personal research agendas. Therefore, gender studies in Portugal is still a relatively dispersed field. Its importance, configuration and institutionalisation vary by institutions, as well as by scientific areas. Only as recently as 2012 was the first interdisciplinary centre for gender studies – the *Centro Interdisciplinar de Estudos de Género* – created in Portugal, a centre that is entirely dedicated to this subject and currently recognised by *Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia*, which is the main science and research public funding institution in Portugal. *Centro Interdisciplinar de Estudos de Género* researchers mainly have a social and human sciences background but the basis for an environment of interdisciplinary cooperation is set, and it is assumed as one of the purposes of the centre (Torres et al. 2015). This was an important step to foster the development of gender research from an interdisciplinary perspective and to claim a scientifically recognisable and recognised space for gender research. In fact, the aim of creating this centre and the concern of researchers involved in it was to establish a basis to overcome the fragmentation and lack of recognition that gender studies has long faced in the Portuguese academy. It is, however, interesting to note that to achieve that recognition the (possibly inevitably) chosen path was to lead gender studies to achieve excellent results in the main performance indicators of the neo-liberal university. The recognition that gender studies could have financial and institutional value made it more valuable in a context of changing scientific policies and extremely large education cutbacks.

There is, in contemporary Portuguese academia, an increasing public recognition of the epistemic status and relevance of gender research (Pereira 2016). Nevertheless, according to the author, the institutional positioning of this area in Portugal is still

relatively marginal and precarious, and its epistemic status is not fully recognised which makes feminist scholars susceptible of being dismissed. “Thus, negotiations of the epistemic status of women, gender and feminist studies are ongoing, unremitting and extremely arduous.” (Pereira 2016, p. 102)

Gender studies in Portugal – but mainly gender studies focusing on gender equality – has been representing an important background of gender mainstreaming, mostly in areas of work and social policy in general. In recent years all over Europe as a result of the impetus of gender mainstreaming several universities and research centres have developed their own gender equality plans (EIGE 2016b). There was a new initiative in Portugal as recently as 2011, so it is timely and important to reflect upon its impacts and to discuss to what extent gender mainstreaming in the academy incorporates the main questions and positioning brought by gender studies and effectively contributes to a transformative difference in the neo-liberal university. In the next section we will analyse the relation between gender mainstreaming and gender studies with a focus on the Portuguese experience of implementing a university gender equality plan.

Still it is important to highlight that gender studies also produces impacts when addressing cutting-edge research without any immediate application. Therefore, despite trends being directed towards accountability and continuous enhancement, gender studies is called on to develop innovative epistemological and theoretical ideas able to provide answers to complex and sometimes unforeseen questions.

---

#### **4 The Gender Mainstreaming Perspective: Part of the Solution or Part of the Problem?**

Due to the recognition of the existence of gender biases and of a frankly unfavourable context to the entry and progression of women in the labour market in general and in scientific careers in particular, in the past years many European countries have implemented work legislation that promotes equality and other specific measures and strategies that promote gender equality. The Council of Europe has assumed a very strong position recommending gender mainstreaming as a strategy to achieve gender equality (EIGE 2016b, 2016c; Lipinsky 2014) highlighting that performance assessment models shall be revised and the need for institutions to develop a cultural change. In framing the definition and implementation of these measures, the Council of Europe has encouraged the implementation of gender equality plans in a wide array of work organisations, including universities and higher education and research institutions. A gender equality plan is an instrument

of organisational management that seeks to streamline institutional change from a gender-mainstreaming angle. In this sense, it is expected that the success of the plan corresponds to a real change in organisational culture in terms of parity (Sales Oliveira and Villas-Boas 2012).

In 2009, when the University of Beira Interior started working towards the development of a gender equality plan whose design and implementation some of us were responsible for, it represented a pioneering initiative at the national level. Up until then, no other Portuguese university had any organisational intervention in this area, unlike their European counterparts, namely in neighbouring Spain (Sales Oliveira and Villas-Boas 2012). However, it is important to say that in Portugal, differently from the majority of the countries that implemented this measure, implementing gender equality plans at universities and research centres is not mandatory by law which is to say that University of Beira Interior's initiative was completely voluntary.

Gender mainstreaming in Portugal is still considered to be in the stage of preliminary measures. Under the National Equality Plans, until very recently universities were not contemplated, in great part due to generally being considered gender-neutral institutions. On the subject of the implementation of gender mainstreaming in Portugal, Ferreira (2011, p. 51) points out:

“The degree of implementation of these policies at the national level is low, and the explanation for this discontinuity is rooted, at least in part, in the fact that the governing elites and state bureaucracies see the issue as a foreign imposition with few internal benefits.”

University of Beira Interior is currently an institution that has a gender equality plan in place which is not the same as saying that it is already an egalitarian institution. The limitations of a gender equality plan in a university setting became progressively clear throughout the project. From the onset, there were initiatives that were not provided for in the funding typology, but which are essential in the university context such as publication and dissemination through scientific events. Additionally, there was a need to involve all groups, namely the students who are the soul of the organisation, and not just the people who work there such as academics and other workers. There were also the specificities of the university as an institution to take into consideration, with the differences between the management and the hierarchical academic logic; on top of that there were the idiosyncrasies of the various academic career paths.

All these specificities are starting to be taken into account through several networks and developed projects and tools such as, for example, the recent launch of



GEAR<sup>8</sup> (EIGE 2016a) in which we were involved. Thus, currently the decision to set up a gender equality plan in a university is better supported by the counterparts' experiences and research on this subject. Still, from our point of view, the core of the issue is deeper. While gender mainstreaming is still pointed out by many as a promising pathway to gender equality, for its potential transversal applicability to the governance of institutions (Hoard 2015), it is also questioned (Daly 2005; Rees 2005; Walby 2005) as something vague and lacking in achievement. Having analysed its results, some authors, including feminists, see the gender mainstreaming strategy as having limitations (Walby 2004). Daly (2005) points out that, despite the various measures that have been implemented, gender mainstreaming has not managed to produce social change, and institutions carry on being guided by policies and by a culture that oscillates between traditional values and the emerging neo-liberalism. The implementation of gender mainstreaming has been conducted by technocrats and not by the civil society movements which have always identified themselves with the cause of women's rights. Another critical claim argues that gender mainstreaming sits comfortably within a neo-liberal logic of flexibility (Bacchi and Eveline 2010). From our point of view another limitation of gender mainstreaming is the main focus on a binary (women/men) vision of gender and not including the diversity and richness of the field.

Walby (2004) refers to a sustained resistance when addressing the introduction of gender equality policies in organisations, particularly in organisations where the dominant culture is a patriarchal one, as is the case with universities. This sustained resistance was encountered at University of Beira Interior, both at an institutional level and at the individual level. Despite some gender concerns having been integrated into part of the existing structures, we are still far from actually transforming those structures in the sense of influencing the policies and agenda-setting of the university.

---

8 GEAR, meaning *Gender Equality in Academia and Research*, is a web platform designed for the support of European academic and research institutions aiming to implement gender mainstreaming, namely a gender equality plan. For more information, see <http://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gear>.

## 5 Concluding Remarks

Remembering our initial questions and addressing the impact in terms of gender at the neo-liberal university, it becomes clear that transformations in higher education and in science policies that are occurring in a scenario of neo-liberalisation, individualisation, precarisation of labour and commodification of education not only have impacts on scholars, as teachers and researchers, but are also threatening the expected development and consolidation of gender studies in academia. This neo-liberal scenario in part neglects gender studies and/or demands their adequacy to the prevalent academic orientation towards results and achievements measurements, depriving them of their heuristic and transformative potential.

In what concerns the present and future for gender studies in Portugal, we saw that despite the growth of work and publications in this area and the recent creation of an interdisciplinary centre exclusively dedicated to gender research, we can say that the field still suffers from scientific underestimation although important changes are being made. This is clear at the level of policymaking, considering the small amounts of national funds given to research within this field. Inside higher education institutions, mostly administered by men, gender studies still needs further recognition which is somehow concomitant with what happens with social sciences and humanities in general. This underestimation is not only anchored in the cultural values and the strong resistance of gender stereotypes that largely pervade the academy (Sales Oliveira and Villas-Boas 2012), but is also linked with the structure of the field, its strong feminisation and the subjects of research (private life, family, sexualities, care issues), still perceived as women's or minority matters, which strongly contributes to the mainstream vision of this scientific field as less valuable, less competitive and less important. Additionally, the path gender studies was making in order to achieve recognition became more difficult with the emergence of the capitalist university, so gender research also has to struggle with the dilemma of whether to contest neo-liberal values and risk becoming even more marginal or to accept the rules and try to position itself in the dominant setting. So we can conclude that new issues associated with a neo-liberal rationale are articulated with 'old' issues related to gender inequalities such as the unequal participation of men and women or the work and family balance.

This state of affairs is contradictory to the growing importance given to gender equality by the European Council and the proliferation of projects promoting gender mainstreaming in higher education and research institutions. To profit from these opportunities meant that gender researchers need to sympathise and accept the gender mainstreaming concept and philosophy which is not always the case. In fact, several authors consider that gender mainstreaming is not part of the

solution but part of the problem, since it tends to align with the status quo instead of effectively discussing it (Walby 2004; Daly 2005). In order to develop a gender mainstreaming effectively informed by the contributions of gender studies, it is important to enlarge the perspective through which gender studies are addressed by gender mainstreaming and therefore assuring its critical and transformative standpoint, and not only the integration of gender equality issues in organisations, without questioning and deconstructing structural and institutional orders of power and discrimination.

Today, as before, gender studies aims to identify and make visible the structural and institutional orders of power, to deconstruct the dominant assumptions, and to identify inequality and discrimination. Its contribution has the potential to not only understand but also to resist and ultimately make a transformative difference in the neo-liberal university. However, can this be done from a peripheral standpoint? Probably not.

Until now, gender studies has managed to balance the commitment to the aim of the field with the production of the demanded outputs of contemporary academia. An example of that is the activist work developed by scholars and researchers simultaneously with the increase in publications. Nevertheless, we cannot say that the impacts of gender studies in the contemporary academy are such that they managed to change the actual scenario and circumstances from within, questioning and overall transforming the existing frameworks and modes of science production. It is a difficult balance, since the dominant logic of individualisation tends to absorb and destroy diversity and inclusiveness features, so the subjugation to the neo-liberal mode of governance will eventually undermine the aim and character of the field.

In this scenario, it is important to promote an open debate and analyse the undergoing changes in European universities, because their transformations are closely linked with the actual and future status of gender studies and with the possibilities of resistance and transformation brought by gender research.

## References

- Ahmed, Sarah. 2012. *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Amâncio, Lígia. 2003. O género no discurso das ciências sociais. *Análise Social* 38 (168): 687–714.
- Araújo, Emília R. 2015. O tempo dos (para) os docentes e pesquisadores numa perspetiva do género. *Revista Ártemis XX* (ago–dez): 39–56.

- Bacchi, Carol, and Joan Eveline. 2010. *Mainstreaming Politics: Gendering Practices and Feminist Theory*. Adelaide: University of Adelaide Press.
- Bal, Ellen, Erella Grassiani and Kate Kirk. 2014. Neoliberal Individualism in Dutch Universities: Teaching and Learning Anthropology in an Insecure Environment. *Learning and Teaching* 7 (3): 46–72.
- Boring, Anne. 2017. Gender Biases in Student Evaluations of Teaching. *Journal of Public Economics* 145 (Issue C): 27–41.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 2004. *Science of Science and Reflexivity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Cañibano, Javier Otamendi and Inés Andujar. 2008. Measuring and Assessing Researcher Mobility from CV Analysis: The Case of the Ramón y Cajal Programme in Spain. *Research Evaluation* 17 (1): 17–3.
- Daly, Mary. 2005. Gender Mainstreaming in Theory and Practice. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 12 (3): 433–450.
- DGEEC/MED-MCTES 2016. *Perfil do Docente*, 2015. [http://www.dgeec.mec.pt/np4/np4/np4/EstatDocentes/%7B\\$clientServletPath%7D/?newsId=138&fileName=DGEEC\\_DSEE\\_DEEBS\\_DEES\\_2016\\_PerfilDocente.pdf](http://www.dgeec.mec.pt/np4/np4/np4/EstatDocentes/%7B$clientServletPath%7D/?newsId=138&fileName=DGEEC_DSEE_DEEBS_DEES_2016_PerfilDocente.pdf). Accessed: August 12, 2016.
- EIGE. 2016a. *Gender Equality in Academia and Research: GEAR Tool*. Vilnius: EIGE.
- EIGE. 2016b. *Integrating Gender Mainstreaming in Academia and Research Institutions: Analytical Paper*. Vilnius: EIGE.
- EIGE. 2016c. *Positive Impact of Gender Mainstreaming in Academia and Research Institutions: Opinion Paper*. Vilnius: EIGE.
- European Commission. 2016. *She Figures 2015*. [https://ec.europa.eu/research/swafs/pdf/pub\\_gender\\_equality/she\\_figures\\_2015-leaflet-web.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/research/swafs/pdf/pub_gender_equality/she_figures_2015-leaflet-web.pdf). Accessed: August 14, 2016.
- Fahlgren, Siv, Katarina Giritli-Nygrén and Angelica Sjöstedt Landén. 2016. Resisting “Over-ing”: Teaching and Researching Gender Studies in Sweden. *Women’s Studies International Forum* 54: 119–128.
- Ferreira, Virgínia. 2011. Os planos para a Igualdade nas organizações e a estratégia de mainstreaming. In *Atas do seminário: Igualdade de Género – Responsabilidade Social e Cidadania*, ed. by Catarina Sales Oliveira and Susana Villas-Boas, 49–53. Covilhã: Universidade da Beira Interior.
- Gill, Rosalind. 2010. Breaking the Silence: The Hidden Injuries of the Neoliberal University. In *Secrecy and Silence in the Research Process: Feminist Reflections*, ed. by Róisín Ryan-Flood and Rosalind Gill, 228–244. New York, London: Routledge.
- Gill, Rosalind, and Ngaire Donaghue. 2016. Resilience, Apps and Reluctant Individualism: Technologies of Self in the Neoliberal Academy. *Women’s Studies International Forum* 54: 91–99.
- Gutierrez-Rodriguez, Encarnación. 2016. Sensing Dispossession: Women and Gender Studies between Institutional Racism and Migration Control Policies in the Neo-liberal University. *Women’s Studies International Forum* 54: 167–177.
- Hark, Sabine. 2016. Contending Directions. Gender Studies in the Entrepreneurial University. *Women’s Studies International Forum* 54: 84–90.
- Hoard, Season. 2015. *Gender Expertise in Public Policy: Towards a Theory of Policy Success*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Joaquim, Teresa. 2007. Feminismos, Estudos sobre as Mulheres ou “para onde vai este barco?”. In *O longo caminho das mulheres: feminismos 80 anos depois*, ed. by Lígia Amâncio, Manuela Tavares, Teresa Joaquim and Teresa Almeida, 203–216. Lisboa: Dom Quixote.

- Kašić, Biljana. 2016. "Unsettling" Women's Studies, Settling Neoliberal Threats in the Academia: A Feminist Gaze from Croatia. *Women's Studies International Forum* 54: 129–137.
- Lipinsky, Anke. 2014. *Gender Equality Policies in Public Research*. Brussels: European Union Publications.
- Martins, Moisés. 2015. Repensar a política científica em Portugal – sugestões a partir da área de Ciências da Comunicação Carta ao ministro da Ciência e Tecnologia. *Revista Lusófona de Estudos Culturais* 3 (2): 361–365.
- Morley, Louise. 2006. Hidden Transcripts: The Micropolitics of Gender in Commonwealth Universities. *Women's International Forum* 29: 543–551.
- Morley, Louise, and Barbara Crossouard. 2016. Gender in the Neoliberalised Academy: The Affective Economy of Women and Leadership in South Asia. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 37 (1): 149–168.
- Naidoo, Rajani. 2016. The Competition Fetish in Higher Education: Varieties, Animators and Consequences. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 37 (1): 1–10.
- Nogueira, Conceição. 2001. *Um novo olhar sobre as relações sociais de género: Feminismo e perspectiva crítica na psicologia social*. Lisboa: Fundação Gulbenkian.
- Palermo, Simona, Elisabetta Giuffra, Valeria Arzenton and Massimiano Bucchi. 2008. *EMBO reports* 9 (6): 494–495.
- Pereira, Maria do Mar. 2008. The Epistemic Status of Women's, Gender, Feminist Studies: Notes for Analysis. In *The Making of European Women's Studies: Volume VIII. A Work in Progress Report on Curriculum Development and Related Issues in Gender Education and Research*, ed. by Berteke Waaldijk, Else van der Tuin and Mischa Peters, 145–156. Utrecht: Athena.
- Pereira, Maria do Mar. 2012. "Feminist Theory Is Proper Knowledge, But..." The Status of Feminist Scholarship in the Academy. *Feminist Theory* 13 (3): 283–303.
- Pereira, Maria do Mar. 2016. Struggling Within and Beyond the Performativity University: Articulating Activism and Work in "Academia Without Walls". *Women's Studies International Forum* 54: 100–110.
- PORDATA. 2016a. *Mulheres doutoradas em Portugal*. [http://www.pordata.pt/Portugal/Mulheres+no+total+de+doutoramentos+\(percentagem\)-682](http://www.pordata.pt/Portugal/Mulheres+no+total+de+doutoramentos+(percentagem)-682). Accessed: August 8, 2016.
- PORDATA. 2016b. *Mulheres graduadas em Portugal*. [http://www.pordata.pt/Europa/Mulheres+no+total+de+diplomados+no+ensino+superior+\(ISCED+5+8\)+\(percentagem\)-1664](http://www.pordata.pt/Europa/Mulheres+no+total+de+diplomados+no+ensino+superior+(ISCED+5+8)+(percentagem)-1664). Accessed: December 5, 2016.
- PORDATA. 2016c. *População residente do sexo feminino com 15 e mais anos por nível de escolaridade completo*. [http://www.pordata.pt/Portugal/Popula%C3%A7%C3%A3o+residente+do+sexo+feminino+com+15+e+mais+anos+por+n%C3%ADvel+de+escolaridade+completo+mais+elevado+\(percentagem\)-885](http://www.pordata.pt/Portugal/Popula%C3%A7%C3%A3o+residente+do+sexo+feminino+com+15+e+mais+anos+por+n%C3%ADvel+de+escolaridade+completo+mais+elevado+(percentagem)-885). Accessed: December 5, 2016.
- PORDATA. 2016d. *Taxa de analfabetismo total e por sexo*. <http://www.pordata.pt/Portugal/Taxa+de+analfabetismo+segundo+os+Censos+total+e+por+sexo-2517>. Accessed: December 5, 2016.
- Priola, Vicenza. 2007. Being Female Doing Gender. Narratives of Women in Education Management. *Gender and Education* 19 (1): 21–40.
- Rees, Teresa. 2005. Reflections on the Uneven Development of Gender Mainstreaming in Europe. *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 7 (4): 555–574.
- Rego, Teresa C. 2014. Produtivismo, pesquisa e comunicação científica: entre o veneno e o remédio. *Educação e Pesquisa* 40 (2): 325–346.

- Rodrigues, Elisabete. 2009. *O lugar do gênero, dos homens e das mulheres na sociologia portuguesa: uma análise a partir da Associação Portuguesa de Sociologia*. CIES e-Working Paper No. 64 (unpub.). [http://cies.iscte-iul.pt/destaques/documents/CIES-WP64\\_Rodrigues.pdf](http://cies.iscte-iul.pt/destaques/documents/CIES-WP64_Rodrigues.pdf). Accessed: July 14, 2016.
- Sales Oliveira, Catarina, and Susana Villas-Boas. 2012. Igualdade de Género na Universidade da Beira Interior. *Ex aequo* 25: 119–136.
- Silva, Manuela. 1999. *A Igualdade de Género, Caminhos e Atalhos para uma Sociedade Inclusiva*. Lisboa: Comissão para a Igualdade e para os Direitos das Mulheres.
- Silveirinha, Maria João. 2004. Os media e as mulheres: horizontes de representação, de construção e de práticas significantes. In *As mulheres e os media*, ed. by Maria João Silveirinha, 5–12. Lisboa: Livros Horizonte.
- Talves, Kari. 2016. Discursive Self-Positioning Strategies of Estonian Female Scientists in Terms of Academic Career and Excellence. *Women's Studies International Forum* 54: 157–166.
- Torres, Anália, Diana Maciel and Helena Sant'Ana. 2015. *Estudos de Género numa perspetiva interdisciplinar*. Lisboa: Mundos Sociais.
- Vaquinhas, Irene. 2002. Linhas de investigação para a história das mulheres nos séculos XIX e XX. Breve esboço. *Revista da Faculdade de Letras. História* III (3): 201–221.
- Walby, Sylvia. 2004. The European Union and Gender Equality: Emergent Varieties of Gender Regime. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 11 (1): 4–29.
- Walby, Sylvia. 2005. Gender Mainstreaming: Productive Tensions in Theory and Practice. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 12 (3): 321–343.
- Waring, Matthew. 2013. All in This Together? HRM and the Individualisation of the Academic Worker. *Higher Education Policy* 26 (3): 397–419.