

DOUTORAMENTO EUROPEU/ EUROPEAN PHD  
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**TAKING THEIR LIFE INTO THEIR OWN  
HANDS: Intersecting Inequality of  
Condition Dimensions in Poor Women's  
Idiosyncratic Social and Educational Paths  
and their Strategies to Cope with Poverty**  
Elsa Guedes Teixeira

**D**

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**TAKING THEIR LIFE INTO THEIR OWN HANDS: Intersecting Inequality of  
Condition Dimensions in Poor Women's Idiosyncratic Social and Educational  
Paths and their Strategies to Cope with Poverty**

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'Lie is the most loyal of allies (or is it a foundation?) of social inequality.'

*Zygmunt Bauman, 2013*

Aos meus pais e aos meus tios, Ester e Domingos, por tudo



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## A VIDA NAS PRÓPRIAS MÃOS: A INTERSEÇÃO DE DIMENSÕES DA DESIGUALDADE DE CONDIÇÃO NOS PERCURSOS SOCIAIS E EDUCACIONAIS SINGULARES DE MULHERES POBRES E AS SUAS ESTRATÉGIAS PARA ENFRENTAR A POBREZA

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**Resumo:** Nas últimas décadas, as percepções sobre a proteção social mudaram e as/os beneficiárias/os têm vindo a ser acusadas/os pela comunicação social, políticas/os, e pelo público em geral, de dependência, preguiça e até fraude. Esta percepção esteve também na base das políticas sociais ativas, criadas no sentido de reforçar a responsabilidade social e a ‘autonomia’. A presente tese procurou desafiar alguns dos estereótipos, sobretudo os relacionados com as mulheres pobres, demonstrando a singularidade dos seus percursos, destacando as suas estratégias para escapar à pobreza e oferecer um futuro melhor aos seus filhos, num contexto de desigualdade social.

O contributo teórico inovador deste trabalho assume-se na articulação de três abordagens teóricas diferentes: estudos sobre igualdade, abordagem contextualista e disposicionalista de Lahire, e teorias da interseccionalidade, de modo a registar os percursos singulares destas mulheres, fazendo interseções entre o género, a maternidade, o estatuto socioeconómico e a ‘raça’, de acordo com as dimensões da igualdade de condição, definidas por Baker e Lynch: redistribuição, relacional, educação, representação, e respeito e reconhecimento.

Neste âmbito, foram elaborados sete retratos sociológicos, baseados em sessenta entrevistas em profundidade, com vinte mulheres do Norte de Portugal. Foram ainda estabelecidos contactos com organizações públicas e privadas e realizadas dez entrevistas exploratórias, com dezassete informantes chave (profissionais de educação e ação social que trabalham com beneficiárias/os do Rendimento Social de Inserção). Para a interpretação dos retratos sociológicos, os percursos das mulheres foram divididos em percursos esperados e inesperados (singulares).

Para além de uma evidente reprodução intergeracional da pobreza, caracterizada pela falta de recursos económicos, a exclusão social das participantes mostrou estar profundamente relacionada com desigualdades afetivas, tais como a negligência e a violência na infância, e a violência doméstica nas famílias constituídas, com implicações a nível emocional, económico, educativo e de saúde.

Contudo, apesar da desigualdade, as mulheres pobres mostraram ter estratégias para lidar com os constrangimentos das suas vidas. A maioria das entrevistadas tinha definido uma estratégia de mobilidade social ascendente, especialmente relacionada com o futuro dos filhos, estando a sua agência fortemente relacionada com o cuidado e a priorização das necessidades daqueles.

Esta investigação revelou ainda que o valor do rendimento social de inserção é claramente insuficiente para as necessidades das famílias. De facto, este apoio permite apenas níveis de sobrevivência, mantendo as mulheres entrevistadas num estado de dependência, contrariando os objetivos de ‘autonomia’ delineados na origem daquela política social.

O estudo apresenta sugestões para o desenvolvimento de políticas nas áreas de justiça social tais como a educação, o emprego, o apoio social, o cuidar, a habitação e a saúde. Em suma, a perspetiva desta investigação destaca que a capacidade de planear, a motivação e a possibilidade de ‘autonomia’ dependem em grande medida de condições socioeconómicas e afetivas.



## RÉSUMÉ

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Au cours des dernières décennies, les perceptions sur l'assistance sociale ont changé et les bénéficiaires ont été accusés par les médias, les politiciens, et par l'opinion publique en général, de dépendance, de paresse et même de fraude. Les politiques sociales actives, sont été créées pour renforcer la responsabilité individuelle et 'l'autonomie' des bénéficiaires. Cette thèse a tenté de remettre en cause certains stéréotypes spécifiquement liés aux femmes pauvres, montrant les singularités de leurs parcours, mettant en évidence leurs stratégies pour échapper à la pauvreté et offrir un meilleur avenir à leurs enfants dans un contexte d'inégalité.

La contribution théorique distincte de ce travail est l'articulation de trois approches théoriques différentes, les études d'égalité, l'approche contextualiste et dispositionnelle de Lahire et l'intersectionnalité, afin de capturer les chemins singuliers de ces femmes, croisant le genre, la maternité, le statut socioéconomique et la 'race', selon les dimensions de Baker et Lynch sur l'égalité de condition, redistribution, relationnel, éducation, représentation, respect et reconnaissance.

Par conséquent, sept portraits sociologiques ont été créés, à partir de soixante entretiens approfondis, avec vingt femmes du nord du Portugal. En outre, des contacts ont été établis avec des organisations publiques et privées et dix entretiens exploratoires ont été réalisés avec dix-sept informateurs-clés (professionnels de l'éducation et de l'assistance sociale qui travaillant avec des bénéficiaires du Revenu de Solidarité Active - RSA). Pour l'interprétation des portraits sociologiques, les trajectoires sociales des femmes étaient divisées entre attendues et inattendues (singulières).

Outre une reproduction intergénérationnelle claire de la pauvreté, caractérisée par la privation de ressources économiques, l'exclusion sociale des participantes était profondément liée aux inégalités affectives, telles que la négligence et la violence à l'enfance et la violence domestique à l'âge adulte, avec des implications émotionnelles, de santé, économiques et pédagogiques.

Cependant, malgré l'inégalité, les femmes pauvres avaient des stratégies pour faire face aux contraintes de leur vie. La plupart des femmes interviewées avaient une stratégie définie envers une mobilité sociale ascendante, en particulier concernant l'avenir de leurs enfants et leur action était donc fortement liée à la prise en charge des enfants et à la priorisation de leurs besoins.

Notre recherche a révélé que la valeur du RSA est clairement insuffisante pour satisfaire les besoins des familles. En fait, cela permet une simple survivance, en maintenant les femmes interviewées dans un état de dépendance vis-à-vis l'assistance, au contraire des objectifs d'autonomie pour lesquels il a été conçu.

L'étude offre des suggestions pour l'élaboration de politiques dans les domaines de la justice sociale, tels que l'éducation, le travail, le bien-être, le logement et la santé. En résumé, la perspective de cette recherche souligne que la capacité à planifier, la motivation et la possibilité d'être 'autonome' dépendent largement des conditions socio-économiques et affectives.



## ABSTRACT

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In the last decades, perceptions about welfare have changed and recipients have been accused by mass media, politicians, and by public opinion in general, of dependency, laziness and even fraud. This perception was also on the basis of active social policies, created to reinforce individual responsibility and ‘autonomy’. This thesis has tried to challenge some of the stereotypes specifically related to poor women, showing the idiosyncrasies of their paths, highlighting their strategies to try cope with poverty and to offer a better future for their children within a context of inequality.

The distinct theoretical contribution of this work is the articulation of three different theoretical approaches, equality studies, Lahire’s contextualist and dispositionalist approach and intersectionality, in order to capture these women’s idiosyncratic paths, intersecting gender, motherhood, socioeconomic status and ‘race’ at different levels, according to Baker and Lynch’s dimensions of equality of condition, redistribution, relationality, education, representation and respect and recognition.

Consequently, seven sociological portraits were created, based on sixty in-depth interviews, with twenty women from northern Portugal. In addition, contacts were established with public and private organisations and ten exploratory interviews were held with seventeen key informants (social and education professionals who work with ISA recipients). For the sociological portraits’ interpretation, women’s social paths were divided between expected and unexpected (idiosyncratic).

Besides a clear intergenerational reproduction of poverty, characterised by the lack of economic resources, participants’ social exclusion was deeply connected with affective inequalities, such as abuse and neglect in early childhood and domestic violence in adulthood, which have had emotional, health, economic and educational implications.

However, despite inequality, poor women had strategies to deal with their lives’ constraints. Most interviewed women had a defined strategy for upward social mobility, especially concerning their children’s future and their agency was thus strongly related to children’s care and the prioritization of their needs.

Our research revealed that the income support allowance’s value is clearly insufficient for the families’ needs. In fact, it enables mere survival, keeping the interviewed women in a state of dependency towards welfare, conflicting with the objectives of ‘autonomy’ for which they were designed.

The study offers suggestive evidence for policy development in the areas of social justice, such as care, education, work, welfare, housing and health. In sum, this research’s perspective highlights that the ability to make plans, the motivation and the possibility of ‘autonomy’ are largely dependent on socioeconomic and affective conditions.



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## NOMENCLATURE

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- BIEN – Basic Income European Network
- CEB – Cycle of Basic Education
- CLDS – Local Contract for Social Development
- CNRM – National Commission for the Minimum Income
- CPCJ – Children and Youth Protective Services
- DECO – Portuguese Consumers Association
- DREN – Northern Regional Education Directorate
- EAPN – European Anti-Poverty Network
- EFA – Adult Education and Training Course
- EU – European Commission
- Eurofound – European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions
- GIP – Professional Insertion Office
- INE – Statistics Portugal
- ISA – Income Support Allowance
- ISS.IP – Social Security Institute
- Novas Oportunidades – New Opportunities Program
- NGO – Non-governmental Organization
- OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
- PEETI – Program for the Prevention and Elimination of Child Labour Exploitation
- RMG – Guaranteed Minimum Income
- RSI – Income Support Allowance
- RVCC – Recognition, Validation and Certification of Skills
- SEF – Immigration and Borders Service
- SJI – Social Justice Index
- VET – Vocational and Educational Training



## INTRODUCTION

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This thesis aims to challenge stereotypes specifically related to poor women, showing the idiosyncrasies of their social and educational paths, highlighting their strategies to try to cope with poverty and to offer a better future for the education of their children within a context of inequality. The qualitative PhD research took place in Northern Portugal with women (recipients of an income support allowance and mothers), during the austerity period. Its purpose is to understand the idiosyncrasies of poor women's life paths, by intersecting inequality of condition dimensions (redistribution (resources) relationality (love, care and solidarity), education, representation (power) and respect and recognition (cultural representation), in order to highlight women's agency, i.e., their strategies to cope with poverty.

Based on this purpose, the research problem is the idiosyncrasies of poor women's social and educational paths, addressed by the reconstruction of their genealogy of dispositions, as well as by intersecting (in)equality of condition dimensions, and their strategies to cope with poverty.

This thesis' theoretical path was complex. During the research, it came across many challenges and unexpected themes, such as the impact of early childhood negligence, abuse and lack of care. This carelessness was often combined with violence or lack of interest from the teachers and bullying from peers, which led to school failure and early school leaving. The extreme poverty in which the interviewed women had lived since they were children, as well as the associated malnutrition (or even hunger), lack of hygiene and poor housing conditions, were often the cause of health issues, cognitive problems and mental health disorders that, in turn, prevented an effective professional inclusion in adulthood. These women often suffered from anxiety and/or depression, and they often ended up as victims in abusive relationships. All these problems were heightened by a lack of State intervention, especially in education and in early social and medical intervention. All these unexpected issues caused a sort of serendipity that forced the exploration of new theoretical contributions grounded in very different traditions. In fact, traditional sociological approaches on social exclusion did not satisfy the need to interpret the different paths of these women's lives and their strategies to deal with the multiple oppressions they were struggling with. It is not our intention to deny such oppressions, but it is paramount to question traditional assumptions.

While this thesis was being written mass media, politicians, and the public were very critical of welfare recipients, specifically Income Support Allowance (ISA) recipients, accusing them of welfare dependency, laziness and even fraud. In fact, in the last decades, perceptions about welfare have changed and the welfare state is currently threatened. In recent decades the latter is increasingly seen as a sign of lack of self-discipline and responsibility (Power, 2005) and the poor are regarded as the culturally marginal ‘others’ and treated as irrelevant and/or inferior (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004), their customs, accents and activities seen as inferior and portrayed as ‘lax, sinful and devoid of moral standards’ (Bauman, 2005: 116). Poor people are seen as unfit to take care of themselves and therefore excluded from their freedom to act.

The introduction begins by describing my background, personal, educational and professional interests related to the thesis’ subject. Next, I will present the theoretical framework, which articulates three approaches: Equality Studies, Lahire’s contextualist and dispositionalist approach and Intersectionality and I will also define the research questions. Lastly, I will address the research’s methodology, conceptual framework, and assumptions.

## WHY DO I CARE?

When my grandmother was 101 years old the *Casa do Infante - Museum* decided to pay tribute to her as one of the last *carquejeiras* alive. Besides the public in general, some family members were present, pictures were displayed and a description of her inhumane working conditions before 1951. At the presentation, she and her colleagues were compared to slaves and described as ‘beasts of burden’. Their job was to carry up to 50 kilos of *carqueja*<sup>1</sup> that arrived in the Douro boats and was used at the bread baking ovens of the city and for heating the privileged people's houses. Poor women like my great-grandmother and my grandmother, who began carrying the *carqueja* when she was ten years old, bent over in

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<sup>1</sup> *Pterospartum Tridantum*, is a woody, arborescent, erect plant, 30 to 70 cm high and with winged branches (undeveloped wings). It is common in Portugal in moors, bushes and pine forests.

*carqueja* bunches, carried it through the city from the dock at the *Douro* River to the bakeries and manor houses, which used the *carqueja* for their ovens and fireplaces. Their journey began near bridge *Luiç I* and could take them as far as five km away to *Foz* or *Paranhos*. The hardest part began at the dock, and it was the *Calçada da Corticeira*, which was 220 m long, with a slope of 21 degrees, that no animal could climb. Poor women performed that task even if they were pregnant or while carrying their babies, just to be paid a meagre wage.

The abovementioned presentation was held during my first PhD years and it occurred to me why poverty and social exclusion of women was always such a fascinating subject for me. Even though I have never experienced poverty, my mother never let me forget where she came from and our family's struggle for a better life. I have always been told many stories about the hardship of her childhood and youth, but until that moment I had never thought of my grandmother as a 'beast of burden'. In fact, I looked around at the people in that room, at that noble building, I saw the pity in their well-intentioned eyes and I felt ashamed. It was right there that I decided that I could not portrait the women of my study in such a unilateral manner. For the first time, my family was the subject of a study and I did not feel comfortable with the way they were portrayed. At *Casa do Infante*, when the family was invited to say a few words, I told the audience that my grandmother was a courageous, joyful woman, who raised three children alone (my grandfather died when he was only 37. By then, she had already seven children, but four died during childhood by lack of healthcare and nutrition). In her old age and illness, she was surrounded by family and she was a respected person in her community. Two of her granddaughters had college degrees and were working in their field of expertise and the other one was a successful businesswoman. She was more than her ancient job, my mother and aunt were more than their school degrees. They were real, complex, idiosyncratic people that had struggled their way up, without denying their social origins, who always kept genuine. This social heritage had undoubtedly been present in my mind when I chose a degree in Sociology, when I specialised in Education, with a Masters dissertation entitled *Singular Paths. School Success in Higher Education and Disadvantaged Social Groups* (Teixeira, 2010) or when I chose a job working at the Department of Social Action and Inclusion Affairs of a Municipality. Bernard Lahire's work (1995; 2002; 2004; 2005; 2012; 2017) inspired me because unlike Bourdieu's dispositionalist sociology it opens the possibility for social change through one's heterogeneous and even contradictory contexts of socialisation and dispositions. Bourdieu's theories felt like yet another mechanism that confirmed the impossibility of social mobility and I refused to be another statistic that confirmed reproduction theories. It

is not my intention to deny the existence of severe economic, social, educational and cultural inequalities. Nevertheless, I wanted to write a thesis where women's agency was valued and try to understand the dispositions that enable some women to surmount unthinkable contexts of adversity and still dream of a better future for themselves and their children. Even though my family's history is unique it is not the only one. In fact, in these unique and unexpected multiplied paths we can glimpse a dawn for social change, even if the road is long, the pace is slow and full of struggles.

## BRIEF PRESENTATION OF THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present research proposes a theoretical framework that articulates three different approaches, which, according to my standpoint, can be complemented: Equality Studies, Lahire's contextualist and dispositionalist approach and Intersectionality. The theoretical differences and articulations between the aforementioned approaches made sense when exploring the idiosyncrasies of poor mothers' paths and their relation with welfare and education.

A sociological knowledge based on the historical and contextual contextualization of social practices as well as on the refusal of determinisms or essentialisms regarding gender, 'race' and social class and that considers the relevance of non-class forms of social exclusion (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004; Lynch, Baker & Lyons, 2009) enables the analysis of poor women's paths, intersecting gender, motherhood, socioeconomic status and "race"/ethnicity at different levels, according to the dimensions of equality of condition, redistribution (resources), relationality (love, care and solidarity), education, representation (power) and respect and recognition (cultural representation), proposed by Equality Studies, namely authors such as Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Walsh (2004). The latter have highlighted the importance of affective relations in framing dispositions, as well as the centrality of love, care and affection and the vulnerability of the poor. Such a framework enabled an understanding of social exclusion not only as a result of insufficient economic, social, cultural and political resources but also as a matter of affective inequality.

A contextualist-dispositionalist Sociology and the notion of idiosyncratic character are outlined in Bernard Lahire's programme (1995, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2017), suggesting a critical reading of Bourdieu's theory. The author argues that Sociology should establish a genealogy of the individuals' dispositions by identifying the different, heterogeneous and

even contradictory contexts of socialization. In fact, dispositions vary with the exposure to different individuals and socialising frameworks and also diachronically and synchronically according to the individual's path, crises or tensions within it.

Finally, a multi-level analysis of the intersecting social categories, suggested by intersectionality authors (Crenshaw, 1989; Risman, 2004; Yuval-Davis, 2006; Hancock, 2007; Shields, 2008; Anthias, 2012; Gopaldas, 2013; Nogueira, 2013), enables to analyse the intra and inter-individual variations, contradictions and crises along the multiple socializations that occur in women's paths.

Furthermore, the selected approaches incorporate gender and citizenship issues, acknowledging the existence of power and gender inequalities linked with inequality of condition. It gives 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 paths of ISA women as mothers. As a matter of fact, methodologically speaking, such understanding is captured by a 'voice policy', 'by listening to the senses and the meanings, especially of women in their own words' (Araújo, 2002: 109).

Two of the aforementioned main theoretical contributions are based on different traditions in the Sociology of Education: the French and the Irish-Anglo-Saxon. From Lahire's perspective, Bourdieu's work has had a crucial importance: 'It is the theory of praxis and habitus developed by Pierre Bourdieu that mainly nurtured our own sociologic view (...). My work invites one to think at the same time, with and against (or, most of the times, differently from) Pierre Bourdieu.' (Lahire, 2002: 11). Lahire's main concerns are the development of a theory of a plural actor, the different ways of reflexivity in human action, the plurality of logics of action, the ways in which the social is embodied, the place of language in the study of action, and internalisation processes. He criticises the notion of *habitus* and proposes the study of dispositions, arguing that 'all (individual) body who is immersed in a plurality of social worlds is subjected to heterogeneous and often contradictory socialisation principles that he/she incorporates' (Lahire, 2002: 31).

Whereas Lahire's perspective is more concerned with the classical tradition in Sociology, Baker and Lynch's perspective, within the egalitarian framework, address ethical issues, is socially engaged and has a transformative dimension. Also, both approaches use two different languages. As Lynch and Payet (2011) argue, the issue of care is not present in the French tradition in the Sociology of Education, especially when it comes to its intersection

with the educational field. As noted earlier, the affective system and love, care and solidarity are part of Baker and Lynch's perspective within a feminist and egalitarian framework, which aims for social justice.

Taking into consideration the above description of the thesis theoretical framework and to accomplish the abovementioned thesis' purpose this study proposes to i. reconstruct the genealogy of dispositions, i.e., the heterogeneous and even contradictory processes of constitution, internalisation and updating of dispositions related to socioeconomic status, gender, motherhood and also "race" (in Salomé's portrait) and the way they intersect in the different dimensions of the life of women who are welfare recipients; ii. describe the contexts of poor women's socialisation; iii. understand the key moments of biographical ruptures or crossroads, and iv. study their strategies to cope with poverty.

Several research questions were subsequently defined concerning the life paths of poor women who are mothers:

1. What are the main disadvantages of each inequality dimension that poor women have to face?
2. What is the relation between affective inequality and social inclusion/exclusion?
3. What are the main characteristics of unexpected (idiosyncratic) and of expected (typical) social paths, considering the women's strategies (agency) to cope with poverty as well as their strategies for social mobility?
4. What is the role of activation policies in empowering poor women?

## INTERSECTING DIMENSIONS OF INEQUALITY OF CONDITION IN POOR WOMEN' PATHS: METHODOLOGY, CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND ASSUMPTIONS

As previously stated, the research has an intersectional approach to the study of inequalities (Crenshaw, 1989; McCall, 2005; Hancock, 2004; Anthias, 2012), namely the intersectionality of socioeconomic status, gender, motherhood, and, in one portrait, 'race'/ethnicity.

With reference to Bernard Lahire's methodology (2004, 2017), seven sociological portraits will be created, based on sixty in-depth interviews, a non-probabilistic, convenience sample

composed of twenty women from northern Portugal. The selected women had socially comparable traits, such as age range and social, economic, educational and professional backgrounds. The sociological portraits will then be interpreted. Finally, a synthesis of the seven sociological portraits will be presented, according to the dimensions that interact to facilitate or reduce inequalities, namely redistribution (resources), relationality (love, care and solidarity), education, representation (power) and respect and recognition (cultural representation), addressing the disadvantages that these women had to deal and their strategies for action within an inequality framework.

Given that the focus of this study is the idiosyncratic paths of women who are welfare recipients, their relationship with their children and the intersections between dimensions of inequality of condition the latter concept is one of its cornerstones. It is, therefore, a multi-level approach, based on intersectionality. Building on the equality of condition concept, it is crucial to understand how these women's education and training intersect with redistribution (resources) and relationality (love, care and solidarity) in order to enable or hinder disadvantages and strategies to cope with poverty. The work dimension has been positioned within redistribution and the education dimension has been given a significant weight, by analysing it separately.

Inspired on Lahire's work (1995), Costa, Lopes and Caetano (2014) and Bóia and Lopes (2012) I will distinguish between expected (typical) and unexpected (countertrend, idiosyncratic) social paths. The first are based on the social background of a person's family and its socioeconomic and educational resources (inspired in social reproduction theories), also known as social regularities, but it will also be argued that, despite numerous inequalities and disadvantages, poor mother's autonomy is conditioned but not determined by economic and gender constraints since they have strategies to try to negotiate their resources' limitations (Lahire, 2004). Additionally, the processes of internalisation and updating of dispositions related to socioeconomic status, gender, motherhood and also 'race', and the way they intersect in the different dimensions of the interviewed women's lives, will be reconstructed. Additionally, the key moments of biographical ruptures or crossroads will also be analysed and lastly, women's autonomy will be highlighted. Despite the poverty lived by the interviewed women, their paths have common characteristics and, more importantly, they show idiosyncratic ways of dealing with their lives' hardship.

## BRIEF SCRIPT FOR THE THESIS

Following on from the introduction, this thesis has eight chapters and the conclusions. Chapter one sets the context of the research by addressing the crisis of the welfare state, the 'autonomy myth' and the idiosyncrasies of the Portuguese welfare state, presenting data on equality and poverty in Portugal, explaining the development of the Portuguese income support allowance and presenting some previous research about ISA recipients in Portugal.

Chapter two focuses on the theoretical framework, based on three different approaches that, that were articulated, Intersectionality, Lahire's contextualist and dispositionalist approach and Equality Studies. These approaches to social exclusion were articulated in order to comprehend the idiosyncratic life paths of these women, as well as their strategies to deal with inequality. The chosen approaches based on the historical contextualization of social practices have in common the refusal of determinisms or essentialisms regarding gender, 'race' and social class while considering the relevance of non-class forms of social exclusion.

Chapter three examines the theoretical intersections between the five dimensions of inequality of condition, highlighting redistribution, relationality and education, their disadvantages and the way they intersect in poor women's paths. This model will be the analysis framework for the interpretation of sociological portraits.

The fourth chapter looks at the methodological framework. It describes the creation of sociological portraits in light of Lahire's theory, as well as the procedures adopted for the data collection. It also presents the main sociodemographic traits of the seven interviewed women who were selected to build the final set of sociological portraits, it addresses the field notes that have been written about the emotions and thoughts that emerged during that interaction and, lastly, are explained the procedures regarding the exploratory interviews held with key informants (social and education professionals who work with ISA recipients, such as teachers, social workers, psychologists and social educators). The results of these interviews are discussed in chapter five.

Chapter six presents the sociological portraits of Mariana, Lurdes, Estela, Salomé, Elvira, Margarida and Cristina and, in chapter seven, two types of paths are differentiated and examined, starting with the unexpected or idiosyncratic: Lurdes, Mariana, Estela and Salomé and their upward social mobility paths, women struggling for socio-professional inclusion, despite a problematic childhood. In the second group, the expected paths: Elvira, Margarida and Cristina, highlighting the long-term effects of economic inequalities and the

intergenerational reproduction of poverty. Chapter eight presents an overview of the findings, divided into the dimensions that interact to facilitate or reduce inequalities, redistribution, relationality, education, representation and respect and recognition. The disadvantages that these women had to deal with are presented first, followed by their possibilities for action within an inequality framework.

Lastly, the main conclusions and their relationship with previous work in these areas, as well as the research questions, are discussed, namely the main disadvantages in each inequality dimension that poor women have to face, the relation between affective inequality and social inclusion/exclusion, the causes of educational attainment and dropout for welfare women, the school performance and behaviour of working class/poor children, the characteristics of unexpected (idiosyncratic) and of expected social paths, women's strategies to cope with poverty and strategies for social mobility and finally, the relation between activation policies and poor women's empowerment. The implications for policy and practice follow, offering suggestive evidence for a comprehensive policy development in the areas of social justice, such as education, work, welfare, housing and health. Afterwards, possible areas for further research on the intersectionality of inequality dimensions of poor women are addressed and, lastly, I will describe my personal journey, preconceived ideas and experiences during the investigation.



# 1. THE CRISIS OF THE WELFARE STATE, THE ‘AUTHONOMY MYTH’ AND THE IDIOSYNCRASIES OF THE PORTUGUESE WELFARE STATE

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In this chapter, I will contextualise the study within the changes occurred in the welfare states and in the representations about the poor, the criticisms to the ‘autonomy myth’ and the debate about activation policies. I will also address the idiosyncrasies of the Portuguese welfare state model, I will present data about poverty and social exclusion in Portugal, describe the Portuguese income support allowance (ISA) and introduce some studies about it.

## 1.1. ACTIVATION POLICIES: AIMING FOR AUTONOMY?

After the 1970s, some serious changes occurred in the European Welfare-States. According to Castel (1999), the salary society entered a state of crisis, characterised by work instability, unemployment and social assistance mechanisms, which opened a debate about the protection of the new poor. In the 90s, in France, the ‘new’ social issue (Castel 1999; Rosanvallon (1995) was related to the social vulnerability of layers of the population that until then never had to rely on welfare. Bauman claims that the welfare state is gradually under profound criticism and in retreat since job scarcity has made poor people redundant<sup>2</sup>. In fact, they are nowadays considered as flawed consumers and overall an ‘unjustifiable waste of taxpayer’s money’ (2005: 113). Indeed, several authors claim that

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<sup>2</sup> The poor in the industrial era were considered as the reserve army of labour (Bauman, 2005: 110) and for that reason had a role to play in society. The prescription for poverty was to accept to work in factories, whenever work was available. Locke and Bentham defended severe discipline, coerced labour, surveillance and even corporal punishment for them. As the need for the labour force existed, the welfare state was created.

liberal individualism dominates the political discourse again (Young, 2004) and that there is a 'new social hegemony based on individualistic consumerism' (Reay, 1998: 263). Zygmunt Bauman (2005, 2011, 2013) has been one of the most critic scholars of free-market economics and its consequences in rising inequalities. Based on the works of Firebough, Wilkinson and Pickett (2010), Stiglitz (2012), Bourguignon and Lansey, Bauman concludes that not only inequality within countries is rising but also that 'social inequality seems nowadays ever closer to turning into the first *perpetuum* mobile in history' (Bauman, 2013). In effect, the justification that 'the pursuit of individual profit also provides the best mechanism for the pursuit of the common good' (Bauman, 2013) is a myth. After 2007 and the bank collapse, unemployment and inequalities have increased, while, at the same time, the number of billionaires reached historical records in 2011. Furthermore, 'people in the richest 1% of the world population are now almost 2000 times richer than the bottom 50%' (Bauman, 2013). According to the OECD (2018), wealth inequality is such that the top 10% of the richest have half of the total wealth, while the lowest 40% hold 3%.

Current societies are characterized by 'risk' and 'uncertainty' (Beck, 2000), demonstrated by work precariousness, discontinuity and informality of employment contracts. Such factors of unpredictability have been translated into a reduction of the governmental response ability and, according to Young (1999), a passage from a society that includes to a society that excludes, within a context of globalisation, in a 'social and political loss of territory' of the Nation-State. Nowadays, big corporations and globalisation dominate the economy, which affects work and social rights (Rodrigues, 2010).

In this global context, from 2000 onwards, welfare recipients began to be criticised. A feeling of injustice/resentment arose throughout the employed low social classes towards the recipients, as they considered the amounts received by the latter to be too similar to the incomes obtained through work. Duvoux (2009) mentions the rising idea of the 'return of the bad poor', inspired by Paugam's conclusions on the changes in representations related to poverty and the overvaluation of individual factors in its explanation (instead of structural causes).

In recent decades the latter is increasingly seen as a sign of lack of self-discipline and responsibility (Power, 2005) and the poor are regarded as the culturally marginal 'others' and treated as irrelevant and/or inferior (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004), their customs, accents and activities seen as inferior and portrayed as 'lax, sinful and devoid of moral standards' (Bauman, 2005: 116). In fact, poor people are seen as unfit to take care of

themselves and therefore excluded from their freedom to act. As a result, 'policing, controlling an supervising (...) are perceived as an act of charity, an ethical duty', and there is an 'impulse (...) to 'heteronomize', to disempower, (...) to subordinate' (Bauman, 2005: 108). The poor, considered as an underclass without rights, are perceived as the 'collateral damages' of 'profit-driven, uncoordinated and uncontrolled globalization' (Bauman, 2011: 4). Consequently, poverty is frequently reclassified as a crime, 'unneeded, unwanted, forsaken', their place is 'out of sight', 'removed from the streets', 'deported' or 'incarcerated' (Bauman, 2005: 116). Also, Wacquant argues that welfare programs are becoming 'instruments of surveillance and control', as poverty is considered a crime. (1999: 1643). It is assumed that welfare recipients are liars, cheaters, and thieves (Gustafson, 2011). In fact, this author defends that nowadays there is a criminalisation of poverty since poor people are stigmatised, placed under surveillance and regulated. This occurs because it is assumed a 'latent criminality among the poor' (Gustafson, 2011:1). The criminalisation draws attention away from the real issues concerning poverty and institutionalises neoliberal, racist and sexist views of the poor. Also, Pimpare criticises 'this stubborn insistence that people could have more money or more health care if only they wanted them more, absolves the government of having to intervene and use its power on their behalf' (2017: 2), which he sarcastically calls 'tough love without the love'. In sum, the humiliation of the poor becomes an effective form of domination and social control, as they interiorize the stigma of dependency that mass media, politicians and society in general attribute to them.

This perception was also at the basis of active social policies, created to counter the 'passivity' that social contributions could instil in the recipients and to reinforce individual responsibility: autonomy was imposed on the recipients (Duvoux, 2009: 2-3). Actually, the notion of autonomy is widespread in neo-liberal ideology in contrast with the definition of welfare recipients as dependents towards the State and the rest of the working and tax-paying citizens. Indeed, liberal political regimes share some principles, namely that some, thus they are in need of being governed by 'older disciplinary methods, with the goal of instilling enough self-discipline and self-responsibility' (Power, 2005: 644). The contemporary expression of classical liberalism conception that some members of society are not considered as ready to be self-governed has been developed in neo-liberal societies in the form of active social policies or workfare, in order 'to prepare recipients for autonomy' (Power, 2005: 644). The insertion contract meets these middle and upper classes anxieties. It is no longer considered that society has a debt towards the poor. In fact, the

latter should work in order to pay their debt to society. In this way, the social contract is infused with individualism and collective solidarities' decline. In fact, contracts and obligations, implicit in minimum income schemes, may cause the opposite effect of self-devaluation and internalisation of the dependency, by forcing individuals to prove their need for benefits (Duvoux, 2009).

Correspondingly, Queiroz and Gros (2012) describe how poor people are often forced to sign the ISA contract in order to receive the benefit but do not agree with its terms. Additionally, there is an awareness of ISA cuts if the contract defined by social workers is not observed and fear that social services take the children away.

Young (2004) criticises the liberal ideology of self-sufficiency, in which only rational autonomous agents have equal citizenship rights, 'today (...) because they depend on bureaucratic institutions for support or services, the old, the poor, and the mentally or physically disabled are subject to patronizing, punitive, demeaning, and arbitrary treatment by the policies and people associated with welfare bureaucracies' (Young, 2004: 50). There is a suspension of rights such as 'privacy, respect and individual choice' (2004: 51). In the same vein as Fineman (2008), she argues that dependency does not need to be oppressive and that is, in fact, a 'human basic condition'. Everyone is dependent on various occasions in his or her lives: children, sick, old people, etc. 'have the moral right to depend on others for subsistence and support'.

In fact, vulnerability is universal, constant and inherent to the human condition and the State should have the responsibility to alleviate it because it often escapes human or individual control (Fineman, 2008). As Sayer argues, 'concepts of human agency emphasize the capacity to do things, but our vulnerability is as important as our capacities (...). Capacity and vulnerability are always in relation to various circumstances' (2011: 5). Fineman proposes the idea of a vulnerable subject, as opposed of the autonomous, self-sufficient, responsible and independent subject idealised by the liberal tradition, criticising what she defines as the 'autonomy myth' (2004). Consequently, according to the author, the State should be 'more responsive and responsible' (2008:2). Nevertheless, as we have seen before, the State's intervention in order to promote equality policies has been constrained by globalisation and institutions such as multinational corporations. Still, the author argues that the impacts of the State's investment in education, health or social justice are not easily or immediately apprehended and measured and challenges the idea of 'efficiency' in such analysis. Furthermore, the Fineman rejects what she calls the 'formal equality model' (based

on Locke's philosophy and liberal tradition), as it does not tackle discrimination, subordination and domination of some groups in relation to others, nor does it challenge the 'unequal distribution of wealth, power and opportunity' (2008: 4). Following this line of thought, also Young (2002) argues that work cannot be reduced to a job. While the first means making a useful contribution to society, considering the well-being of the community and the common good (by caring for others and the environment or contributing to Arts or Science), the latter implies a 'task assigned by a powerful person for which he or she is willing to pay' (2000: 47). Welfare rhetoric thus renounces to the discussion about the meaningfulness of work, as a 'useful and challenging activity that gives one pride and recognition' (Young, 2002: 57). In sum, feminists have been questioning the liberal vision of the competitive, self-sufficient and autonomous citizen, which is based on a middle-class, white male conception.

The activation debate is central when European countries are confronting a socioeconomic and financial crisis and those policies are publicised by many governments as one of the main solutions to fight unemployment. In fact, since the 2000s, activation policies were mainstreamed, as consensus about new poverty (Paugam, 2003) was broken and reforms of the tax system were carried out. Social representations changed about vulnerable social groups, seen as people of privilege rather than victims (Duvoux, 2009), from a perspective of 'blaming the victim (Ryan, 1976).

As we have seen so far, the new social policies have emerged in a context of economic globalisation. Reforms in employment policies were essentially based in flexibility, skill-diversity and work requalification. According to Knijn, Martin and Millar (2007), activation policies are based on the idea that there is a trade-off regarding the right to receive a social income: the recipients have to commit to having an active contribution (socially useful activity, finding work or increasing their qualifications).

Hespanha (2002) differentiates between the strict and wide senses of activation policies. The latter highlights social insertion and its different dimensions and not only professional insertion, defending that such policies stimulate personal autonomy and are an important step to the transition between the exclusion situation and the social and professional inclusion. However, the author warns to the fact that

workfare programmes are marked by a punitive attitude, based upon meaningless or stigmatizing work, without any expectation of security or stability at work, undermining personal autonomy and self-respect. Only activation programmes

based on useful work, qualification programmes and qualifying training may positively contribute to a significant improvement of the social participation. (Hespanha, 2002: 7).

Several authors (Hespanha, 2008; Heikkilä, 1999; Hvinden, 1999; Bosco and Chassard, 1999; Geldof, 1999) have identified strong points of activation such as qualification improvement, the increase of employment and self-esteem, the decrease of a dependency culture and the promotion of concerns with the right to work, thus elevating 'work ethics to a central pillar of society' (Hespanha 2008, 11). However, these authors also underline its weak points, namely its punitive character, autonomy and freedom restrictions, 'the conduction of tasks that are socially undervalued or even degrading' (Hespanha 2008, 12). In this sense, they frequently remove the responsibility of social exclusion from corporations and the capital and place it on the individuals. Finally, very often, there are only precarious occupations and/or unfit jobs available that hardly lead to real professional insertion.

Hespanha (2008) reflects on the execution of activation policies in Portugal, namely: i) the real capacity these policies have in creating access to the job market, that is, professional training creates expectations that may not automatically translate into job opportunities, given that these measures do not prevent unemployment; ii) the loss of rights for the 'activated workers'; iii) the selectiveness of the activation programmes based upon the subjective power of social workers in the selection of individuals; iv) the reinforcement of social marginalisation, by the fact that recipients are available to accept work in the parallel economy; v) the devaluation of socially useful non-paid activities; vi) the ineffective participation of the recipients in the 'design and development of the programmes' (2008: 16); vii) the ability to create activation programmes that respect all prior prerogatives and, finally, viii) the Portuguese specificity in what concerns the difference between what is legislated and what is implemented.

As seen above, Young (2000b) upholds that activation policies like workfare (obligation to work) or mandatory job training are useless. Regarding the second, Young declares it a 'waste of time', considering that most of the time people are already familiar with the subjects or that what they learn is not in-depth knowledge. In what concerns workfare, Young claims that in the current economic context of globalisation, there are no jobs available despite the fact that State policies urge poor people to work. At the same time, the payment level is often too low to make ends meet, so self-sufficiency becomes a 'cruel joke'

(2000b: 26). Furthermore, the author criticises the contemporary's welfare system, namely its complexity, with confusing rules that change frequently or social workers that are 'poorly trained and overworked' (Young, 2000b: 26), the fact that recipients are disrespected and not properly informed of their rights or that local insertion units are too bureaucratic.

In the same vein, Martin and Paugam (2009) define the current situation of ISA recipients as 'assisted precarious workers'. In fact, as seen above, the definition of poor has changed and, as a result, welfare policies incite recipients to work and earn a small pay, together with their income support allowance. The problem is that these people are not wage earners, they are, in fact, precarious workers. This kind of under-employment or sub-wage will not grant poor people an employment with a guarantee of social rights as they would be granted in a wage society (Castel, cit in Martin & Paugam, 2009: 15). The 'job insecurity results, on the one hand, of the economic management of flexibility and, on the other hand, it is caused by the public management of unemployment, that are transforming labour rights and establishing a social divide within workers' (Martin & Paugam, 2009: 15).

## 1.2. THE IDIOSYNCRACIES OF THE PORTUGUESE WELFARE STATE

When compared to other western European countries, Portugal's welfare state had a late beginning, in the 1970's, and 'was launched in the midst of an international crisis, at precisely the time when more developed welfare states were beginning to (...) adopt more restrictive measures' (Hespanha & Portugal, 2015: 1114). In general, welfare states in southern European countries were established late, which explains the reasons why they did not go through long periods of prosperity. Its later establishment occurred in a context of high unemployment, low-skilled population, high rates of illiteracy, strong women's participation in the labour market and ageing population. At the same time, there was an increase in tax evasion and the informal economy. Santos (1993) describes it as a 'semi-welfare state', in which the civil society has played a major role. Social protection in Portugal combines characteristics of the Bismarckian model in Social Security and the Beveridge's model in the National Health System. It is also characterised by a strong intervention of the Catholic Church (namely through the action of *Misericórdias*) and the family, one of the most important pillars of solidarity (which can also be considered a downside, since it lowers individual's power to claim for State's intervention). Ferreira (2014) argues that Portugal has a 'familial ideology', as families are still the main providers

when people are in need, even though, from 2006 onwards, policies have been developed to counter it, namely by i. the creation of social infrastructures for children, the elderly and other dependents; ii. ‘full-time schooling for children in primary school (2006)’; iii. ‘new cash benefits, including for infants the prenatal allowance (2007)’; iv. ‘the allocation of structural funds to implement gender equality schemes in businesses and municipalities (2007)’; v. ‘reinforcing policies to prevent and combat domestic violence (2007)’, among other policies (2014: 212). Portugal presents a high rate of women’s employment (as a large number of women have full-time jobs), a low level of part-time employment (like other southern European countries) and a high level of self-employment. A strong sexual division of labour and care in the households underlines all those characteristics, as well as the lack of social services and equipment for the families (Ferreira, 2014).

However, since 2008, the structural adjustments have caused a significant impact in the Portuguese welfare system, especially from 2010 onwards, with the neo-liberal ideology of the right-wing coalition government and the austerity measures imposed by the Troika<sup>3</sup>. In fact, there were spending cuts in social security expenses, namely in family allowances, sickness benefits and ISA, a reduction of social benefits and, in general, cuts and a decrease in human resources (Hespanha & Portugal, 2015: 1120). A transfer of state responsibilities to private stakeholders, private-public partnerships and municipalities also occurred. For the citizens, it meant a decrease in incomes and pensions and an increase in unemployment, taxes and expenditures in education, healthcare, housing and care. At the same time, there has also been an unequal distribution of the austerity measures (Callan et al., 2011; Ferreira, 2014; Hespanha & Portugal, 2015) that ‘imposed a greater financial burden on the poor’ (Hespanha & Portugal, 2015: 1121). A study by Callan et al. (2011) shows that Portugal was the country where the poor lost more of their income with the crisis, between 2009 and 2011, when compared to five other countries (Greece, Spain, UK, Ireland and Estonia). Furthermore, austerity has overwhelmed families, especially concerning care (which has

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<sup>3</sup> The Troika included members from the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

had a greater impact on women).

Taking into consideration that Portugal is one of the countries where the value of the benefits are lower combined with the fact that complementary supports were suppressed, due to austerity measures, it has become almost impossible to tackle poverty (Queiroz & Gros, 2012). Welfare recipients also have to deal with frequent delays in receiving ISA after starting the bureaucratic process.

### 1.3. DATA ON INEQUALITY AND POVERTY IN PORTUGAL

Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) state there is a correlation between high levels of income inequality and social problems. Furthermore, the differences in income within each society are more relevant to the inequality than the average incomes in a society. In fact: ‘rich people tend on average, to be healthier and happier than poorer people in the same society’, even if ‘people in one society are almost twice as rich as people in another’ (2010: 13). According to this study, Portugal is the third most unequal rich country in the world<sup>4</sup>, based on data from 2006, from the Human Development Report. It also ranks as the second worst on the index of health and social problems. Additionally, in Portugal, unlike other rich countries, health and social problems are also closely related to the ‘national average income’ (the lowest of the 21 countries considered in Pickett & Wilkinson’s study). In what concerns ‘women’s status’, Portugal also scores low in the index, as well as a ‘high-income inequality’. In what regards PISA results (2006), ‘Maths’ and ‘Literacy’ scores of fifteen-year-olds are usually lower in more unequal countries, and Portugal is no exception. Additionally, it shows a high degree of inequality in reading literacy.

According to the Social Justice Index in the EU Index Report (2016), Portugal’s Social Justice Index (SJI) score is 4,97, which places it in 22nd place among the EU member countries. In what concerns the dimensions ‘labour market access’ and ‘intergenerational justice’ the country ranks 21; in ‘health’ it is placed in the 20th place and ‘poverty

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<sup>4</sup>Based on household income, after taxes and benefits, adjusted for the number of people in each household.

prevention' in 17th. Portugal only ranks above the EU average (5,89) in the dimension of 'social cohesion and non-discrimination' (5,95), which places it in 17th. In the authors' opinion, in 2015 Portugal's major policy challenges were very high unemployment (12,9%) and long-term unemployment rates (7,4%). Also, low-skilled unemployment was 13% and there was a most disturbing youth unemployment rate of 32%. In the same sense, poverty remains in high values: the total population considered at 'risk of poverty' was 26,6%. Children's (0-17) 'risk of poverty' was especially high – 29,6% (this rate has however declined when compared with the 2013 levels – 31,7%). The levels of 'severe material deprivation' of the total population were 9,6% and for children that percentage increased to 11%. The 'in-work poverty rate' was 9,6% (22nd place) and for the population living in 'quasi-jobless households', the percentage was 10,9%.

More recently, a report from OECD (2018) shows how Portugal is one of the countries with less upward social mobility since the socio-educational background and parents' social capital highly influence the children's future career. In fact, in Portugal, mobility through education is the lowest of OECD countries, and the report shows how five generations are needed so that children from low-income families get medium incomes. The authors propose, on the one hand, policies that ensure equal opportunities to children, such as the investment in pre-school education that can compensate children from disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as to increase public investment in health, the promotion of policies that ensure a work and family balance, policies that affect wealth accumulation and policies that reduce urban spatial segregation. On the other hand, it is also mentioned the need to protect people against unexpected life events, related to work or at a personal level.

Also, the Social Justice Index in the EU Index Report (2016) ranks Portugal among the bottom countries in the 'equitable education' dimension, where it positions among the bottom three. In fact, where education is concerned, from the working-age population, at least 54,9% have less than upper secondary attainment (which places Portugal in the second to last in the ranking). On the other hand, although early school leavers rate dropped to 13,7% (from 34,9% in 2008), it is still among the highest in the EU. During the austerity years, Education suffered major budget cuts on primary and secondary levels. Additionally, the right-wing government abolished the New Opportunities life-learning program and replaced it in 2013, expanded vocational courses and the national exams, increased private partnerships and initiated a process of decentralisation of education responsibilities. However, 'there is little evidence that these measures have generated gains in terms of quality, access or efficiency' (Bruneau, Jalali & Colino, 2016: 13).

As seen above, children and young people are especially vulnerable to poverty in Portugal. In fact, the country's child and youth opportunity index places it in 21st (EU average is 5,61 and Portugal ranks 5,15). Taking into account that opportunities for children and youth are essential for social justice and democracy 'whether a child is born into poverty or wealth should play no role (...) in their educational opportunity' (Schraad-Tischler & Schiller, 2016: 84). Besides being an ethical moral imperative, there are also economic reasons why education is essential to a society since it increases job opportunities, income levels and health, which benefits the country's productivity and innovation (Bruneau, Jalali & Colino, 2016: 84).

#### 1.4. INCOME SUPPORT ALLOWANCE (*RENDIMENTO SOCIAL DE INSERÇÃO*) IN PORTUGAL

Following other European countries' activation policies, the Portuguese welfare system launched in 1996 the first income support allowance, *Rendimento Mínimo Garantido*<sup>5</sup>, later called *Rendimento Social de Inserção*<sup>6</sup>, which universally granted the right to a minimum level of subsistence in exchange for its recipients' insertion in several areas (namely employment and vocational education and training). The Portuguese income support allowance emerged in Portugal almost 40 years later than in other European countries. In fact, Portugal was the penultimate country of the European Union to adopt it, following a recommendation from the EU Council of Ministers in 1992<sup>7</sup> (Rodrigues, 2010). It is an allowance for the poorest individuals and families, consisting of an insertion contract to help them integrate socially and professionally and a benefit paid in cash in order to satisfy their basic needs. In order to receive the ISA, an Insertion Contract is signed, which includes a set of duties and rights, aiming their social and professional integration (I.S.S., I.P., 2017: 4).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> RMG (Law n.19-A/96, of 29th of June)

<sup>6</sup> Law n.13/2003 of 21<sup>st</sup> of May, rectified by Rectifying Declaration n.7/2003, of 29<sup>th</sup> of May

<sup>7</sup> 92/441/CEE, June 24, 1992

<sup>8</sup>The ISA value in 2017 is €183,84 (for the recipients who live alone); for the second and more adults the value of the allowance is €129,69 (70%) and for each child or teenager younger than eighteen years old is

According to the following charts, the number of ISA recipients has been declining since 2010 (there were 525 641 recipients in 2010 and by 2016 that number had decreased to 287 407 individuals). In 2016 the number of recipients represented 2,77% of the total population<sup>9</sup>. There were more women recipients, although the difference between genders has been fading. Children and youngsters under eighteen years old represented 31% of the total of recipients. The average value of provision per family was €252,21 and per recipient was €110, 90.

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€91,92 (50%). ISA is a monthly allowance based on the difference between the individual/family income and the ISA value, calculated depending on the family household. (ISS, I.P., 2017: 4)

The ISA may be accumulated with retirement or incapacity social pensions, widowhood or orphanage pensions; Complements for solidary dependence for old age; home rent subsidies, 3rd person assistance (dependence), for attending a special education institution, parental and adoption allowances, illness and unemployment, handicap allowance, familial and pre-natal subsidies.

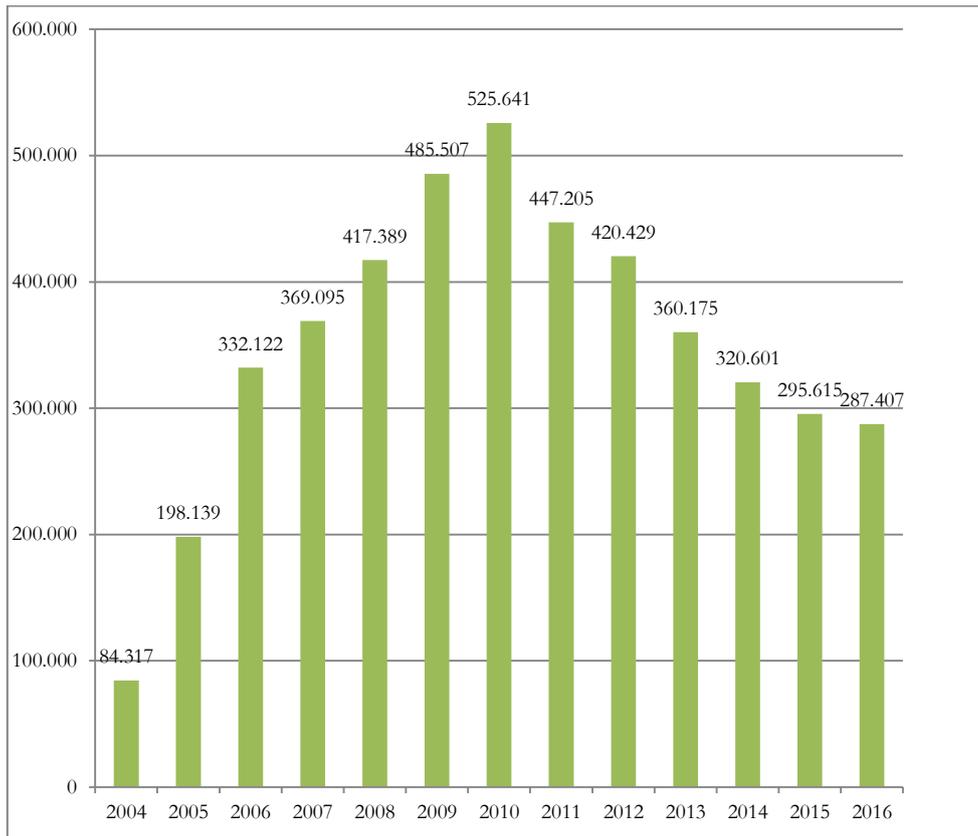
For establishing the monthly income of the family the following incomes are considered: the dependent and independent work incomes are assessed; capital and real-estate incomes; pensions (including alimony); social allowances (all except family, deficiency and 3rd person assistance dependence) allowances; monthly subsidy received during the exercise of occupational activities of general interest; home rent subsidies or other public housing support, of a regular nature and other incomes fixed or variable.

Furthermore, 'if the family resides in social housing, the following amounts are added to the monthly income of the household: in the first year of assigning the ISA benefit, the sum of €15,45 is added. On the date of the first annual renewal of the provision of ISA, the sum of €30,91 is added. On the date of the second annual renewal of the ISA and subsequent payments the amount of €46,36 is added'. (I.S.S., I.P., 2017: 9)

The RSI recipients are individuals or families who need support improving their socio-professional integration and that are in a situation of serious economical deficiency and fulfil certain conditions namely: the sum of their real estate (bank deposits, stock market shares, state bonds or other financial actives) of all the elements of the family is lower than €25.279,20 (60 times below the indexing value of social allowances). Additionally, the value of movable assets, automobiles, boats, motorcycles) is also subject to registration and may not exceed €25.279,20 (I.S.S., I.P., 2017: 5).

<sup>9</sup> Based on Annual Provisional Resident Population Estimates (INE), data reference period 2015, number of resident population: 10.341.330 people  
([https://www.ine.pt/xportal/xmain?xpid=INE&xpgid=ine\\_indicadores&indOcorrCod=0008272&contexto=pi&selTab=tab0&xlang=en](https://www.ine.pt/xportal/xmain?xpid=INE&xpgid=ine_indicadores&indOcorrCod=0008272&contexto=pi&selTab=tab0&xlang=en))

**Figure 1. Number of ISA recipients (2004-2016)**



**Figure 2. Number of ISA families (2004-2016)**

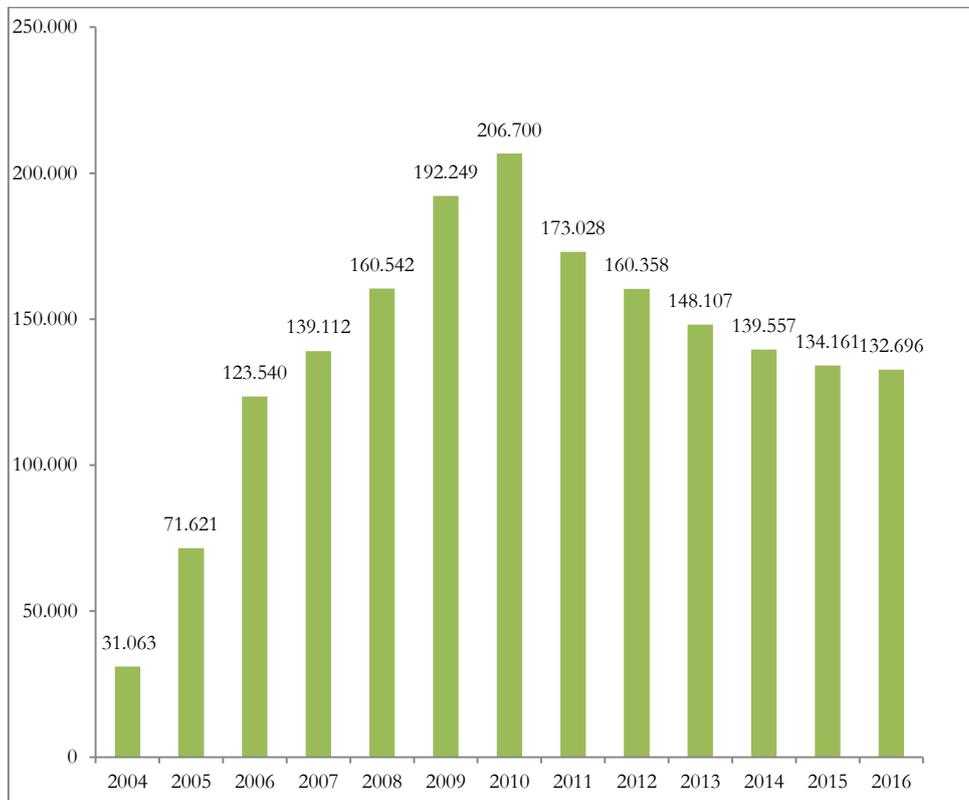


Figure 3. ISA Recipients, according to gender and age range, 2016

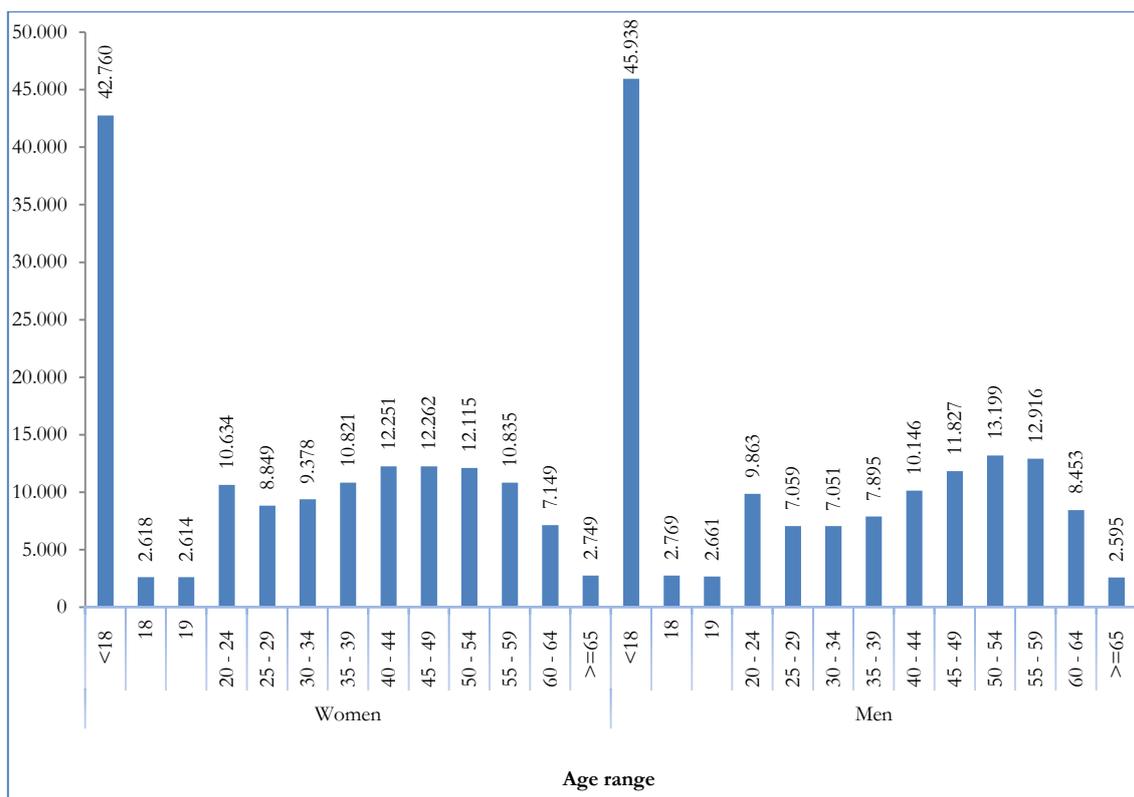


Figure 4. Average proceeds of ISA provision per beneficiary in December of each year (2004-2016)

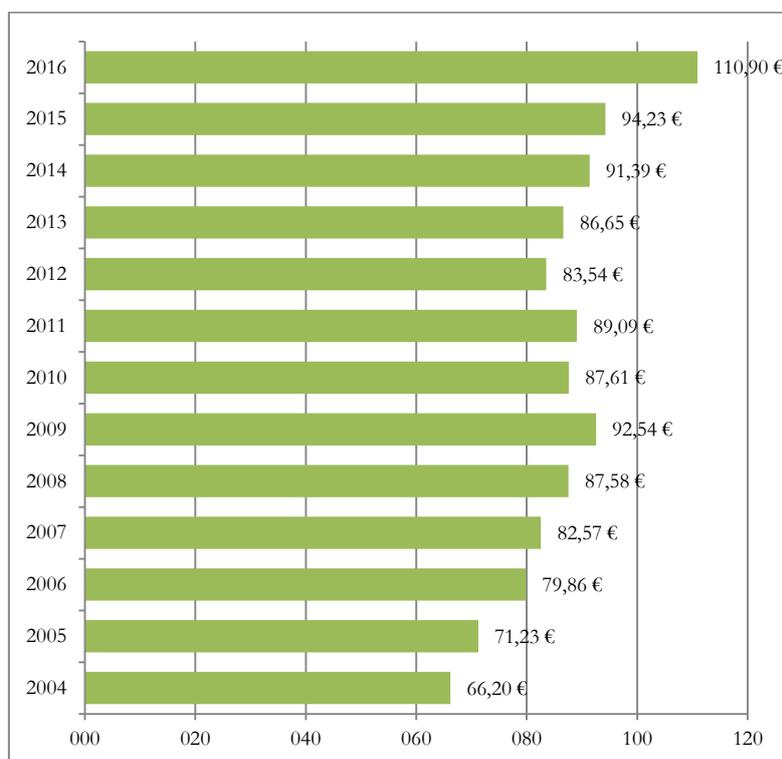
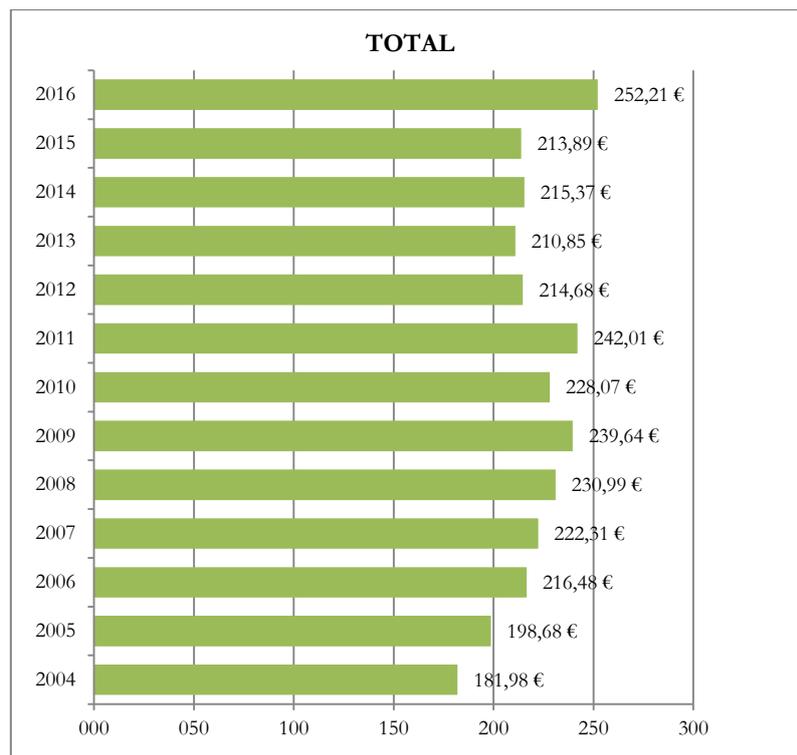


Figure 5. Average proceeds of ISA provision per family in December of each year (2004-2016)



## 1.5. RESEARCH ABOUT ISA RECIPIENTS IN PORTUGAL

In a study from 2002, the National Commission for the Minimum Income (CNRM) created some types of ISA recipients from which we highlight the results related to lone mothers. Three typical ideals were identified: single mothers, characterized by a first unwanted pregnancy, early motherhood and absence/instability of conjugal relationship; separated/divorced women, who have often experienced a traumatic marital relationship, followed by a voluntary break up/abrupt abandonment of the partner or widows. Concerning these women's expectations, some of them verbalize a will to change, to find a job and to 'fight' while others are more passive (CNRM, 2002: 49)

A more recent report on the impacts of insertion contracts<sup>10</sup> (Matos & Costa, 2012), concluded that the main reason for benefiting from ISA is, for both genders, employment loss. However, there are gender specificities: for men, the reasons are related to inadequate benefits and social support, drug addiction or health problems, while for women the causes are linked to greater social vulnerability situations, such as separations/divorces/widowhood, the need to care for dependents, and the inability to meet expenses, since many of them are domestic workers and therefore have no income (2012: 66). Furthermore, the authors claim that 'this measure of social policy (...) was not enough to put these families off the poverty line' (2012: 142).

In sum, according to these authors there are three dimensions that cause poverty and force people into welfare: labour market crisis, unemployment and precarity, but also low school and professional qualifications; inadequate social policies; lack of facilities to support families in their children's education, as well as in situations of illness and dependence, and finally, the 'fragility of identity universes and life projects' (2012: 142), especially concerning older people, that frequently live alone, with scarce resources and are underqualified, that have no horizons and are resigned to their condition. The authors conclude that ISA

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<sup>10</sup> Based on the results of questionnaire surveys applied to a representative sample of ISA beneficiary families residing in mainland Portugal Continental, conducted in 2011

beneficiaries are very different and that for that reason the objective of the measure cannot be the same for all people, i.e., autonomy through work. In fact, it will often mean an improvement in poor people's living conditions.

Correspondingly, Rodrigues (2010) emphasizes that due to their palliative character, social policies tend to reproduce social problems, influencing without solving them, and keeping dependency. When crime, deviation and racism arise they are often fought with security policies that constrain citizen's freedom. Rodrigues argues that the way to tackle inequalities is by changing social and economic structures, i.e., with structural policies.

Following the observation of the absence of full employment, there are several references, by a large number of scholars, to the creation of a basic income, independent of work. We will further analyse this possibility in the Conclusions.



## 2. INTERSECTING THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

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A theoretical framework based on social constructivism is proposed in this thesis, based on three different approaches that, according to my standpoint, can be articulated: Intersectionality, Lahire's contextualist and dispositionalist approach and Equality Studies. My theoretical path was not easy. As stated in the Introduction I came across many challenges and unexpected themes that forced me to explore new contributions that are grounded in very different theoretical traditions. However, these differences and articulations made sense when exploring the idiosyncrasies of poor women's paths and their relation with welfare and education. Traditional sociological approaches to social exclusion did not satisfy my need to interpret the different paths of these women's lives and their strategies to deal with the multiple oppressions they were struggling with. It is not my intention to deny such oppression, but I found it paramount to question the traditional theoretical assumptions. The chosen approaches have in common the refusal of determinisms or essentialisms regarding gender, 'race'/ethnicity, social class and other categories and they all consider the relevance of non-class forms of social exclusion.

A sociological knowledge based on the historical and contextual contextualization of social practices enables the analysis of poor women's paths, intersecting gender, motherhood, socioeconomic status and 'race'/ethnicity at different levels, according to the dimensions of equality of condition, proposed by Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Walsh (2004), establishing a genealogy of their dispositions and identifying the different, heterogeneous and even contradictory contexts of socialization. The contextualist-dispositionalist approach proposed by Lahire, and a multi-level analysis of the intersecting social categories, suggested by intersectionality authors, enables to analyse the intra and inter-individual variations, contradictions and crises along the multiple socializations that occur in women's paths. This approach supports our perspective that poor women are not all the same, challenging the stereotype and demonstrating how different social contexts can offer different ways of seeing the world and mobilizing resources.

Above all, our research proposes a more empowered perspective of poor women, not as victims, but as agents who try to surmount their severe constraints, highlighting their strategies to cope with poverty and to offer a better future for their children within a context of inequality. However, we emphasize that this desire to show the idiosyncrasies in women's paths does not imply denying the inequalities that condition their lives. This

statement leads me to the importance, recognised by intersectionality's authors as well as by equality studies, of a socially engaged research and the proposal for political intervention.

## 2.1. INTERSECTIONALITY AS A PARADIGM THAT ENABLES POSSIBILITIES FOR CHANGE

The concept of intersectionality was developed by black feminists, during the XXth century who considered that these black women's interests were not fully represented either by black's movements or women's movements (since the first were dominated by black men and the latter by white, educated, middle-class women). Indeed, it was the realisation that some multiplicatively oppressed groups were left out of social analysis and political intervention. The term was introduced by the US jurist Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) who claimed that black women suffered from a 'triple oppression' as women, as black and by being a part of the working-class. It was an attempt of transcending social classism, racism and sexism and it has become 'perhaps the most important development in feminist thought in the last part of the twentieth century' (Risman, 2004: 442). Authors such as McCall (2005), Hancock (2007), Shields (2008), Winker and Degele (2011), Gopaldas (2013) and Saatcioglu and Corus (2014), describe intersectionality as a research paradigm, here understood as a basic belief system or a worldview that guides the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Anthias (2012), on the other hand, prefers to define it as an 'intersectional framing'.

According to Hancock,

'Intersectionality emerges out of the earlier unitary and multiple approaches, joining with other constructivist efforts in asserting first and foremost that reality is historically and socially constructed. In this way, intersectionality represents an emerging paradigm from critical theory and its companion (...) critical legal studies, critical 'race' theory, feminist legal theory, and critical 'race' feminism. All of these approaches acknowledge and incorporate the historical context in which contemporary power relations operate' (2007: 74).

The concept expanded to other fields of knowledge, such as political science and sociology, and is nowadays interdisciplinary. It also expanded to other identity categories (such as sexual orientation, disability, health, age, religion, ...), to other groups and to the study of the privileged as well as the oppressed, since oppression and privilege are

interconnected (Risman, 2004; Yuval-Davis, 2006; Shields, 2008; Gopaldas, 2013; Nogueira, 2013). Furthermore, given the importance of the cultural and historical context, no category should be essentialised. Notwithstanding the recognition of inequalities, subordination and oppression, a constructionist intersectional approach gives room for the possibility of change (Nogueira, 2013).

In sum, it is an interdisciplinary approach based on the interaction of categories such as gender, class, “race”/ethnicity, ‘as organizing structures of society, recognizing that these key components influence political access, equality, and the potential for any form of justice.’ (Hancock, 2007: 64). However, intersectionality authors have different definitions for the units of ontology, i.e., the ‘structural ‘things’ that are intersecting’ at multiple levels (Walby, Armstrong & Strid, 2012: 229), such as ‘social structures of inequality’ (Risman, 2004), ‘social divisions’ (Yuval-Davis, 2006), ‘categories’ (McCall, 2005; Christensen & Jensen, 2012), ‘categories of socio-political difference’ Hancock, 2007), ‘social identities’ (Shields, 2008), ‘relational dynamic forces’ (Choo & Ferree, 2010), ‘categories of difference’ (Ludvig, 2006), ‘oppressive categories’ or ‘relevant categories of inequality and differences in power’ (Winker & Degele, 2011), ‘social identity structures’ (Gopaldas, 2013) or ‘identity categories’ (Saatcioglu & Corus, 2014), ‘sets of unequal social relations’ or ‘inequalities’ (Walby, Armstrong & Strid, 2012), just to name a few authors. As we can see, some authors reinforce these units’ social identity feature, others highlight its structural character, others its inequality trait, or the power issues around it.

Intersectionality has been criticised or at least debated in several aspects. Many authors mention the number of social categories in each study (Butler, 1990; Ludvig, 2006; Yuval-Davis, 2006; Saatcioglu and Corus, 2014) and the question on ‘how many differences should be incorporated’ (Anthias, 2012: 6). Yuval-Davis (2006: 202) points out that Butler (1990) ‘mocks the ‘etc.’ that often appears at the end of lists of social divisions mentioned by feminists’ and Ludvig (2006: 247) mentions that ‘the endlessness of differences seems to be a weak point in intersectional theory’. Another common criticism is the danger of ‘mere description’ (Hancock, 2007: 66) or the simple listing of differences and the ‘impossibility of attending analytically to this plurality’ (Anthias, 2012: 5), which Hancock proposes to solve with ‘an examination of how to collect intersectional data and design intersectional research’ before the actual research on ‘categories like ‘race’, gender, and class. There are also uncertainties about what is the best methodological approach considering its significant analytical complexity (McCall, 2005). In fact, Ludvig (2006) states that ‘the weaknesses of intersectionality become more obvious when trying to apply it to

empirical analysis (...) because the list of differences is endless or even seemingly indefinite' (2006: 246). Anthias (2012) also mentions the risk of focusing excessively on individual differences and the issue of 'how political mobilisation can take place given either a deconstruction or an individualisation of difference' (Anthias, 2012: 6).

One of the main debates within intersectionality is how authors theorise the relation between the different categories, i.e., do these exist as such (individually) or always in relation to other categories? are social divisions irreducible or are they mutually constituted? Even though there is a consensus among authors about the historical and cultural contextualisation of categories, authors divide between those who argue that categories can only be apprehended in the relationship with other categories (Hancock, 2007; Shields, 2008; Christensen & Jensen, 2012); those who state that categories are not reducible to each other (Yuval-Davis, 2006) and those who consider a both/and approach (Collins, 1998; Risman, 2004; Anthias, 2012; Walby, Armstrong & Strid, 2012).

The idea of mutually constitutive processes is shared by Hancock (2007), according to whom intersectionality is based on the idea of the 'mutually constitutive relationship among these categories and the way in which (...) they play a role in the shaping of political institutions, political actors, the relationships between institutions and actors, and the relevant categories themselves' (2007: 67). Also Shields (2008: 303) argues that 'a fundamental assumption (...) is that intersectional identities are defined in relation to one another' and that 'social identities which serve as organizing features of social relations, mutually constitute, reinforce and naturalize one another. (...) one category of identity, such as gender, takes its meaning as a category in relation to another category' (2008: 302).

On the one hand, according to Christensen and Jensen (2012) 'the non-additivity issue' is 'a desk problem' since 'the social world is not neatly divided into class, gender, ethnicity, etc.' and that 'everyday lives are rarely – if ever – separated into processes related to gender, processes related to ethnicity, and processes related to class', so 'it must be seen as a condensation of social processes, interactions, and positions where intersecting categories are inextricably linked' (2012: 117). Yuval-Davis (2006), on the other hand, argues for the 'irreducibility of social divisions' i.e., these are not reducible to each other, even though 'all social divisions share some features and are concretely constructed by/intermeshed with each other'. Furthermore, the author does not reject the fact that on specific historical contexts the location in one social division, such as 'race', may influence the position in social class, for example.

Notwithstanding, Risman (2004) reminds us that,

we should not, therefore, only study gender, ‘race’, and class simultaneously. (...) There may be similarity of outcomes (...) but that is an empirical question, not a logical necessity. (...) Feminist scholarship needs a both/and strategy (Collins 1998). We cannot study gender in isolation from other inequalities, nor can we only study inequalities’ intersection and ignore the historical and contextual specificity that distinguishes the mechanisms that produce inequality by different categorical divisions, whether gender, ‘race’, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, or class. (2004: 443)

Correspondingly, Winker and Degele (2011) argue that ‘before thinking about their interrelations, inequality-creating phenomena must first be able to be properly described. For this reason, conceptual differentiations on a theoretical basis are required. Contrastingly, the interrelatedness of these power relations can be empirically, that is to say historically, observed and investigated and are not deductible in a purely theoretical way (2011: 54-55). Walby, Armstrong and Strid concur with this stance and stress that before the interaction’s analysis between unequal social relations, one must first ‘systematically address the ontological depth of each of the inequalities’ (2012: 230). However, in the analysis of the way in which inequalities affect each other, the authors criticise the idea of the mutual constitution and argue for a mutual shaping approach accepting that ‘each system is changed as a result of its interaction with other systems, but that is not destroyed or turned into something totally new’. Furthermore, ‘each remains visible, although each is changed’ (2012: 237). Walby, Armstrong and Strid (2012) also criticise Hancock’s idea that all categories matter equally (2007) stating that in some contexts some categories are more relevant for the analysis than others.

## 2.2. LAHIRE’S DISPOSITIONALIST-CONTEXTUALIST APPROACH

As above-mentioned, also Bernard Lahire’s presents a constructivist point of view and proposes a sociological knowledge based on contextualization or historicisation. The author presents a dispositionalist-contextualist (Lahire, 2017) and epistemologically innovative theory of action, based on a sociology at the individual level which includes a coherent methodological proposal, sociological portraits (Sá, 2010: 11). Furthermore, the author helps to clarify the sociological debate on the traditional dichotomies between individual/society, actor/structure, subjectivism/objectivism, mental structures/objective structures, arguing that ‘social beings do not exist before ‘social structures’ or ‘linguistic

structures', rather they constitute as such through their social relations' i.e. through their interdependence (1995: 284).

According to Lahire, the knowledge of society through individuals is possible, but the author refuses individualistic perspectives of social analysis, stating that his critics have intellectually positioned him 'alongside those who believe in 'the rise of individualism', just because I work on an individual scale, when in fact I am very suspicious of these thesis (...) and I never forget to mention the existence of social classes as well as social, educational, and cultural inequalities' (interview to Amândio, 2012: 209).

### 2.3. EQUALITY STUDIES AND THE RECOGNITION OF THE AFFECTIVE SYSTEM

In the same vein, equality studies, within the critical theory, moved their focus from reproduction theories, to resistance issues and to post-modernist, feminist and post-structuralist critiques. Based on Fraser's work (within a feminist and Marxist framework) of the three dimensions of social justice - recognition (cultural system), redistribution (economic system) and representation (political system) – Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Walsh (2004) introduced the affective system, based on love, care and solidarity. According to the authors, equality of condition is based in the 'belief that people should be as equal as possible in relation to the central conditions of their lives' and it 'involves the equal enabling and empowerment of individuals' (Lynch & Baker, 2005: 132). It aims to 'eliminate major inequalities altogether' (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004: 33). It entails five key dimensions that interact to facilitate or reduce inequalities, i. redistribution (resources) including income and wealth; social capital; family; social networks; affiliations, cultural capital: educational credentials, time, health and environmental resources; ii. Cultural representation (respect and recognition), that entails equal rights; privileges of citizenship; accepting differences, in a critical interculturalistic approach); iii. relationality (love, care and solidarity), including the appreciation of paid and unpaid care work; equal distribution of care work; education about love, care and solidarity relations; transport networks and neighbourhood structures that facilitate caring for vulnerable groups); iv. power (that involves reducing power inequalities through civil and political rights and the expansion of democratic principles to family and economy) and v. working and learning (the universal right to 'potentially satisfying work'; recognising limits and/or compensations for unequal loads of work, as well as the acknowledgment of unpaid work, including care

work and solidarity. Concerning learning, the authors propose that it should represent more than a preparation for work, but also for a development of students as citizens. It also means considering formal and non-formal education (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004; Lynch, 2006; Lynch & Baker, 2005).

Regarding, in particular, issues of love, care and solidarity (LCS), or relationality, these authors highlight its centrality in equality and justice issues, even though traditional theories of justice consider the citizen as autonomous, rational and non-relational. It was mostly in the 80s that scholars (mainly feminist researchers) began to investigate the relation between inequality and the affective system. According to several authors (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004; Lynch & Baker, 2005; Lynch, 2007; Lynch, Baker & Lyons, 2009; Lynch & Lyons, 2009; Lynch & Walsh, 2009) affective inequality occurs when people are deprived of the love, care and solidarity, they need to survive and develop as humans, when care is unequally distributed and its contribution to human well-being is not recognised. Additionally, such inequality is reinforced when people are not educated on these issues and when they are misrecognised from political and scientific debates. Nevertheless, 'care is as a fundamental prerequisite for mental and emotional well-being and for human development generally' (Lynch & Baker, 2005: 133) and as a consequence paid, unpaid work and love, care and solidarity work should be balanced. Furthermore, employment, mobility and housing should be designed in ways that enable care. Finally, the care needs of vulnerable groups should be acknowledged and protected.

The authors distinguish between different forms of care work, i.e., love labour, general care work and solidary work as concentric circles of care relations, linked to each other. Primary care relations are based on intimate relations and have a high level of emotional significance. They are characterised by strong attachment and interdependence, depth of engagement and intensity (and sometimes abuse and neglect that damages the person). Secondary care relations are centred on general care work and tertiary care relations are founded on volunteering or activism (Lynch & Walsh, 2009: 40; Lynch, Baker & Lyons 2009: 40-45). According to Lynch (2007) and Lynch and Walsh (2009) care involves i. cognitive work, which entails using the skills of knowing how to care and also involves discovering what needs to be done; ii. emotional work that implies emotional engagement, commitment and responsibility, time, a moral imperative, trust and a sense of belongingness; iii. mental work, which entails planning, attentiveness and responsiveness, management of tensions and conflicts and thinking about people and iv. physical work. Lynch (2007) also argues that love labour is a distinct and non-commodifiable form of care

labour that entails nurturing capital, much more than an emotional one (since the latter can also be used for profit or for the fulfilment of one's interests).

Research by Lynch and Lyons (2009: 93-113) on the intersectionality of inequalities regarding gender, social class and caring explores how differences in social class and family status intersect with gender and determine the conditions of caring. Women are often perceived as 'natural carers' and in fact feel 'morally impelled' to care for children and other dependent, what O'Brien (2009) defines as 'gendered essentialism'. Furthermore, women are expected to make sacrifices for their children: 'not surprisingly, therefore, women from low-income families were even more likely to experience personal deprivation in order to make ends meet' (Lynch & Lyons, 2009: 94). The authors conclude that there is a strong gendered order of care, i.e., strongly gendered views about the most appropriate carer that are deeply internalized and which, of course, carry feelings of guilt if, by any reason, the moral imperative is not met. It is poor people who rely more on State services to provide care. However, there is a lack of investment in this area, so lower-income households are most affected by it, as they cannot afford to choose. Additionally, caring requires flexibility and adaptability and most unskilled workers with low autonomy are easily replaced when they need schedule flexibility or when they have to be absent from work (on account of care duties). Finally, with regard to family status, the authors argue that caring alone (as in lone parents families, for instance, but not exclusively) is to experience not only isolation but also the burdens of living on a single income. When public services are inexistent, poor people have to rely on their families or friends for help, who may not be always available. Sometimes is not possible to manage paid work and care, whether because services are too expensive or the logistics and schedules do not allow it, thus creating guilt, anxiety and emotional costs. Furthermore, single parents often have to deal with the stigma attached to their status (2009: 108-109). Caring can be overwhelming, but the lack of supports and services can provoke exhaustion and a lack of hope in the future. In conclusion, 'those who are sole carers and poor have little independence; they experience social isolation, stress, lack of leisure and general exhaustion' (2009: 112). Additionally, the careless State increases the vulnerability of the already more vulnerable citizens, especially lower income people and lone carers, and, more specifically, poor lone mothers.

The following section will address the key issues of the abovementioned main theoretical contributions, namely the criticisms to simple correspondence models, the refusal of determinisms or essentialisms regarding gender, 'race' and social class and the need for a

historical and social contextualisation of social practices.

#### 2.4. CRITICISMS TO REPRODUCTION THEORIES AND SIMPLE CORRESPONDENCE MODELS

Pierre Bourdieu's dispositionalist sociology sought to answer the question of the relationship between agency and structure through a theory of action, more specifically through *habitus*, an element that would explain the relationship between social practices on the one hand and structures on the other. In fact, Bourdieu defines *habitus* as 'both the generative principle of objectively classifiable judgments and the system of classification (*principium divisionis*) of these practices' (Bourdieu, 1984: 169-170), an interiorization of objectivity and objectification of interiority, in a social space defined as a structure of differentiated positions defined by the place they occupy in the distribution of a given capital. It does not, however, explore the ways in which these dispositions could be 'transmitted' or embodied.

In recent decades, especially since the 1990s, Bernard Lahire has based his work at the 'stage in which he Bourdieu left his work and tried to develop his reflection and his work (...) sometimes to continue it and sometimes to break up with his line of thought' (interview to Amândio, 2012: 206). Therefore the author proposes to test the concept of *habitus* through empirical investigations, in order to give it the status of scientifically useful' (2005: 16). In fact, Lahire criticizes Bourdieu's claiming that the latter did not empirically explore that concept. He concurs with the latter that the dispositions are embodied by actors, but criticises the dispositionalist tradition and the abusive generalisation of dispositions to all contexts, as well as the idea of a single generating principle, transferable to all the contexts, refusing the '(magic) formula that generates all our practices' (2002: 47). The author argues that only in two particular situations (traditional societies or confinement) the material and cultural conditions of existence are met for an actor to have a homogenous and coherent scheme of action, transferable between spheres of activity (Lahire, 2002: 24-25). The author presents his version of the dispositional action theory and proposes a theory of the plural actor, which enables to think about the ways of reflexivity and the plurality of the logics of action, where he argues, against Bourdieu, that 'one has to go back to all the evidence left unquestioned' (Lahire, 2002: 12). The plural actor is the product of socialisations in multiple and heterogeneous social contexts, different social universes, in which he occupies different positions. The author adds that

‘sociology has the duty (and the challenge) to highlight the social production of the individual ... and to show that the social is not reduced to the collective or the general, but is also found in the most singular traits of every individual’ and that ‘the social world is in us as much as it is outside’ (Lahire, 2005: 36).

For Lahire, ‘to study the individualized social (...) is to study social reality in its embodied, internalized form. How does outer reality, more or less heterogeneous, takes form? How can multiple socializing experiences co-inhabit the same body? How do such experiences settle in a more or less lasting way in each body and how do they intervene in the different moments of social life or the biography of an individual?’ (Lahire, 2005: 14). The recognition of intra and inter-individual variation of behaviours, of the dispositional stock (which is open, can be activated, paused and reactivated), and of the principles that generate the plurality of embodied dispositions all lead to a dispositional and contextualist sociology of action.

Rather than mentioning a ‘*sociogenesis* of the habitus’, a dispositionalist-contextualist sociology (Lahire, 2017) would aim to study the genealogy of the constitution of dispositions along the actor’s trajectory of multiple socialisations. Contrary to what Bourdieu argued, such dispositions do not obey automatic mechanisms of transmission and transfer (Amândio, 2014), because in contemporary societies, characterized by a ‘plurality of non-homogeneous social worlds’, i.e., heterogeneous, competing and even contradictory contexts of socialization, the social actor has a ‘stock of non-homogenous schemes of action or habits, and consequently heterogeneous (and even contradictory) practices that vary according to the social context’ (2002: 31). In fact, not even family configurations are completely homogeneous, because in them coexist examples and counter-examples and even contradictory principles of socialization.

Surprisingly, even though these authors do not cite each other, we can find a similar stance in Young’s definition of group differentiation ‘as multiple, cross-cutting, fluid, and shifting’ that ‘implies another critique of the model of the autonomous, unified self. In complex, highly differentiated societies like our own, all persons have multiple group identifications. (...) Individual persons (...) cannot be unified, themselves are heterogeneous and not necessarily coherent’ (2004: 45).

When there are maladjustments between dispositions and social positions, dispositional crises emerge (or class conflict on an individual scale), materialized in cases of social disqualification or defectors, as a result of a heterogeneous stock of individual dispositions

(Lahire, 2012). Regarding maladjustment and crisis situations, Lahire criticizes Bourdieu arguing that he only considers displacements in social space related to the volume and distribution of the capital's structure, neglecting all small or medium-sized crises in the family universe, in friendships or of socio-professional nature. The author indicates a list of examples of maladjustments between incorporated habits and actual lived situations that produce crises and reflection: forced cultural contradictions (the case of school and minority school failure, for example), the more or less forced displacements from one social universe to another (hospitalisation, imprisonment, migrations, military service), biographical breaks (divorce, separation, birth, retirement), the deviations between the actor's social properties and the situation, the tensions between traditionally competing habits (women's role as a professional and as a housewife), the deviations that provoke anxiety, rage, boredom, between dispositions and new situations and, finally, minimum adaptations to support and adapt temporarily to a situation (Lahire, 2002).

## 2.5. DISPOSITIONS/GENEALOGY

But what does Lahire mean exactly by dispositions or schemes of action? For the sociologist, a disposition is a 'recreated reality which, as such, is never directly observed. (...) To speak of dispositions presupposes the performance of an interpretive work to account for behaviours, practices, opinions, etc.', i.e., 'it is a question of making the principle or principles that generated the apparent diversity of practices appear' (Lahire: 2004: 27). Sá adds that 'when one thinks of dispositions, it considers ways of thinking, acting and feeling - it is not the thought, action or feeling itself, but what is behind them, which 'can not be observed directly', and that can be constructed interpretively and be seen as 'spring clips' of several noticeable thoughts, actions, and feelings' (Sá, 2010: 13). Dispositions are not properties inscribed in the actor, but rather 'relational realities (interactions) that are only observed in the encounter between him and something or someone' and therefore have a conditional (contextual) dimension. In this sense, it is the present that defines what can be updated from the past that has been incorporated. A disposition is activated in the interaction of internal relations of force (that already exist from past socialization) and external relations of force (context). Social contexts 'take certain experiences from us and leave others in a state of (...) standby. Changing contexts (...) means changing the forces that act upon us' (2002: 57-59).

As we saw earlier, in order to fully understand a disposition it is essential to reconstruct its

genealogy (the conditions and modalities of its formation). The dispositions are distinguished by their degree of fixation and their strength (which depends on the frequency of their activation in social contexts – i.e., the more they have been repeated in the past, especially in childhood, the more they will resemble a 'second nature'). The degree of fixation and strength of dispositions depends on the frequency of their activation in social contexts. The updating of embodied habits depends on the way they were acquired, from the moment of the individual biography and the current context of its updating, 'habits that were internalized early in life, in favourable conditions to their good internalisation (without (...) cultural dissonances between parents or between what adults say and what they do; between what they say and the way they say it ...) and that find positive (socially rewarding) conditions of fulfilment, can become passions' (Lahire, 2005: 22).

Lahire explains that individuals do not incorporate social structures, but rather habits, schemes of action, ways of doing, feeling, thinking and saying adapted to certain contexts, internalized through interaction and interdependence with other actors and objects. But all the incorporated culture is appropriate and transformed, depending on the stock of habits previously incorporated. Cultural 'transmission' of habits occurs progressively through time, repetition, and exercise, and the affective dimension plays a very important role in supporting and encouraging the necessary effort (we will return to this idea when discussing the importance of affective equality in education). This 'transmission' is often unconscious for both transmitters and receivers. In fact, there are implicit injunctions, e.g. in the education of children, which reveal the power of the counterexamples in everyday life, such as parents that encourage their children to read but don't do it; making demands without controlling their execution; upholding principles without developing tactics so that the children can apply it, or the 'counter-exemplarity of the material and social context', for example, the lack of cleanliness of the neighbourhood in which the families live, while, at the same time, trying to instil in their children cleaning habits (2002: 185 ). Lastly, based on Max Weber, he argues that, contrary to popular belief, children only incorporate habits, knowledge and techniques when their 'interest in learning is greater than their interest in not learning' because the disinterest or indifference are prior to incapacity.

## 2.6. REFUSAL OF DETERMINISMS OR ESSENTIALISMS REGARDING GENDER, RACE AND SOCIAL CLASS

As seen above, Lahire has dedicated much attention to the criticism of Bourdieu's theory. Notwithstanding, many relevant authors within gender studies, intersectionality and equality studies have also criticised deterministic or reproduction models within social sciences and have 'recognized the importance of non-class forms of social exclusion' such as gender, ethnicity, 'race', etc. (Lynch, 2006: 90). Furthermore, authors from equality studies highlight that we should be critical of groups' homogeneity, 'the injustices experienced by a particular group may be rooted in cultural, economic, affective or political structures. But because all beings operate with multiple and overlapping identities, there is no person whose social position, and correlatively whose experience of injustice, takes a singular form' (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004: 70)

Social categories or divisions such as class, 'race'/ethnicity or gender tend to be naturalized', to be seen as a 'biological destiny linked to differential genetic pools of intelligence and personal characteristics' (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 199). The corollary of such 'natural' and, as such, legitimised differences, tends to be an unequal access to economic, political and cultural resources. Intersectionality approach enables to escape biological determinism, essentialism and stereotyping because it attends to the historical and cultural context underlines the importance of social interaction in the construction of social categories, like gender (Nogueira, 2013) and highlights the power relations between groups (Shields, 2008), by stressing the 'different historical and ontological bases' (Anthias, 2012: 7) that create inferiority and exploitation (Anthias, 2012), boundaries of inclusion and exclusion and hierarchies as well as different 'entitlement' to resources, and unequal access to power and overall opportunities (Risman, 2004; Yuval-Davis, 2006; Anthias, 2012; Nogueira, 2013). In fact, what is seen as an identity feature echoes the dynamics of power relations (Shields, 2008).

Reay (1998) defines class as a 'complicated mixture of the material, the discursive, psychological predispositions and sociological dispositions that quantitative work on class location and class identity cannot hope to capture' (1998: 259). In fact, according to the author economic conditions are just one of the aspects of class, given that she considers that 'race', gender, age and sexuality also need to be taken into the analysis. Besides an economic perspective, class should include sociological as well as psychological views, a point also argued by Lahire (2005) when he establishes his above-mentioned project of a sociology at an individual level. Likewise, Young argues that one should compare oppressions 'without reducing them to a common essence or claiming that one is more fundamental than another' (2004: 59). Young is against what she calls the 'reification of the

metaphor of structure', i.e., 'to think of social structures as entities independent of social actors', (2000: 95) when in fact, social structures only exist in the interaction of actors, they are processes, not states: 'our experiences of cultural meaning and structural positioning occur in unique events and interactions with other individuals' (2000: 101).

According to Hancock, one of the intersectional approach's most influential authors, 'intersectionality bridges part of the theoretical gap between critical theory, which often faces the dilemma of overemphasis on structural explanations, and liberalism's privileging of the atomized individual'. Furthermore, she explains that 'structural and micro-level research pursued in isolation from each other lack significant utility in addressing intractable political problems like persistent poverty, lack of political empowerment, and educational inequality' (2007: 74).

In sum, much has been discussed on the role of social class. It is my understanding that this concept should be included in the social analysis, but not always as the dominant inequality.

## 2.7. HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXTUALISATION OF SOCIAL PRACTICES

As seen above, intersectionality authors as well as Lahire highlight the need of a socially and historically situated analysis of practices, interactions or relationships and the relations (often defined as power relations, or hierarchical) between social categories/identities at different levels of analysis (macro and meso, intersubjective, micro and representational), also emphasizing processes of contestation and transformation (Yuval-Davis, 2006; Hancock, 2007; Shields, 2008; Winker and Degele, 2011; Anthias, 2012; Gopaldas, 2013), given the fact that 'social categorisations are not equally positioned or salient at all times. One or other of the divisions does not always matter in particular contexts or some may matter more than others' (Anthias, 2012: 13-14) and even though oppressions can be deeply intersecting, their mechanisms may or not be the same, especially in different historical conditions (Risman, 2004).

Next, a table is presented where it is exemplified, according to some intersectionality authors, the different levels of analysis, here considered as a heuristic tool, that are 'context-specific, topic-orientated and inextricably linked to social praxis' (Winker & Degele, 2011: 54):

**Table 1. Levels of analysis according to some intersectionality authors**

Authors	Levels of analysis			
	Macro and Meso	Intersubjective	Micro	Representational
<b>Risman, 2004</b>	Institutional opportunities and constraints	Cultural expectations embedded into interaction	Individual identities	-
<b>Yuval-Davis, 2006</b>	Organizational	Intersubjective	Experiential	Representational
<b>Hancock, 2007</b>	Structural (social institutions) and Disciplinary (bureaucratic hierarchies and administrative practices)	Interpersonal (routinized interactions among individuals)	-	Hegemonic (ideas, cultures, and ideologies)
<b>Shields, 2008</b>	Structural	Interpersonal	Individual	-
<b>Winker and Degele, 2011</b>	Social structures (including organizations and institutions) – Power relations	-	Identity constructions	Symbolical representations
<b>Anthias, 2012</b>	Organisational (structural position)	Intersubjective (practices)	Experiential (narratives)	Representational (discourses)
<b>Saatcioglu and Corus, 2014</b>	Structural and Institutional	Communal	Individual	-

According to Winker and Degele (2011) and Christensen and Jensen (2012), given that the abovementioned structural levels are connected by the social practices of individuals, the latter should be the methodological starting point of the analysis, available through empirical research. Accordingly, the authors argue that inductive and deductive methods should be used in the analysis of people's everyday life (2011: 56).

As previously seen, the different levels of analysis are connected to categories through every day social and power practices. This multi-level approach, based on intersectionality

will be articulated with the five dimensions of equality of condition mentioned above, and which will be summarized below.

Considering that the focus of this study is the paths of women who are welfare recipients, their relationship with their children and its intersections with education and training, the concept of inequality is one of its cornerstones. In fact, it is crucial to understand how these women's education and training intersect with the economic and the affective systems enabling or hindering inequalities.

As aforementioned, according to Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Walsh, 2004; Lynch and Baker, 2005; Lynch, Baker and Lyons, 2009, equality of condition involves five key dimensions that interact to facilitate or reduce inequalities.

Firstly, the authors define resources not only as income and wealth but as social capital (e.g. family, social networks and affiliations), cultural capital (e.g. educational credentials), time and health and environmental resources (e.g. high-quality healthcare and clean environment). Feeley (2014) interfaces resources with care and literacy and specifies the most relevant aspects, such as levels of family literacy, awareness of the value of education, access to reading materials, physical and mental health, family's time and presence and concludes that the desire and willingness to facilitate others literacy is still 'constrained and determined by (...) relative economic comfort' (2014: 95).

Secondly, the authors (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004) debate the importance of respect and recognition of values and traditions. They support a principle of universal citizenship that highlights the equal status of all citizens, with equal rights of citizenship. This means accepting differences (not just tolerating them) but also the possibility of criticising other points of view, as the authors suggest that 'in the end, we show more respect for others by engaging critically with their beliefs than by adopting a laissez-faire attitude' (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004: 35). It also entails principles of justice in the private life (e.g. respect for women and children). They propose an ideal of critical interculturalism as a 'mutually supportive and critical dialogue between members of different social groups' (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004: 35). Given that the culturally marginal often suffer from stigma and shame, the privileged must make an effort 'to understand the voices of subordinate groups' (2004: 35).

The core premises of the affective system (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004) are the recognition of the relational and emotional character of human beings, of human vulnerability and the fact that it involves the private as well as the public sphere. The

authors argue that living without love and care is a ‘serious human deprivation’, since attachment in early childhood is fundamental for loving, caring and being solidary in adulthood and establishing ‘a basic sense of importance, value and belonging, a sense of being appreciated, wanted and cared about’ (Lynch & Baker, 2009: 217). Furthermore, aside from being essential for survival, the authors argue that love, care and affection give meaning and joy to people’s lives and finally they conclude that overall economic, political and cultural systems would not be able to work without those.

In the interface between literacy, the affective system and respect and recognition, Feeley (2014) argues that individuals from oppressed groups, who suffer from lack of respect and recognition from others may experience a sense of worthlessness, lack of self-respect and, most relevant for our study, unambitious educational expectations. The loss of self-worth, essential to the self-esteem of the person, and, to learn, may create adults that do not fulfil their potential. This has economic implications because it makes it extremely difficult for these groups to be offered a job (due to stereotyping and depreciation) and when they actually get a job they may become victims of bullying and other disrespectful or illegal practices by co-workers and employers.

In what concerns power (and powerlessness), these groups may be excluded from decision-making processes that affect them and be the victims of acts of violence. The authors propose to challenge power in the economy, family, education and religion and recommend more egalitarian and participatory forms of politics (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004). According to Feeley (2014) school replicates patterns of power in wider society, where power and emotional abuse may occur and that are often neglected by the State. Emotionally, the consequences of power abuses may be the internalisation of abuse, provoking future learning traumas, feelings of worthlessness and resistance to learning.

Finally, the authors argue that equality should be extended to work and learning arguing for the recognition, support and division of care work, a restructuration of the gendered division of labour and claiming that ‘everyone has the right to some form of potentially satisfying work’ (Lynch & Baker, 2005: 133). Regarding learning, they emphasise that it is intertwined with self-development as well as the development of personal relationships. Furthermore, the authors state that it should inspire students to engage in literature, arts and politics (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004: 65).

## 2.8. A POSSIBILITY FOR CHANGE?

If we consider intersectionality to be a paradigm it is essential to address the politics, goals, and the use of findings of this research. Gopaldas (2013) suggests that an intersectional approach should 'uncover the historical and structural mechanisms of domination (...) that reproduce and sustain the status quo' and to position as 'critical' or 'transformative', making 'value-laden proposals and plans for social change' (2013: 92-93).

In fact, intersectionality enables not only the development of a comprehensive empirical research on inequality issues but also aims for social change by challenging power relations and the dynamics of institutions (Hancock, 2007; Shields, 2008; Saatcioglu & Corus, 2014).

In the same vein, egalitarian theories address ethical issues about the purpose and the value of the researches (Lynch, 2006). In fact, these authors argue that the dichotomy in social sciences between fact and value (based on the Weberian tradition) makes no sense since inequality is an ethical issue and, as such, researchers have to choose if they want to be socially engaged.

Finally, the accelerated rhythm of change, brought about by globalization, forces researchers to continually assess the new mechanisms of domination and ways of resistance (Nogueira, 2013).

In the next chapter, intersections between the aforementioned dimensions of inequality with each other in relation to poor women will be analysed.

### 3. INTERSECTING DIMENSIONS OF INEQUALITY OF CONDITION IN POOR WOMEN' PATHS

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Considering that the focus of this study is the paths of poor women living or that have lived on welfare, their relationship with their children and its intersections with education and training, the concept of inequality is one of its cornerstones. In fact, it is crucial to understand how these women's education and training intersect with the economic and the affective systems enabling or hindering inequalities.

Building on the equality of condition concept, I have considered the previously discussed notions of relationality (love, care and solidarity), education, as well as redistribution (resources) as the main dimensions of inequality in poor women's paths. I have chosen to position work within the redistribution dimension and to give a significant weight to the education dimension, by analysing it separately. Why have I chosen to highlight these dimensions of inequality instead of others? It is clear from the theoretical framework, as well as from the interviews, both with key-informants as well as with the women, that resources play an essential role in inequality. Living without work or any kind of income is the main source of inequality in the women's lives. However, it is not the only one. Gender issues and lack of affection and care also play an important role in their paths of social exclusion as well as their school failure.

The following section presents the intersections between the five dimensions of inequality of condition, even though highlighting redistribution, relationality and education, their disadvantages and the way they intersect in poor women's paths. This model will be the analysis framework for the interpretation of sociological portraits. Although most of them present the paths of poor women as the common denominator, the issues of lone motherhood and 'race'/ethnicity (one of the interviewees is black) will also be addressed in the analysis.

#### 3.1. INTERSECTING SYSTEMS OF INEQUALITY

The next sections are dedicated to the discussion of the key dimensions that generate inequality, according to the main groups they affect and the intersections between systems (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004). Considering the scope of the investigation, the

intersections for people dependent on welfare, for the working class and for women will be highlighted.

Firstly, according to Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Walsh (2004), the key inequality system is the economic. The division of labour has a key role as it subjects 'working class people to the power of employers', deprives them of 'opportunities for satisfying and fulfilling work', lowers their living conditions and worsens their children's opportunities in school (2004: 45). Likewise, according to Young (2004), material deprivation interacts with other dimensions of inequality such as lack of respect and recognition and of power resulting in marginalisation, powerlessness and a disrespect of cultural differences (Young, 2004). In fact, marginalisation occurs when people are banned from a useful participation in society, thus potentially creating poverty, and even extermination. It is profoundly connected to the labour market and unemployment. Along with material deprivation, people are often deprived by welfare policies of the rights and freedoms that others have (Young, 2000a; 2000b; 2002). Culturally, their customs, accents, and activities are seen as inferior and often they have a troubled relationship with education. Practices of stereotyping and depreciation may also hinder the relationship with the job market. Finally, the authors also stress that 'severe material deprivation can lead to emotional deprivation' (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004: 45). In order to change this state of affairs, the authors propose to 'restructure the economy to achieve greater equality of income and wealth', to democratise economic relationships and the 'deconstruction of hierarchies of occupational status'.

In fact, besides issues of distributive justice, marginalisation also involves 'the deprivation of cultural, practical, and institutionalized conditions for exercising capacities in a context of recognition and interaction' (2004: 51). According to the same author, powerlessness (2004) is another form of oppression based on the lack of authority, status and sense of self, often related to the division of labour and the lack of status of non-professionals, meaning an absence of recognition, autonomy and respectability in other aspects of social life, such as work, culture, housing and consumption (Young, 2004). As a consequence, 'there remain populations whose private selves have never belonged to them; they have been legislated, adjudicated and regulated by political institutions and other citizens' (Hancock, 2003). Similarly, Reay (1998) states that the working classes are subjected to discourses about themselves produced by those who have power in a society. She adds that these classes are not even 'entitled to a sense of fairness because everything from their financial situation, the state of their health to their children's schooling, has been

repackaged under late capitalism as the responsibility of the individual alone' (Reay, 1998: 263). Poor, especially poor women are excluded from participation and decision-making (Paugam, 2003; Young, 2006; Hancock, 2003) often because they lack the time, energy and resources to participate politically (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004).

According to Freire (1985, 2018), powerlessness creates a 'culture of silence'. The powerless don't talk about their oppression, for the culture in which they live forbids them even to mention the injustices they endure. Indoctrination is a deeper level of oppression, a stage in which the oppressed feel they are 'naturally inferior'. Education and literacy are denied, so they don't gain awareness of their oppression. One of the main techniques of indoctrination is to give the oppressed a negative image of themselves, so they eventually perceive it as a fact. In this way, the negative images are internalized and believed. At this point others no longer silence them, they 'choose' to be silent. The only way to combat this culture is through gaining critical consciousness or 'conscientization' (Freire, 2018), through education, literacy and self-reflection and eventually, using their voice and freeing themselves from indoctrination.

For women, the key system that generates inequality is the affective. In fact, 'gender-based inequalities interact with other inequalities to determine women's incomes' (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004: 69). Many feminist authors have highlighted the intersections between affective issues related to gender, care and resources, given women's higher social vulnerability. Indeed, the gendered division of labour tends to assign women to low-skilled precarious jobs, low-paid and/or temporary, in the areas of cleaning/cooking services, children and elderly care (Young, 2004; Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004). Additionally, being an unskilled worker means having low autonomy and being easily replaced whenever schedule flexibility or taking time off work are needed due to care responsibilities (Lynch & Lyons, 2009). Furthermore, women's severe material deprivation may lead to emotional deprivation, given their state of anxiety, depression, and worries about the future that can provoke mental health issues (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004). In fact, Daly and Leonard (2002) argue that concerns about poverty affect men and women differently since the latter tend to give it more importance.

O'Brien (2009) argues that although caring gender disparities cut across women from all social classes, other factors such as lack of emotional support and inequalities of resources particularly affect poor mother's care and educational work.

Finally, in terms of power, there is a frequent dominance of men and their agenda. Furthermore, women are often subjected to different kinds of violence, including in their home. Love and care are an opportunity and duty for women but ‘not always give them the love and care they need themselves’ (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004: 44).

The intersections between women’s socioeconomic status, motherhood and relationality with inequality of condition dimensions, redistribution, relationality, education, representation and respect and recognition will now be further developed.

For low-income/poor lone mothers who are caring alone in a careless State, characterised by a lack of investment in care support, children’s welfare and, in general, in education, health or social justice, the misrecognition and devaluation of mother’s work and, consequently, their lack of self-worth are even more significant (Kershaw, Pulkingham & Fuller, 2008; Sayer, 2008; Lynch & Lyons, 2009; Feeley, 2014). In fact, not only they have to live on a single income as they often feel isolated when it comes to caring for their children, due to the inexistence of public services or to the fact that existent services are too expensive, and/or logistics and schedules are too complicated to balance. In fact, Caragata and Cumming mention the ‘absence of affordable, accessible and regulated childcare’ (2011: 385), also mentioned by Daly and Leonard (2002). Additionally, friends and family are not always available to help. The difficulties concerning care arrangements often create guilt, anxiety and emotional costs to poor lone mothers (Dodson, 2007). Additionally, they have to face other disadvantages such as precarious jobs; debts; physical and mental health problems; food scarcity, and its physical, social, and educational consequences; inadequate housing and lack of money to pay for extracurricular activities for the children (Caragata & Cumming, 2011). As such, lone motherhood becomes a risk factor since ‘this lack of ability to meet their children’s needs and to face critique from both within the family and from the broader society further erodes the self-confidence and agency which are critical to lone mothers’ day to day functioning’ (Caragata & Cumming, 2011: 383). Furthermore, these children often suffer from social isolation in school, due to their external signs of poverty and lack of social status. At the same time, ‘less parenting time and increased parental stress as well as increased likelihood of seeking out deviant peers to buttress against feelings of isolation’ (2011: 384).

Similarly, Daly and Leonard (2002) mention the guilty feelings lone mothers experience when their children seem to have less material possessions than others, such as clothes or toys, thus prioritising children’s needs, since women are expected to make sacrifices for

their children, including personal deprivation (Lynch & Lyons, 2009; Power, 2005), so that the children have the chance of fitting in with their peers, and don't feel ostracised. In fact, lone mothers worry about providing a 'normal' childhood for their children (such as giving them treats, money for school and extra school activities, birthdays and Christmas' presents, clothes, food, leisure and vacation).

In a comparative study of welfare states, Kröger (2010) defines 'care poverty' as the imbalance between the needs of the families (especially working lone mothers) and the existent childcare resources. Specifically, about lone mothers in Portugal, the author mentions that they pay a high emotionally or financially price when caring for their children. In fact, their full-time jobs are characterised by very long work hours, so the children often have to receive childcare from family members, especially the maternal grandmother. This can become a source of conflict and tension due to different and sometimes conflictual educational styles and a loss of independence and autonomy for the mothers. Frequently, the latter mix formal and informal resources. Sometimes there is paternal participation, other times they use a domestic childminder, 'paid informally, their work remaining undeclared and non-registered' (396), thus perpetuating the cycle of low-paid, informal work for other women. However, many times there is a lack of adequate childcare, in particular for those lone mothers who work atypical hours. Along with other authors that have been mentioned, also Kröger (2010) mentions that the lack of affordable and adequate (coverage and quality) care for the children is exhausting and worrying for the mothers and a source of mental problems, including psychiatric treatment.

Despite all the above-mentioned aspects concerning poor women labour market insertion and its low-influence in their overall standard of living, due to the insertion in low-skill occupations in precarious labour markets, as well as the lack of affordable and adequate childcare arrangements, debts and physical and mental health problems (Caragata & Cumming, 2011), neo-liberal governments have positioned the burden of responsibility for the problem of poverty in individual women and promoted work as the only way to escape from it, through the activation policies discourse and the reduction of welfare benefits (Power, 2005; Kershaw, Pulkingham & Fuller, 2008). However, introducing work obligations without creating conditions and facilities to realize these, such as paid leave, good-quality childcare, training and reintegration programmes that fit lone parents, and income protection in between precarious jobs (Power, 2005: 656) does not enable social inclusion. The author argues that in 'welfare liberalism', poor women are governed by 'disciplinary strategies' as well as by consumption. Regarding the first strategies, Power

states that poor women are disciplined by authoritarian procedures of social workers that treat them 'as less than human', humiliating them by denying money for urgent basic needs, creating in them the fear of losing the children and also instilling the fear that their benefits may be cut if they fight for their rights (2005: 647). Furthermore, the possibility of being surveyed in all the spheres of their lives, including the most intimate, is always present (Power, 2005). Poor lone women (caring alone) have a stigma attached to their status (Lynch and Lyons, 2009) and there is a negative public discourse about them and their parenting abilities (Caragata & Cumming, 2011). They are publically characterised as welfare bums, lazy and irresponsible (Power, 2005), or 'welfare queens' (Hancock, 2003) and as 'abject and irresponsible, ungovernable, dirty white, pointless and useless (...) a drain to the nation' (Skeggs, 2011: 502). Additionally, Adair (2002) argues that the Otherness and undeservedness of poor children is written in their bodies and that poor women are often considered pathologic and indecent, in sum, they are 'branded with infamy', and a 'proof of the need for further discipline and punishment' (Adair, 2005: 822). In fact, their bodies show marks of 'pain, humiliation and suffering' (Adair, 2002: 451), what this Adair names 'the (not so) hidden injuries of class' (Adair, 2002: 454). Poor unmarried mothers are seen as 'dangerous parasites' (Adair, 2005: 825), they have failed working-class values of sacrifice, work and marriage and are portrayed as undeserving, whilst the need for welfare programs that 'activate' them. Correspondingly, Skeggs argues that the poor are expected to learn 'the religious narratives of the redeemable self' in order to earn welfare benefits (2011: 497).

However, poor women and children are victims of other forms of powerlessness, namely domestic and sexual violence and subordinated to the power of men, parents and partners, and sometimes even to women from other social classes (Young, 2004; Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004). There are also precarious and violent relationships at work (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004). For Young (2004), violence is the extreme sign of powerlessness and involves the degradation, humiliation or stigmatization of group

members that are culturally dominated, stereotyped and/or rendered invisible (Young, 2004). It represents

the fear and the real possibility of unexpected and unprovoked attacks, which sole reason is to cause harm, humiliate or destroy the person.<sup>11</sup> These power abuses often have as a consequence the internalisation of the abuse, creating trauma, feelings of worthlessness, lack of self-esteem, and a loss of self (Feeley, 2014).

### 3.2. DIMENSIONS THAT INTERSECTING IN POOR WOMEN'S EDUCATION

Considering that the focus of our analysis is social inclusion through education/training of women who are welfare recipients, as well as the education of their children, this dimension is fundamental. Consequently, its intersections with redistribution, respect and recognition, representation (power) and relationality will be discussed in detail in the following sections. In fact, it is important to comprehend how these intersections deepen, mitigate or even counteract inequalities.

Issues of distributive justice are essential when discussing education (Young, 2006). The relations between underprivileged groups and education has been widely studied and documented, namely the conversion of economic capital in cultural capital that schools value (Bourdieu, 1986). According to Reay, 'the relationship between the education system and social class inequalities is one of the most fundamental issues in the sociology of education' (2010: 396).

Schools have been seen both as an opportunity for social mobility and as reproducers of

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<sup>11</sup> Members of some groups, like women, ethnic groups, gays and lesbians suffer from physical and sexual violence, 'harassment, intimidation, or ridicule'. Women, for example, suffer from: 'gender-based exploitation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence' (2004: 59). Violence is a matter of social injustice due to its systemic character and to its existence as a social practice with a premeditated character. These kind of behaviours are irrational and motivated by fear, insecurity or hatred towards oppressed groups. 'Cultural imperialism' intersects with violence because cultural difference questions the universality claim of the dominant's culture and creates dissonances that generate irrational fears.

social inequalities. Reay (2010) argues that Bernstein's conclusions about education not being able to compensate society are reiterated in several recent studies and that there is a general consensus 'that internal educational processes are not in themselves sufficient to explain class inequalities in education' (2010: 396). External factors to schooling, such as the labour market or the working-class culture, have been based in a 'blame culture', in which the working-class family is often guilty of culture deficits (Reay, 2010).

For Reay (2010) as well as for Lynch and Baker (2005), education has become a market commodity and schools are major institutions of selection and stratification for the labour market. Reay (2010) adds the segregation of the education system, based on the 'spatial protection and insulation' of the middle-classes in private schools and the decrease in the quality of the working-classes schools (2010: 401). In fact, whenever educational resources can be restricted to some groups, there is a commodification of the access to education. In this sense, both Young (2006), Connell (2013b) and Reay (2010) mention the existence of a 'classed culture of winners and losers' (Reay, 2010: 399), legitimated by the 'great revival of competitive testing' (Connell, 2013b: 282) at national and international levels (PISA assessments, for example) that legitimates neo-liberal policies in education, so that the underprivileged are seen (and self-perceived) as losers, not as victims of discrimination or bad luck and are forced to undergo training measures and to find a job (Connell, 2013a).

Several disadvantages have been pointed out in the first years of working class/poor children's education that will later be addressed in the sociological portraits' analysis. Right from the start, there is a severe deprivation of resources that result in malnutrition, lack of health care (which often causes truancy) and an absence of books and school material. At another level, and as abovementioned, a good education is also jeopardised by the lack of affordable and good quality early childhood education and care (Dale, 2010). These starting points, combined with some teachers lack skills to work with disengaged students (Dale, 2010), can often (but not always) lead to a lack of motivation to study and behaviour problems at school, that can ultimately precipitate academic and social disengagement, truancy, school failure and/or school dropout. It can also, as it did for the majority of the

interviewed women in this research, precipitate child labour<sup>12</sup>. Several authors have linked school dropout to the labour market appeal (Pinto, 1998; Stoer & Araújo, 2000; Lisboa & Malta, 2009). The first considers it the ‘triumph of work over school’ (Pinto, 1998: 130) since it enables a precocious independence of youngsters through income, which also means having power and status within the family, given their financial contribution to the household (1998: 76). Notwithstanding, Dale (2010) states that early school leavers ‘are more likely to be unemployed, in precarious and low-paid jobs, to draw on welfare and other social programs throughout their lives’ (2010: 5). It has huge social costs to the health system and the social system; it lowers tax revenues and productivity. Furthermore, it is ‘a tremendous waste of potential’ and, in sum, ‘it perpetuates the cycle of which is a part’ (2010: 5).

Nonetheless, Abrantes (2011) claims that, despite the families’ efforts to comply with the compulsory schooling of their children, nowadays their chances of upward social mobility remain at the level of children in the 60s that concluded 4th grade. In fact: ‘due to the inflation of diplomas, for this third of adolescents who roams in the schools, the expansion of schooling levels doesn't mean an increase of opportunities, but the

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<sup>12</sup> In Portugal, in 1969, the legal regime of the employment contract has increased the legal working age to fourteen years. Only in 1979 conditions were created to ensure six years of effective schooling (Decree Law 538/79 of 31 December). In 1986 the Education System Basic Law (Act No. 46/86 of 14 October), established that ‘the mandatory frequency of basic education ends at fifteen years of age’, which comprehended nine years and applied to students who enrolled in the academic year 1987-1988 in their first year of basic education.

In the late 80’s, trade unions, NGOs and sectors of the Catholic Church reported that there were working practices of children in agriculture, textile and footwear industry. In certain areas, this occurred ‘with the complacency of the surrounding community and their own parents, who, with very low levels of literacy, continued to belittle the usefulness of school knowledge and considered that the best thing for the children is to learn a trade in early labour context’ (Pestana, 2008: 2). In 1991, the government started to combat this phenomenon and fixed the minimum age of admission to work in fifteen years (Decree Law 396/91). In 1997, from 1 January onwards, that age was increased to sixteen years (except for lighter jobs). In addition, the admission to employment had to be communicated to the Labour Inspection and school dropout had to be reported. From this period on there was a strong concentration of efforts for a concerted policy action (including different ministries) and work-related organisations, social action, education, among other areas. In 1988, the Program for the Prevention and Elimination of Child Labour Exploitation (PEETI) was finally released (subordinated to the Ministry of Labour). This program had significant results in reducing school dropout. In the following decade, more social policy instruments were combined with education policies, in particular Combat Poverty Programs and the Guaranteed Minimum Income. There was also a strengthening of the joint action by the Labour Inspection and the Finance Inspection.

The extension of compulsory education from nine to twelve years was established in 2009.

postponement of the entry into the labour market' (2011: 269).

Still, economic resources are not the only factors affecting the variation in school performance and behaviour of working class/poor children (Lahire, 1995). Besides economic conditions and dispositions, such as income stability, regularity of family activities and schedules, rational calculation and ascetical dispositions, the author also mentions: i. the habits of written culture and the fact that these enable to plan daily activities, as well as to postpone urges and impulses, control language, space and time; ii. the domestic moral order, not necessarily involving pedagogical aid, but rather support in peripheral domains that enable good school performance, such as submission to school authority, proper and docile behaviour, attentive listening, classroom work and indulging no distractions; iii. the ways of exercising authority, namely practices of family authority that value self-restraint and the embodiment of behavioural norms close to what school considers the basic rules of conduct and also non-violent forms of punishment, deferred, that aim to provoke reflection (Foucault, 1999), operate at the individual level and encourage self-vigilance; and finally, iv. the ways of pedagogical investment, meaning the family organisation and sacrifices made in order to set the domestic moral order and to manage the domestic economy. The corollary of the above mentioned for Lahire (1995) is that parental dismissal in families from working-class backgrounds is a myth. Therefore he describes as fundamental the social and symbolical integration of school experience, through parent's interest and valorisation of their children's reports about school (by carefully listening or posing interesting questions). Furthermore, the author states that school capital is not dissociable from school experience, meaning that for the child 'it is undoubtedly preferable to have parents without school capital than parents who had suffered at school and still bear the anguishes, shames, complexes, pains' (Lahire, 1995: 279). Lahire (1995) also mentions the centrality of women's role within the family, usually mothers, as they often represent the rational pole, whereas men tend to be more spontaneous/hedonist which are not valued in school.

As aforementioned, even though the lack of resources plays an important role in educational achievement and attainment, several authors have stressed the relationship between socio-economic disadvantages and a lack of respect and recognition, namely by stigmatising, humiliating or even bullying the 'other' in educational contexts (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004; Lynch & Baker, 2005; Young, 2006; Reay, 2010; Feeley, 2014). However, according to Connell (2013a) justice means material equality as well as respect and recognition. In fact, an 'educational encounter' entails diversity in terms of gender,

class and 'race'/ethnicity. In contrast, 'an exclusive education is a corrupted education' (2013a: 105). Correspondingly, Young (2006) argues that a politics of difference 'means that no one should be stigmatized in status or disadvantaged in their access to the resources necessary for a basic standard of wellbeing because their physical or mental abilities differ from a majority, or because of socio-cultural attributes into which they have been socialized by a community' (2006: 97). In this sense, it implies acknowledging that people are different and that those differences need to be democratically included.

Similarly, Lynch and Baker (2005) mention issues of respect and recognition that affect equality in education. In fact, they argue that there are several status related inequalities such as age, sexuality, religious beliefs, disability, language, gender, class and 'race'/ethnicity. Culturally marginal, these 'others' are treated as irrelevant and/or inferior, invisible or negatively stereotyped or misrecognised. According to those authors, there are educational practices that sustain inequality of respect and recognition namely: i. 'silence or invisibility often accompanied by devaluation or condemnation'; ii. 'bias in the syllabi and school organization' by the imposition of cultural arbitraries, such as women's subordination, for example (2005:143) and iii. segregation into different classes or schools. Often because it is the dominant opinion, members of oppressed groups internalise the negative stereotypes, defined as 'common sense' (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004: 154). At this regard, Feeley (2014) adds that school's practices of denial and depreciation often lead to a lack of self-worth that prevails in adulthood. Reay (2010) argues that besides the lack of material and economic resources of the families, working-class children and youngsters have to deal with negative representations and 'othering' they are subjected too. In fact they present low levels of material, cultural and psychological resources and often feel fear, anxiety and unease in their interaction with schooling, as 'family memories of educational subordination and marginalisation' persist (2010: 398), a sort of 'historical legacy of being the inferior 'other'' (2010: 399). Furthermore, they lack the degree of confidence and entitlement of other classes (Reay, 2010). Paradoxically, in competitive and individualised societies, as citizens are becoming more and more responsible for their success in education and work, the working classes are increasingly 'pathologised as unmotivated, unambitious and underachieving' (Reay, 2010: 399) while, simultaneously, the chances of social mobility are becoming less possible.

Besides resources and respect and recognition, injustices in education are also shaped by disadvantaged groups' lack of decision-making power, and self-exclusion (Young, 2006; Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004). More specifically, discussing power issues is central

when the focus of the research is adult women that are welfare recipients. In fact, activation policies have made attendance to vocational and education training or literacy courses mandatory in order to receive welfare benefits, regardless of the motivation and people's choices. This mandatory character often results in a lack of interest in the subjects of training. Lima (2010) states that the placement of certain groups in vocational education and training is merely palliative since there are people who are unemployable, due to global economic restructuring processes. The author also argues that the EU and international agencies guidelines for lifelong learning are based on employability, flexibility and economic competitiveness and 'on exaggerated beliefs in the power of education and learning' (2010: 41). However, as Bernstein (1970) wrote 'education cannot compensate for society' and also Freire (2000) stated, 'education alone cannot transform society'. Based on critical pedagogies and on humanistic-radical pedagogical approaches, Lima (2005; 2010) criticises the idea of a learning system 'individually controlled by learners' (2010: 45) because such a system presupposes autonomous, strategic and rational individuals who hold the resources to learn. However, as seen before, resources are not equally distributed and, at a macro level, national and international agencies of power still control education, by monitoring, evaluating and ranking schools, learners and teachers. Nevertheless, Bernstein (1970) highlights school's moral duty to attempt being 'incubators of democracy', Freire (2000), claims that without education society does not change and Lima argues that education has some power, since

the main force of education lies, paradoxically, on its apparent fragility, on its own and generally slow paces, (...) uncertainty and lack of immediate and spectacular results, in its continuous processes of dialogue and conviviality (...), from the principle that no one educates, shapes or changes someone else quickly and forcefully, either through legislative instruments, (...) vocational programs, re-education, re-socialization or retraining' (Lima, 2010: 51).

Likewise, Correia (2005) states that, for those who are targeted by social activation policies, vocational education and training (VET) means symbolic disqualification for socially disadvantaged people, 'a space of duty or to experience an ordeal rather than a place to exercise citizenship' (Correia, 2005: 71). Other authors mention the 'trivialisation of school work and the granting of certificates that do not correspond to real knowledge' (Queiroz & Gros, 2012: 67) and the low-quality training and expectations that, in sum, transform training in an activity to occupy poor people's time. Furthermore, even the studies that highlight the recreational and social value of training and the learning of useful skills for

welfare recipients, mention that when there is no practical possibility of using such qualifications in the job market people become frustrated (CNRM, 2002).

Finally, this section ends by debating the intersections between working-class/poor mothers, care and education. As stated by several authors (Lynch & Lyons, 2009; O'Brien, 2009; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010; Feeley, 2014) parents and caregivers that are poor and/or stressed and unsupported cannot easily provide a stimulating social environment for early learning. In fact, working-class mothers and others from disadvantaged groups invest greater emotional capital in their children's education with lower results (O'Brien, 2009), due to less financial resources to buy school materials and pay for extracurricular activities; poorer knowledge of the school system and little access to economic, social and cultural capital, that they try to compensate with emotional resources. Because of the latter, they tend to feel anxious, depressed, lonely and burdensome (especially single parents). In sum, inequalities compromise their health and well-being. Furthermore, low-income single mothers often have to abandon adult education to take care of children or other relatives, as care responsibility and the well-being of the children are seen as more relevant than their own education (Lynch & Lyons, 2009).

In the first years of education, children from disadvantaged groups may sometimes suffer from bullying from their peers as well as abuses of power, and symbolic and physical violence from teachers and educators, since school tends to replicate the patterns of power in wider society. This kind of violence can even intersect with issues of respect and recognition if one considers violence towards black or migrant students or sexual violence against girls. Often the abuse is internalised and expressed in feelings of worthlessness, fear of punishment, future learning difficulties and traumas and resistance to learning (Feeley, 2014). For these reasons, emotional work is central to teaching and learning (Lynch & Baker, 2005; Feeley, 2014), even though emotions, care and love are often devaluated and neglected. The authors argue that education has to be seen as a process, instead of a product. It is important to have a space for teachers and students to talk about their feelings and concerns. Additionally, 'learning is often seriously impaired because students lack emotional support and care in their personal lives, or because of their negative emotional response to particular subjects' (Lynch & Baker, 2005: 152). This is frequently the case with Mathematics, for example, as even adults react negatively when asked to complete an exercise, evoking feelings of anxiety, panic, fear and embarrassment. Secondly, the authors argue that emotional work must be taught and learned at school, as it is fundamental to professional and intimate future relationships. In addition, the authors

claim that emotions develop solidarity and concern towards others that are fundamental to an inclusive democratic society, as well as being a part of educational rights.

Concerning adult education, even if it can be an important factor for poor women to escape abusive relationships, when partners feel threatened, due to an increase of the women's self-esteem, self-confidence, skills, financial resources, social networks' expansion and in general, the broaden of their horizons, they often sabotage their school activities by intensifying physical and emotional abuse (Brush, 2003). They do so by destroying books and homework, turning off alarm clocks or fail to give rides in decisive events, make debts in their names, or even force them to involve in illegal activities. Nevertheless, as seen in the introduction, activation policies fail to acknowledge the specific circumstances of 'chaos, pain and humiliation' of poor women and mothers (Brush, 2003: 217), and workfare or learnfare become an additional source of stress. In fact, current social policies don't recognise the long-term consequences of abuse, such as the cognitive and emotional barriers to education, training and working and the need for time and services to heal from physical and mental problems long after the abuse stops. Also, Kershaw, Pulkingham and Fuller (2008: 184) explored the implications of policies that do not include concerns about violence against women and father's neglect of childrearing responsibilities. As children depend on lone mothers, they are forced to prioritise childrearing at the expense of their own career and personal goals. The government fails to recognise the contribution of these women to society because activation policies don't often consider the importance of affordable childcare services, support through shelter allowances (that enable women to escape men's violence) or meaningful training opportunities.

In sum, activation policies set education in the centre of the inclusion debate, as the neo-liberal vision of education focuses on its capital gains. This line of thought downgrades both the education of those who are not economically productive as well as the non-marketable work related to care. In fact, care and affection are central to issues such as education, equality and justice, as seen in the previous sections.

### 3.3. STRATEGIES (AGENCY) TO COPE WITH POVERTY

Despite numerous inequalities and disadvantages, poor people, and poor mothers, in particular, have strategies to try to negotiate their resources' limitations. I concur with Young (2000) and Lahire (2004) and suggest that their autonomy is conditioned but not determined by economic and gender constraints. Furthermore, I also propose that poor

lone mother's agency is deeply connected to their concerns with childrearing and their children's schooling.

Iris Young concurs with Giddens' theory of the 'duality of structure', as people act based on rules, expectations and resources available by their social positions (that are relationally constituted), i.e., social structures shape individuals, while at the same time, individuals shape the social structures. Also, an intersectionality author such as Risman (2004) argues that 'Giddens embraced the transformative power of human action. He insisted that any structural theory must be concerned with reflexivity and actors' interpretations of their own lives. Social structures not only act on people; people act on social structures. Indeed, social structures are created not by mysterious forces but by human action. When people act on structure, they do so for their own reasons' (2004: 432). As Young emphasises, 'people are born into a particular class position, and this accident of birth has enormous consequences for the opportunities and privileges they have for the rest of their lives' (Young, 2000a: 96). However, the structural inequality conditions but does not constitute or determine identities, as 'a person's identity is her own, formed in active relation to social positions (...). Individual subjects make their own identities, but not under conditions they choose'. In sum, if whether by luck, hard-work or cleverness, agents do surmount their circumstances they 'can not be judged as equal to those who have faced fewer structural obstacles' (Young, 2000a: 98-99). Furthermore, the author opens the door to the transformation of social relations through collective action as 'individual persons freely act in relation to social group positioning' and arguing that 'the multiple positioning of individuals also enables (...) to draw on knowledge of different kinds of social and cultural relations for different purposes' (2000a: 102). Correspondingly, for Paugam, 'social actors have a margin of autonomy that enables them to internalize, refuse or negotiate the social definition of their status. (...) However, recognizing their margin of autonomy does not mean that they are totally masters of their game' (2003: 33).

Fonseca and Araújo (2007) have discussed the notion of women's autonomy proposed by James, Arnot et al., and Lister. For James 'the absence of economic, physical and emotional conditions to autonomy (to speak and have their own voice) is an obstacle and prevents independence' (Fonseca & Araújo, 2007: 64). Lister proposes a 'constructed' (in a sense that is not given) 'self-esteem', consubstantiated in 'having a voice and explain their own standpoints' (Fonseca & Araújo, 2007: 64). Arnot et al. propose the concept of 'complex autonomy' meaning a set of rights related to 'economic independence' (where freedom from poverty is included), 'political independence' and 'personal independence' (the right

to be respected and decision-making, the right to private life and choice here included, as well as the right to expression and freedom), (Fonseca & Araújo, 2007: 65). Fonseca and Araújo propose autonomy as an alternative power, as the 'free activity of a self-determined self', related to agency, in a relational context and free from oppression (2007: 66). This notion of self is different from the liberal notion of the self as an individual. Instead, it is a 'relational self'. According to Lister, an autonomous human action means autonomy to be and to act and implies conscience, access and participation aimed at individual and institutional change. For Lister, such autonomy is also conceived as a right. In sum, according to this author the 'autonomy of the human action' is solidary, personal and critical (Fonseca & Araújo, 2007). Based on these notions of autonomy and considering that the women in our research are deprived of basic economic resources, much of their private and social lives are affected. I will discuss in chapter seven the strategies found by poor people, and especially poor women, in a context of deep scarcity, to distinguish themselves from others (trying to escape a negative identity). On the other hand, they also have upward mobility strategies and, above all else, when it comes to caring for their children they excel in finding ways to enable them to have the opportunities they could not have.

One of poor people's strategies to deal with the 'intolerable particularity of a negative identity' (Paugam, 2003: 166) is through 'social distinction' and individual differentiation that can be explained by a need for social recognition and self-assertion if they feel their social status is devalued. According to Paugam, the strategies of social distinction are the 'avoidance' of 'false poor' and isolation inside their homes and with their families, a selective sociability linked to a social promotion project. The 'frail' and the 'assisted' also aim to 'differentiate' themselves vis-à-vis other poor people, to escape the levelling and to dissociate themselves from the latter's moral values. In order to do so they emphasize their own values or personal merits, 'such as family union, the responsible education of the children, courage, honesty' (2003: 166), and criticize other poor's misuse of benefits, for not making an effort, spending their time at the cafés, squandering their limited budget or mentioning their alcoholism or vagrancy. Furthermore, they argue that they suffer the consequences of the 'opportunists' dishonesty' since it makes social workers distrust everyone. In this process of social distinction, there is often a relocation of the discredit to foreigners (in a lower hierarchical position, due to ethnic differences), or to single mothers (cf. Hancock, 2003; Skeggs, 2011), thus relativizing their own lower position in the social hierarchy (Paugam, 2003). In sum, the poor are structurally divided against each other (each

group of poor people contributes to the stigmatization of the other), assigning the 'unbearable' character of stigma to others and displacing it from themselves. There is a need and an effort for individual differentiation within the community, a distinction strategy:

the smallest signs of prestige attached to the individual's or family's past lived experiences, material advantages (...) enable individuals and families to distinguish themselves from each other in order to reduce or compensate for the inferiority and discredit that oppress them. Those assisted, e.g., do not compare to those who have a job, rather with those who are just below them (2003: 165).

A propos, Pimpare (cit. in Szalavitz, 2017) argues that 'poor people tend to be hardest on each other'. This contempt and disrespect from working class and other welfare recipients towards 'other' recipients through the reference to 'others' abuse of welfare benefits may be explained by the social psychology concept 'fundamental attribution error' (Ross, 1977), i.e., the tendency to blame a person's character, rather than the situation when observing behaviour while, at the same time, tending to excuse or downplay their own behaviour based on circumstances rather than personality traits. Sometimes the observer's experiences or behaviour influences how he/she perceives the behaviour of others, considering their own behaviour as the standard. This is called the 'correspondence bias'. In the first case, personality is given primacy over circumstance as a cause for the behaviour. In the second case, a character trait is assumed from the behaviour. Culturally, more individualistic societies tend to see the individual as the sole responsible for the behaviour. These beliefs are essential when discussing welfare, if for example people consider that poor people are poor because of their bad choices and/or laziness (personality traits), so they gather that it's their own personal responsibility and not the society's, whereas the same people can consider themselves poor due to an unfair system.

Besides social distinction strategies, low-income and poor people, especially mothers, also have strategies for social mobility. Based on Bourdieu's concept of social capital, understood as 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition' (1986: 248), Briggs (1998; 2002) understands the concept as an 'individual good' (1998: 178), conceptualising two forms of social capital, 'social support' and 'social leverage'. The first type is the one that helps people 'get by' or cope, and 'is especially vital to the chronically poor, as it routinely substitutes for things that money

would otherwise buy' (1998: 178). It involves 'strong ties' with kin, neighbours and intimate friends that provide emotional and instrumental support and help with basic needs. Nonetheless, it often involves 'forms of social control', that 'sometimes undermine social and economic mobility by acting as levelling pressures and by placing restrictions on individual freedom' (Dominguez & Watkins, 2003: 113). According to these authors (2003), who have used Briggs' framework to study the social mobility strategies of African-American and Latin-American poor mothers, social support networks can be family, friendship or institutional-based. The first offer childcare, emotional support and some financial support, such as small loans, for example, and are affected by physical proximity, reciprocity and family tensions (Dominguez & Watkins, 2003). Friendship-based networks are based on 'fictive kin' ties (Stack, cit in Dominguez & Watkins, 2003: 120), and depend on solidarity and trust. Sometimes, when this help is financial and provided by men, women are the object of unwanted sexual proposals. Furthermore, in poor neighbourhoods, there is a sort of 'community distrust', characterised by ambivalence and distrust. Institution-based networks offer both instrumental help (food, childcare, help in finding jobs) as well as emotional support provided by services of social support and social workers. According to the above-mentioned authors (2003), three factors facilitate institutional support: reliability, confidentiality and the beneficiaries' possibility of reciprocating on their own terms. Notwithstanding, over-dependence on this kind of organisations entails some dangers. Firstly, it makes women more vulnerable to policies changes and budget cuts. Secondly, poor women may consider that gratitude and loyalty are forms of reciprocating, and this perception of self-sufficiency can prevent them from seizing new opportunities that entail confrontation with other social realities. Thirdly, these service providers often consider poverty as an 'individual pathology, isolating low-income people and blaming them for their own isolation' (Dominguez & Watkins: 2003: 130) resulting in social isolation.

Social leverage, the second kind of social capital, helps people to 'get ahead', 'is about access to clout and influence' (Briggs, 1998: 178), it enables poor people to 'change their opportunity structure', in sum it is about ties that can 'promote upward mobility by providing access to education, training, and employment' (Dominguez & Watkins, 2003: 113). Heterogeneous interclass social networks increase opportunities whereas socioeconomic homogeneity and racial segregation may limit them, as they inhibit the opportunity for contact, that is, according to Briggs's (2002) one of the conditions that enable 'bridges' across ethnicity and social class. Besides 'bridges', Dominguez and Watkins

point to other factors that might influence the social networks of low-income single mothers such as i. balanced reciprocity, based on return, trust and assurance (while unmet reciprocity may cause tension and rupture), ii. gender roles in the families, that assign young women household duties, such as cleaning and caring for other family members, leaving them with little time and energy to focus on their education and in building outside networks. Stack and Burton (cf. Dominguez & Watkins, 2003: 115), defined this as 'kinscription-power'. The third factor pointed out by the authors is childcare arrangements, either using social support networks or informal providers. In sum, these women's success is highly dependent on the 'nature and structure of their social networks' since 'whom they know and how they relate to other people may influence their personal trajectories and opportunities' (2003: 114), hence the importance of describing their social networks' dynamics. According to the authors, in what concerns upward mobility strategies, the employment's type and location are very important due to the possibility of creating heterogeneous social networks, since it increases the access to information and opportunities, namely, as seen before, the opportunity for contact (Briggs, 2002). In fact, interactions with co-workers and professionals that can act as role models and that can share information about job and training opportunities are crucial for social mobility. Nevertheless, 'not all the women have access to the kinds of jobs that provide opportunities for this sort of bridging, especially if 'the job provides low wages, offers little opportunity for advancement, and is located in a disadvantaged neighbourhood' (Dominguez & Watkins, 2003: 126). In sum, 'in-group social controls, kinscription, and emotional reliance or support networks can discourage the development of social leverage networks. Conversely, class variation within the support network can facilitate advancement' (2003: 126). In fact, support networks can work in tension or together with networks for social leverage. Just one person can make a difference, either by leading the way and encouraging further education and giving advice, which can allow women to looking 'beyond their circumstances', taking risks and to 'venture beyond the pull exerted by their support networks' (2003: 131) or, by the contrary, boycotting women's efforts to further their education. These people may be the mothers, the siblings or abusive partners. Nevertheless, the authors conclude that the economic system and adverse socioeconomic conditions have reduced poor people's capacity to help each other, even if they wanted to.

In addition to social distinction and attempts at social mobility, poor lone mothers' agency is predominantly related to their children's care. As Power (2005) argues, they worry about providing a 'normal' childhood for their children (such as treats, money for school and

extra school activities, birthdays and Christmas' presents, clothes, food, leisure and vacation) and have a sense of failure in a context of a consumerist society. For them, it is important that the children fit in with their peers, that they are not be ostracised, even if it implies the mothers having to make sacrifices (Power, 2005). The author argues that poor women's ways of escaping 'otherness' (2005: 653) are through work and consumption as they have interiorised neo-liberal's values of self-sufficiency. Notwithstanding this is problematic considering that most of these women have minimum wage jobs due to their low levels of education.

In a study on the impact of the emotional care work in education, O'Brien (2009) argues that low-income and marginalised mothers' concerns around care are profoundly related to economic resources. In this sense, much of their emotional care is related to saving money throughout the year to meet schooling expenses and also worrying that the children have the kind of material possessions, such as clothes and shoes, that don't make them feel ashamed when compared to their peers. Also, Daly and Leonard (2002) mention the guilty feelings lone mothers experience if their children seem to have fewer material goods than others, such as clothes or toys, and their prioritisation of the children's needs. In fact, whereas middle-class mothers are concerned about the quality of the education and status of the schools they carefully chose, mothers from low-income backgrounds are often stressed about the 'hidden costs of schooling', such as transport, for instance (O'Brien, 2009: 167). Nevertheless, these mothers have strong concerns about their children's academic attainment and worry about keeping them in school. However, their lack of knowledge of the school system and lack of cultural capital may make them feel uncomfortable about meetings with teachers. Moreover, even when they want to attend these meetings its timing excludes people for the working classes for whom it is difficult to leave early from work. Their social capital is also limited to local information of neighbours and family so, in this sense, they move in close networks (cf. the above-mentioned distinction between social support and social leverage – Briggs, 1998). On the other hand, mothers' emotional capital is in itself essential for their children's care and it is based on the 'intimate supports' (O'Brien, 2009) they had in the past and have in the present. Regardless of social class issues, the majority of mothers do not usually have emotional support from their partners in all the work involved in caring for the children. Furthermore, women have internalised traditional stereotypes involving care and consider it as a moral imperative. However, when other resources are also limited this can lead to 'emotional isolation and exhaustion' for low-income mothers (2009: 176), since they disregard their own well-being.

In fact, according to Daly and Leonard (2002), in general, many of them consider children as the main priority, 'the most favourable parts of their lives' as they 'gave meaning to their lives and made life worth living' (2002: 64). These authors claim that in the studied families there was no evidence of carelessness towards children and that, as seen in other studies, they prioritise their needs, neglecting their own.

Regarding the relation between poor mothers' concerns about children's care and their work outside the household, Dodson (2007) argues that although the dominant ideology demands parents to put work above all else, in general, poor mothers choose to care for their children, as they consider motherhood the most important task of their life and the pillar of their identity. The author calls this a choice for a 'moral economy'. Poor mothers display concerns about the quality, security and affordability of childcare, the children's educational needs, their relation with peers and their health. There is a high turnover for working-poor mothers as well as work sanctions, loss of pay and promotions, so they are often regarded as lazy or irresponsible.

Based on her research in the United States, Skeggs presents an analysis of a group of white working-class women that considered themselves victims of misrecognition and devaluation by middle-classes and felt they had to permanently prove their value 'through a performance of respectability' (2011: 503). By so doing they tried to attach value to themselves, showing they were good mothers, kind, caring, not causing problems to others, and those aspects were valued as essential to their personhood. In fact, 'their best chance of value was moral and affective' (2011: 503) not financial. Skeggs proposes other forms of person value besides being able to generate profit, refusing the neo-liberal notion of the 'proper person' as the stereotype for working-class women 'as abject and irresponsible, ungovernable, dirty white, pointless and useless, supposedly refusing not only to accrue value to themselves, but also represented as a drain to the nation.' (2011: 502). The author presents care, loyalty and affection as alternatives to the neo-liberal practices of value linked to capital, especially in a context of job precariousness and scarcity. Furthermore, she stresses that there are different models to understand personhood, which is influenced by space and time configurations; the 'extraction from model', related to labour power; the 'accruing to model', i.e. which means spending 'time and energy on self-development' and the 'relationality model' linked to 'time and energy with and for others' (2011: 509). In sum, Skeggs identifies other forms of personhood that value not only the financial aspects of human lives but also self-development and relationality.

Poor people also evaluate the incentives and disincentives to taking up employment, especially if they consider that the payment is inadequate (Daly & Leonard, 2002). Furthermore, they often criticise welfare services regarding 'perceived negative attitudes towards claimants, inadequate payment levels and perceived inequality of treatment of particular sectors of the population by the system' (Daly & Leonard, 2002: 196).

Another strategy some welfare beneficiaries use is cheating. But what does it mean to cheat welfare? Gustafson (2011) claims it often means not to declare all income from work or income of others in the household, informal work or gifts/loans from family and/or friends. Some people cheat because they need to provide for them and their families; others do it because they have figured out how or do not understand the risks involved. For some people, the system is too complex and they do not know and/or understand the rules about what they need to report and how. Besides, compliance with the rules may not be worthwhile in terms of time, dignity and money (Pimpare, 2012). Concerning the recipients' decision-making process, Gustafson distinguishes between the informed, those who know the rules and ignore them, the misinformed, who don't know the rules and the preoccupied, who are too concerned with the problems in their lives and unaware of the rules (Gustafson, 2011: 183).

In sum, poor mothers have different strategies to deal with their lack of resources: creating a social distinction from 'other' poor; having social networks that they use as social support and/or social leverage; the development of a performance of 'respectability', when they attach value to their moral and affective characteristics as mothers; creatively and actively conciliating their professional life and their children's care; criticising the welfare services, whether the low value attributed to recipients or the fact that these services try to impose on them childrearing ideals they have no conditions to fulfil, and finally by cheating welfare, for various reasons. This difference between all of these strategies is important to show the heterogeneity of the ISA recipients that will be analysed and discussed in our sociological portraits.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

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As mentioned in the Introduction, given the theoretical framework of the research, sociological portraits will be developed, based on a ‘sociological biography’, that ‘seeks (...) to reconstruct the successive or parallel socialising experiences – family, educational, professional, sentimental, political, religious and sports, etc – through which the respondent has been constituted and which have settled in them in the form of schemes or dispositions to believe, see, feel and act’ (Lahire, 2017). According to Bernard Lahire, sociological portraits are a methodological device that enables the understanding of the ways the dispositions are transferred according to circumstances and evaluates ‘the degree of heterogeneity or homogeneity of the actors’ stock of embodied dispositions during prior socialisations’ (2004: 32).

### 4.1. SOCIOLOGICAL PORTRAITS

Lahire argues that in multi-differentiated societies, characterised by a strong division of labour, multiple spaces of interaction, as well as heterogeneous and conflicting socialisation principles, the individual deals with different, often contradictory, situations. Therefore, the idea of a single behaviour generating formula (*habitus*) is destroyed, and instead, the author proposes ‘*completing or competing formulas*’ (2004: 35).

The main concern behind the creation of sociological portraits, as proposed by this author (2004), is to understand through empirical research, how the study of dispositions and habits, competences and skills, the stock of dispositions and their updating, pausing and combinations, interspacing or struggle may influence theoretical reflection in Sociology.

It is therefore understandable that moments of biographical rupture, or even of slight changes in life courses, are of great importance. In such moments, dispositions may go through a state of crisis or may be reactivated when they have been paused: ‘in this kind of situation the interviewee contributes largely to a deterministic, one-way and linear vision of his/her path. To recover through anamnesis the memory of the plurality of choices and the indecisions of the past is to bring back to conscience the existence of dispositions, inclinations, skills... That were paused and remind the interviewee that his/her life could have been entirely different (Lahire, 2004: 37).

Sociological portraits are based on the conduct of in-depth interviews, divided by grids (concerning the main socialising universes or matrices, i.e.: family, school, work, social networks, leisure, culture and body/health). The grid questions of the research schedule presuppose a research hypothesis or question. The main differences between the portraits and the life stories, besides the length, which is longer in the latter, are the socialisation theory, which is at the basis of the first, that aims to understand what constitutes an individual in the various dimensions of his/her social life, through the acquisition of skills and dispositions. In addition, concerning sociological portraits, the interviews are based on a well-structured work hypothesis. It presupposes that one compares the information regarding each person, using interview grids that should have the following features:

- a. To know the effects of the main socialising matrices (family, school, work, ...) on the individuals;
- b. The grids should communicate in terms of activity spheres, domains of practices or socialising matrices;
- c. To analyse the intra-individual variations between universes of practices, as well as the variations within each universe, *'that depend on the properties of the situation, the place occupied by the interviewee in these situations and on the properties of those with whom he/she interacts'* (Lahire, 2004: 38);
- d. To go against the sociologists' tendency to give coherence to the analysed information (eliminating small differences), by proceeding exactly in the opposite way;
- e. To understand the closure, transfer, competition or the complementarity of the practices' universes, in terms of the investment (of time and energy) that the individual spends in those different universes;
- f. The biographical nature of each grid, from childhood to the present, in order to grasp the intra-individual variations from a diachronic perspective (changes in a person's life cycle that enable the reorganisation of the dispositional stock), as well as a synchronic perspective, and also to address the matter of the dispositions' genealogy;
- g. To attend to dispositional dichotomies such as practical ways of learning vs. school and pedagogical ways; asceticism vs. hedonism; planned dispositions vs. spontaneous dispositions, strict and tense relationships with rules and norms (hyper-correction) vs.

a relaxed relationship vs. refusal or resistance; legitimate cultural dispositions vs. non legitimate; aesthetic dispositions vs. utilitarian dispositions; dispositions related to public and collective activities vs. individualism, and finally, passivity vs. initiative or leadership;

h. To take into consideration the power relations between dominant/dominated; leader/follower; responsible/participant; competent/incompetent;

i. To ask for stories of practices;

j. To ascribe to the sociability grid a special role, given that through the reconstitution of the actor's bonds and affinities one may better understand his/hers internal plurality, as well as the influences one is subjected to, and the reorganisations that the stock of individual dispositions goes through when a friend is lost or new bonds take place;

k. To pose questions that show frictions, tensions, crisis, frustrations, in order to reveal inhibited, conflicting or contradicted dispositions; to find contradictions between the interviewee's situation and his/her dispositions, and to highlight reactivated dispositions and aspirations (e.g. the wish to go back to school);

l. To pose questions concerning professional, academic and family dreams. These moments are important because the corresponding dispositions have not yet been formed, or because they are embodied dispositions that no longer find a context to their fulfilment;

m. To identify the exact contexts (where? when?); the people who had relevant roles (with whom?); modes of practices (how it used to occur) and to multiply the given examples.

This means that the interviewee's speech will not be homogeneous. Instead, it will show contradictions and confused fragments that can be explained by the will to legitimate it, and by the existence of heterogeneous dispositions, that imply the interpretation of such dissonant fragments, contradictions and heterogeneity.

The portraits will be linked to the methodological and conceptual framework. The main concern is to study the idiosyncrasies of women's paths, in order to influence the theoretical reflection in Sociology.

As seen above, Lahire's (2004) sociological portraits are based on in-depth interviews, guided by grids of the main socializing universes/matrices. Grid questions presuppose a research hypothesis or a starting issue. There are several aspects to consider during the interviews: contexts, people and examples of practices. It is also important to pose accurate, contextualised questions so that indecision, a plurality of possible choices or contradictions can emerge. The researcher has to consider the biographical character of each grid: from childhood to the present as well as dispositional dichotomies.

In this research, seven sociological portraits were created, based on 60 in-depth interviews with 20 women recipients of ISA from northern Portugal. Between 2011 and 2013 contacts were established with public and private organisations from the districts of Porto and Aveiro (situated in Northern Portugal), and ten exploratory interviews were held with seventeen key informants (social and education professionals who work with ISA recipients, such as teachers, social workers, psychologists and social educators). Besides providing important comprehensive information on the research subject, these interviews were pivotal to gain access to the field and to locate potential participants, identified by these key informants.

Following this strategy, a non-probability, convenience sampling was built, having in mind the following criteria: the interviewees' age cohort was between 30 and 45 years old, they had to have children and had to be (or have been) enrolled in VET/literacy courses in the context of ISA. Correspondingly, the selected women had socially comparable traits, such as age range and social, economic, academic and professional backgrounds. From this initial set of twenty women, seven sociological portraits were created. There were several reasons for this difference. Even though four of the interviewees were initially identified as fulfilling the exposed sampling criteria, I later came to realise that this was not the case. Another two women were excluded because the information they gave during the interviews was not deemed trustworthy. Finally, another seven cases (corresponding to twenty-one interviews) were discarded due to time constraints and other practical reasons<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> The corresponding interviews will be the basis of future scientific publications.

The final seven sociological portraits were then analysed, assembled in two groups of women with similar paths, and interpreted.

According to the methodology proposed by the author, the elaboration of sociological portraits presupposed the conduction of at least three depth interviews with each of the (ex) recipients, each one with the approximated length of one hour, at their residence, whenever possible. It was also important to gather some information about the (ex) recipients through the services that have indicated them (brief characterisation). The schedule of the interview was presented to them without revealing the research questions. The free acceptance of the interviewee was preceded by an explanation about the availability of time required for the interviews (at least three hours, on three different occasions).

The interview schedule had the following dimensions: a. The women: sociodemographic information; b. Work; c. Education and training; d. Income, social care, ISA and impact evaluation; e. Representations of poverty; f. Health; g. Everyday life, recognition, social networks, participation, consumption, leisure and cultural practices; h. Family; i. Place of residence; j. Positive aspects; k. Most meaningful moments in life (especially moments of crisis as well as biographical ruptures) and l. Future and dreams.

All interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and transcribed. Data were analysed through a combination of categories *a priori* defined in the grid, in addition to analytical categories and themes that emerged from the interviews, using *NVivo* software.

#### 4.2. INTERVIEWEES' SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

The following table presents the main sociodemographic traits of the seven interviewed women who were selected to build the final set of sociological portraits:

**Table 2. Sociodemographic traits of the interviewed women**

Name Categories	Mariana	Lurdes	Estela	Elvira	Margarida	Cristina	Salomé
Date of birth	1974	1973	1976	1977	1974	1982	1973
Nationality	Portugal	Portugal	Portugal	Portugal	Portugal	Portugal	Sao Tome and Principe
Place of residence	Porto district, urban area	Aveiro district, urban area.	Aveiro district, urban area	Aveiro district: urban area	Porto district, rural area	Aveiro district, urban area	Porto district, urban area
Child labour	Started working at fourteen years old, as a factory worker	Started working at eight years old, as a rural worker and door-to-door	Started working at twelve years old, as a factory worker. Before that, she	Worked since her childhood, first as a rural worker.	Started working at eight years old, as a housekeeper	No	Yes

Name	Mariana	Lurdes	Estela	Elvira	Margarida	Cristina	Salomé
Categories		salesperson. Officially started to work at 13	used to work during school holidays				
Mother's literacy/occupation	4 years of education  Several low qualification jobs: factory work, cook, kitchen helper, housekeeper.	-  Farmer and door-to-door salesperson	-  Factory worker (shoe factory)	4 years of education  rural worker and prostitution	Illiterate  Door-to-door salesperson	-  Factory worker for nine years (chocolate factory)	-  Factory worker (coffee factory)
Father's literacy/occupation	-  Plumber	4 <sup>th</sup> grade  Factory worker (rope factory)	-  Street sweeper	Never went to school  Rural worker	Illiterate  -	-  Construction worker	-  A worker at an oil company
Siblings	2 brothers and 1 sister	5 brothers and sisters	3 brothers and sisters	8 brothers and sisters	5 sisters and 1 brother	5 brothers	13 brothers
Marital status	Married	Married	Single	Single	Divorced	Divorced	Separated
N° of children	2	3	1	1	3	1	3+1 stepdaughter

Name	Mariana	Lurdes	Estela	Elvira	Margarida	Cristina	Salomé
Categories							
Occupation	Childminder and housekeeper	Unemployed (last occupation: seamstress) Cooked food to sell (odd job)	Traineeship (last occupation: unqualified worker at a fast-food restaurant)	Unemployed (last occupation: cleaning lady in an occupational programme for the unemployed)	Unemployed (last occupation: factory worker)	Unemployed (last occupation: factory worker for one week)	Unemployed (last occupation: traineeship at a nursing home)
ISA status and value	Ex-recipient	Ex-recipient	Recipient (€101)	Ex-recipient	Recipient (€210)	Recipient (€208)	Recipient (€419)
Partner's occupation	Electrician (independent worker)	Retired	-	-	Construction worker	-	Unemployed (last occupation: construction worker)

Name Categories	Mariana	Lurdes	Estela	Elvira	Margarida	Cristina	Salomé
Literacy (before ISA)	5th grade	6th grade	6th grade	6th grade	Illiterate	4th grade	3 <sup>rd</sup> grade
Literacy <sup>14</sup> (after ISA)	9th grade (EFA)	9th grade	12th grade	6th grade	4th grade (incomplete)	6th grade	9th grade (incomplete)
Housing	Council flat	House with a backyard in a rural	Council flat	Council flat	Rented house in a rural area	Rented house in an urban area, shared	Council flat

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<sup>14</sup> Portuguese education system: The Portuguese education system is divided into four sequential levels. It begins with Pre-school Education, an optional cycle for children from 3 to 6 year-olds, followed by Basic Education, which lasts for nine years and is composed by 3 sequential cycles. The first cycle comprises 4 years (6 to 10 year-olds); the second cycle of 2 years (10 to 12 year-olds); and the third cycle of 3 years (12 to 15 year-olds). Upper Secondary Education is a 3-year cycle, for 15 to 18 year-olds and includes seven types of courses: Science-Humanities courses, Vocational Courses, Specialised Artistic Courses, Programme-Specific (Science-Technology) courses, Education and Training Courses, Apprenticeship Courses and Recurrent Secondary Education. Higher Education is structured according to the Bologna Principles and is aimed at students who completed a Secondary Education course or obtained a legally equivalent qualification. (Eurydice, 2018).

Name Categories	Mariana	Lurdes	Estela	Elvira	Margarida	Cristina	Salomé
		area				with her mother and her daughter; no room for the child	
Health	Health issues prevented her to complete the 'Novas Oportunidades' program	Chronic back pain	Depression and borderline personality disorder. She was hospitalized in a mental health institution for fourteen days.	Alcoholic rehab when she was ten years old Mental health problems, including a suicide attempt	Depression	Depression, anxiety and obsessive- compulsive disorder	Varicose veins High blood pressure Sight problems

### 4.3. FIELD NOTES

My structural position as a white, college educated, middle-class woman affected my research (Bhopal, 1999) and it was inevitable to compare my life path and experiences with theirs and reflect on those differences. It also made me reflect on the socio-economic and cultural inequalities that exist between women from the same generation in Portugal (born after the democratic revolution of 1974). Over the course of the interviews, field notes have been written about the emotions and thoughts that emerged during that interaction. This procedure enabled an analysis of the subjectivity involved in the interviews and of the relations of proximity, trust and power between the interviewees and me. Indeed, many of the interviews were held at the women's homes and, after overcoming the lack of willingness and the suspicions of some of them, mainly during the first interview (related to the fact that often I was initially mistaken for a social worker, with the power to potentially take away their benefit), women were very friendly and many confided in me, in an interaction of 'woman talk', in which we 'help each other develop ideas' (Devault, 1990: 101). Some even cried while telling me about the violence they suffered during childhood and their partner's violent behaviour. In this sense, it was impossible not to listen to their stories and be touched by them, investing my own identity in such a relationship (Oakley, 1993). Additionally, the interview context, the type of questions asked and the fact that the researcher was also a woman, sometimes turn the interviews into a sort of therapeutic session. While, evidently, this was not the aim of the interviews, there were active listening moments about everyday problems and advice on community resources. Additionally, I felt that some of the interviewees also attempted to manipulate me in order to provoke sympathy towards their problems and get emotional, psychological and material help. The field notes will be presented before each corresponding sociological portrait, in chapter six.

#### 4.4. INTERVIEWS WITH KEY INFORMANTS

As stated before, ten exploratory interviews were conducted with seventeen key informants (social and education professionals who work with ISA recipients, such as teachers, social workers, psychologists and social educators). The interviews were held in two districts and in five councils:

**Table 3. List of interviews with key informants**

Interview number	Districts	Institutions	Interviewees
1	Porto	School	Teacher (adults' literacy)
2	Aveiro	Community Centre	Coordinator (social worker)
3	Aveiro	Training Centre	Psychologist
4	Porto	Community Centre	Social worker
5	Aveiro	Office for Professional Insertion (GIP) and Local Development Project – (CLDS)	Professional insertion worker, a psychologist and a social educator
6	Aveiro	Office for Professional Insertion (GIP) and Municipality's Social Action and Inclusion Affairs Department	Coordinator (social worker) and a professional insertion worker
7	Aveiro	Institute of Social Security (Income Support Allowance Team)	Team coordinator (social worker)
8	Aveiro	Institute of Social Security (Income Support Allowance Team)	Team Coordinator (social worker) and two social workers, a teacher and a psychologist
9	Porto	Integrated Development Agency – Social Service Integrated Office	Social worker
10	Porto	Parish Council	Social worker

Besides enabling to gain access to the field, these interviews also yielded important information, which was later subjected to a qualitative thematic content analysis. The corresponding results shall be presented in the next chapter.



## **5. MAIN IMPACTS OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING POLICIES ACCORDING TO PROFESSIONALS: BREAKING THE SOCIAL EXCLUSION CYCLE?**

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As mentioned in the Methodology, exploratory interviews were conducted with key informants who work with ISA recipients. The results will be presented in this chapter, taking into account five analytical dimensions: types of courses available for ISA recipients, external and individual constraints, gender differences and main impacts of the implementation of these policies.

### 5.1. EDUCATION AND TRAINING COURSES

The interviewed professionals mentioned the existence of the following courses: Adult Education and Training Courses; Recurrent Education; Recognition, Validation and Certification of Skills (RVCC) and vocational training. In addition to these, it was mentioned the organization of workshops for the development of personal, parental and social skills as well as domestic skills such as hygiene, food, household care. These actions were normally carried out by social workers, social educators and/or psychologists, but also by nurses or technical assistants. The professionals emphasised the work done with recipients regarding their appearance, hygiene and posture, for greater success in recruitment interviews, as well as in future workplaces.

### 5.2. EXTERNAL CONSTRAINTS

The main external constraint exposed by the interviewees was the employment crisis, the economic situation and the financial difficulties. Indeed, as stated in interview two, ISA recipients have greater difficulty continuing their training due to financial reasons, because the training scholarships are not enough to endure for a year and a half, so they ended up dropping out. The financial and care support that recipients got was insufficient and therefore they searched for work, however precarious it might be.

According to the professionals, women wanted a better life for themselves and for their children, but they did not have personal, social and structural resources. They needed to

have the 9th grade in order to get a better job, but they were unable to finish it. The training scholarships (€146 and meal allowance, in 2011) were not enough (int. 2).

It should also be taken into account the negative role of the male partners, which lessen education's importance (saying that 'ending the 9th grade isn't useful at all') and do not appreciate the influence of colleagues, 'They follow them to confirm whether they are even there. For the male partner, it is better that the woman stays at home, takes care of his clothes and cooks for him. He lives at her expense. He benefits more if she is at home' (int. 2).

This view is corroborated in the eighth interview:

Women's success in education occurs mainly when women are separated or divorced. This, in my opinion, is due to the fact that the husbands or partners don't want women to study, which, from their point of view, is a waste of time. They don't accept their knowledge improvement, that they will move up and free themselves somehow, it is very complicated for the family dynamics. There are cases where the family relationship was shaken because the women are confronted with other realities and the family structure can be questioned. Women are more successful when their partners also go to training, or when women are alone, with or without children, but on their own (int. 8).

Additionally, the issue of transportation to training is essential. As seen above, the men are against training and therefore usually do not help, even if they have the means of transport and they are unemployed. The absence of public transport to sites of education/training or the inadequacy of timetables can prevent women from attending the courses.

Another central issue with implications at several levels is the inflexibility of the law in what concerns the activation through employment. In fact, ISA legislation prioritises employment and training, thus limiting the professionals' scope of intervention to deal with other priority issues such as the development of basic skills, hygiene, self-presentation and self-esteem, for instance. Furthermore, recipients are placed in temporary or precarious jobs and do not have the skills to actively search for jobs, thus returning to unemployment and to welfare, i.e., ISA compulsory policies regarding training and employment turn out to be counterproductive. As mentioned in the eighth interview:

How can we ask a woman who is going through a rehabilitation process, to have self-esteem, to get a job, it doesn't even have the money to pay for a dental prosthesis to improve her appearance? How can you ask this person to have dreams, hope and empower herself? How can you ask much from them if the benefit is barely enough to feed their children? ISA limits the intervention because it forces those who have no basic schooling to go back to school or be available for employment, while limiting other fundamental actions, such as improving their appearance, the organisation of everyday life or the management of the family budget. Social intervention is limited to what the law defines. It would be better to decide first about small actions in order to proceed to employment and schooling (int. 8).

Another major cause of demotivation or dropout is the inadequate education and training offer that does not take into consideration the real needs of local labour markets and of the population.

Finally, it is mentioned that recipients don't value education and training. In the past, with four years of schooling people could easily find work. Only when difficulties in obtaining employment began and training requirements were imposed by ISA, and also by employers, did mentalities start to change, but it is a long process, full of contradictions and constraints.

### 5.3. INTERNAL CONSTRAINTS

The main constraints to education and training, referred by the professionals, are related to the recipients' age, their health (physical and mental) and the lack of appreciation for training. Indeed, older people tend to refuse such measures more often, because they consider that at their age the training is not useful anymore. Additionally, people feel that they are losing useful time instead of having a job and earning money to sustain their family.

It was also mentioned their self-exclusion, i.e., the fact that they are the first to criticise other welfare recipients, and programs such as 'New Opportunities', maybe because they assume what is mainstreamed by the media, thus reinforcing the stigma against themselves (int. 9).

#### 5.4. GENDER DIFFERENCES

All the interviewed professionals reported gender differences in terms of training, related in particular to the choice of training areas, classroom behaviour, results, school absenteeism, value attributed to training or resistance towards it.

Regarding the choice of the training area, women give preference to areas related to sewing, education and geriatric nursing assistance, as well as administrative work (commercial and accounting).

In interview two, concerning classroom behaviour and absenteeism, it was stated that, in general, women are more responsible and committed, have better grades and are more concerned with school attendance. They only give up when there is no alternative left. Men drop out of training when they find work, women leave when their children are sick or they are themselves sick (depression, chronic illnesses). Several other interviewees share this view. Another interviewee says: 'men are more likely to misbehave in the classroom. Women are calmer, quieter. Women can understand that there is a purpose, they see a path for the future. They state that they do not want the same future for their children. Men just want to get it done' (int. 1). However, being part of a couple can boost man's motivation (int. 3), influenced by the woman. Men who are living alone tend to be more passive, in general, they do not show interest in their own valorisation and downplay the training.

In sum, there is a consensus among the professionals on men's greater resistance towards training, although there is a tendency to fade away if they manage to overcome the first obstacles. Notwithstanding, men in training are outnumbered because they have greater ease in finding employment. The reasons pointed for this are the fact that they have their own transport and that they do not have to take care of the children. Women accept the task of studying and the challenge of change more easily, men do it more out of obligation, because it is mandatory and they do not want to lose their benefits.

## 5.5. MAIN IMPACTS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICIES RELATED TO TRAINING AND EDUCATION

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### 5.5.1 SHORT-TERM INSERTION IN THE LABOUR MARKET

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Due to the economic crisis, there were very few practical results of activation policies related to education and training, due to unemployment. The training allowed an increase in qualifications, but not an actual professional integration, although later it could be facilitated. These policies make it possible to get jobs apart from the usual occasional and precarious jobs. When the interviews were held, part-time or temporary job offers were the most frequent. The areas of family support and geriatric nursing assistance there were still offers in institutions, with the support of government programmes and some recipients eventually got a permanent job.

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### 5.5.2 EMPLOYABILITY

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School certification (9th or 12th grade) enables recipients to apply for jobs that otherwise they could not access to. Indeed, many of them only had four years of education (or less), which made it difficult for them to find a permanent position, even in unskilled jobs. People began to realise that they could not only survive from odd jobs or jobs in agriculture.

Attending courses was a positive development because people felt they had a suitable profile for the position they were going to fill since they had improved their professional skills. Measures related to education and training motivate people to pursue more education. Additionally, some enabled traineeships, thus providing work experience for a future job.

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### 5.5.3 LITERACY

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These measures have enabled, on the one hand, the rise of adults' literacy levels, thus reducing the high percentage of illiterates that existed until a few years ago, improving national literacy levels. On the other hand, they opened the possibility of people with only the 4th or 6th grade, who left school prematurely, to resume their studies and to be able to

do something that seemed impossible for them. Finally, it was stated in the interviews that compulsory school attendance effectively fights children's absenteeism.

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#### 5.5.4 PERSONAL VALORISATION AND SOCIAL INTERACTION

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According to the professionals, in adult education, the interaction between people in the same circumstances, with the same problems, enabled the exchange of experiences and increased social skills. The sessions often dealt with themes that they had never spoken about and being a part of a group acts as a stimulus to improve self-presentation. Concerning personal valorisation, it is mentioned an increase of self-awareness and self-esteem, as well as horizons broadening, 'For these women who go through training or improve their school qualification, it is as if the world has other colours and shapes that they had never thought about' (int. 8).

In the next chapters, sociological portraits and their interpretation will be presented.

## 6. SOCIOLOGICAL PORTRAITS

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### 6.1. MARIANA, 'I DON'T SEE A BRIGHT FUTURE FOR US'

*I arrived at Mariana's house on a sunny Saturday afternoon. She works during the week and this was the only day she is available for the interviews. I felt an immediate empathy. Her two daughters were home and looked at me with a timid curiosity. In the apartment, a lively black and white dog cheered up our afternoons. He lied down at my feet, stroking them with his tail, during our conversations. A sweet yellow cat appears later to approve me at a safe distance.*

*Through the open windows came the sound of the leaves in the trees outside, which waved with the wind, and the cheerful shouts of kids playing ball. Mariana was a woman with blonde hair and a sweet voice and confessed that she would love to be an animal handler. In our first half hour together our conversation was about dogs and cats. She turned out to be a good storyteller, so we ended up talking on five separate occasions.*

*At the end of the fifth interview, I said goodbye to Mariana and left thinking I will miss our sunset Saturdays' conversations.*

Mariana lives in an urban municipality in the district of Porto, in a social housing estate. By the time of the interviews, she was thirty-nine years old (she was born in 1974) and married. Her mother held several jobs: worker in a match factory, as a cook, kitchen helper and housekeeper. Her stepfather worked as a plumber. She completed the ninth grade after having given birth to her second child. At the time of the interviews, she was working as a childminder and housekeeper for a couple of medical doctors with a young daughter. Her husband is an electrician working as 'independent worker'<sup>15</sup> 'green receipts' and they have two daughters who are in school. At this point in time, she no longer is an ISA recipient.

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<sup>15</sup>In Portugal, the invoices issued by self-employed workers are called 'green receipts'. Over the years, many employers have kept their workers in a situation of fake self-employment, so as to avoid giving them a permanent position in the company. Therefore, the expression 'green receipts' has sometimes negative connotations.

She comes from a background of low educational qualifications: her mother, father and stepfather only completed four years of education each. Mariana and her siblings (two boys and a girl) managed to complete the ninth grade, although only when they were already adults.

All of Mariana's siblings have moved abroad. Her sister lives in France; she is a housekeeper and childminder. Her two brothers live in London: one is a bartender who has married an architect with a management position; the other is a factory worker with a temporary employment contract.

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‘WHEN I WAS ABOUT FIVE YEARS OLD I LIVED IN A SHACK’

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Mariana's first years of school coincided with significant changes in her family and housing conditions, even though she never relates those changes to her aggressiveness issues - she only mentions them when questioned about her family. In fact, her father left his family to be with another woman when she was eighteen months old and the consequent lack of paternal love and care were central during her childhood and led to emotional instability in her first years in school:

What affected me the most was my parents' separation when we were very small. My father packed his things and moved in with my mother's best friend. When he left us, I was one year old, my brother three, and my sister five. I was raised in a permanent fear of meeting him. My mother says, ‘When you were about three or five years old if I told you ‘Oh, here comes dad’, you would hide in the closet.’ My brother remembers seeing me cry a lot inside the closet. And I hated that person my father more and more as I grew up.

Her parents' divorce led the family to move into a shack where they lived for five years, from 1979 to 1984. Despite the poor living conditions, she has good memories of those times, namely of being part of a community and of people helping each other.

When I was about five years old I lived in a shack. I stayed there for five years; in the meantime, we, the children, finished primary school. But that was the best time of our lives; we were the happiest then, when we lived in the shack, and that's where most of my memories come from. Not as many bad things happened then as they do now: there was less evil. We could play in the street without being afraid.

My mother always worked a lot - two shifts a day. She was a kitchen helper. From 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. she would do one shift, but in order to bring home a second paycheck she would carry on working from 4 p.m. straight until midnight. Therefore, we were raised by my grandmother and my aunt, spending time with one and the other, and going back to the shack at night. My aunt used to bring us over, after our bath and put us to bed. After she had left, we would be watched over by a neighbour and his wife; they kept an eye on the shack until my mother came home. We would be watching TV – that’s what my mother managed to give us, a TV set for us to watch when she wasn’t around – and, at a certain time in the evening, the neighbour would throw a stone onto our roof. When he threw the stone, we knew it was time to switch off the TV and go to sleep – those were my mother’s instructions. She was always very strict about that. We spent almost the entire week without seeing her: either my grandmother or my aunt would come over in the morning to get us dressed and send us to school; when she left work, at midnight, we would already be asleep again. When school was finished for the day, I would go back to the shack – I had a set of keys – and then to the neighbour’s, and get something to eat there. She the neighbour would say, ‘Go to the afterschool care until your aunt is back from work to pick you up.’ My brother finished his classes at a different time, so he went to a different neighbour after school... There was always a lot of people helping us; they did it because they knew that my mother was single, and also because they had more means than her. Some of them earned very well - their shacks looked almost like apartments... We used to go to my aunt’s to get a bath and eat; she lived right across the street. The shack was almost only for sleeping. In winter, my aunt would pick us from afterschool care, give us a bath right away and take us to the shack. Then she would go home, make dinner and bring it over in plastic containers. She ate with us. This way we wouldn’t get very cold; it wasn’t as cold as 7 p.m. as it was, for example, at 10 p.m. After dinner, my aunt would put us to bed and leave; we stayed in bed watching TV until that neighbour threw the stone. In summer, we wouldn’t go home right after school. Instead, we played on the street with the other children, while my aunt watched us from the window. But she had to go to work, and so there was always a time – school vacation – when no one was around. Afterschool care was closed, and my grandmother did not always have the patience to look after us – all three of us! So, my mother would leave our meals ready for my older sister to warm them up when

we wanted to eat, and we would spend the whole day outside, on the street. From time to time, the neighbours would call us to go inside and eat with them - they worried about us. Nowadays, nobody cares about anyone else!

Mariana admits that she never got over the fact that her father cut off contact with his children and stopped contributing financially. Still, her mother eventually started a new life with another man, whom Mariana considers to be her 'real' father:

My mother never said anything bad about my father but, somehow, I saw things in a different way, I can't explain why. As I grew up, I never got over the fact that he stopped seeing us. He never gave us any money, not even 100 *escudos* (€0,50) never wished us a happy birthday, never called on Christmas Day... we didn't have any of that. He only decided he wanted to be our friend when we were already teenagers, but by then we didn't need him anymore. By then we had our stepfather, who gave us everything. He gave us a home, we left the shack because he had a home for us.

Even before she went to school, she formed an early attachment to books, writing and reading, largely thanks to her mother's influence and also to having attended pre-school:

My mother used to buy us books from *Círculo de Leitores*<sup>16</sup>. Me and my brothers and sister, we were brought up in kindergartens, in daycare centres... We knew how to make out our names, we already had the habit of writing. And whenever we were watching a movie and couldn't follow it, my mother would read the subtitles for us and we would understand a lot of what she read.

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'MY BROTHERS AND I LEFT SCHOOL BECAUSE WE WANTED TO GET A JOB'

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Mariana's pathway in school can be divided into two distinct periods. The first was until she dropped out as a fifth grader in 1985:

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<sup>16</sup> Publishing house.

The first time I attended school, I got until the fourth grade and I was even kept back in elementary school. Then I moved on to fifth grade but I couldn't finish it. I had bad grades in school, already in the first year – it felt like a car accident, right from the beginning... I didn't speak in class. I remember hearing the teacher talk and I was just like... very attentive, but not able to fix anything in my mind because I was just eager to leave school. I was always writing and writing... My mother used to say, 'You used to write a lot, but you couldn't explain to me what it was about, you had to look it up in your notebook.' I was one of those girls who can't be still even for a moment – so much so, that my mother took me to the doctor. I used to get into fights with my girlfriends. They would say something to me and... *bang!* I would start a fight. And then I was grounded, always.

Her detachment was already obvious in the first years of elementary school, where she failed her first year, with episodes of teachers' aggression towards Mariana and of her own acts of aggression towards her colleagues. Her relationship with the teacher who accompanied her throughout elementary school was characterised by moments of violence (she was often smacked on the hands with the teacher's wooden ruler). Her mother never intervened even though she was aware of this situation (which was frequent in elementary schools in Portugal, at that time). Being aggressive in school was the opposite of Mariana's behaviour when she was at home, she considered herself to be 'very sweet'.

I used to be spanked with a paddle, and then my mother would say, 'If she hit you it's because you deserved it'. And I would reply with a warning, 'Just wait until I get to the fourth grade...'

To start with, I always had very bad teachers. That elementary school teacher, she was something else! She was one of those old ladies who still wear their hair in a bun. It made her look so frightening! Whenever I heard someone say, 'Here comes the teacher!', I would run for dear life! I'll never forget it.

I had to put up with that lady all through elementary school, and she was really mean. Old, mean, wouldn't speak to us. I didn't even want to go to school because I knew I would get spanked. If I had the choice, I wouldn't set foot there. She kept hitting me with the wooden ruler. She wasn't the kind of teacher who sends students to the corner; instead, she would punish us by not letting us out during recess. But the smacking was the worse! On top of that, I would argue a lot with

one of my colleagues, because her dear mother was the one who offered our teacher the wooden ruler. So I hit her every day, 'It's your mother's fault that I was hit with the ruler your mother gave her!' Later, I started to think that school was boring because I was always being beaten, and whenever I hit someone I would be grounded. So, I got a label, 'Mariana is a bad girl'. And then I really lost interest.

I knew that the 4th grade was compulsory at the time, so I told my mother, 'I'm not going to school anymore. If you make me go, I'll run away. I won't go!' And she said, 'Then don't leave the house. Don't open the door to anyone. Okay?' And I stayed home all day.

Mariana still made an attempt at secondary education after finishing the fourth grade, but she eventually quit, at eleven years old. The main reason was her fear of being bullied by her 'much bigger' colleagues:

I still attended the 5<sup>h</sup> grade for a while - my mother had threatened me with a beating if I didn't go – but as soon as I was in, I was out again. I didn't know anybody there and I already had a bad impression of school, so I thought, 'This will be the same story all over again, only much worse because now the other kids are bigger than me...' I was eleven and I told my mother, 'I'm not going to school anymore. I'm afraid.'

After leaving school Mariana did not study or work until she was fourteen.

So, between eleven and fourteen I stayed home, taking care of the house. I was the most revolutionary in our family, more so than my three siblings. Then, my brothers and I left school because we wanted to get a job. We weren't starving, but money was always tight; we wanted things that our mother couldn't afford to buy us.

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'AT FOURTEEN I STARTED TO WORK'

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Mariana's professional career was marked by a series of low-paid, precarious jobs. She started working at age fourteen (in 1988) as a factory helper for a clothing manufacturer:

At fourteen I started to work in a clothing factory, I worked as a factory helper and I delivered materials to the seamstresses. I was there for less than three years. In the

meantime, my contract expired, so I applied for the unemployment subsidy. Two months later, the factory hired me again – they did that to avoid giving me a permanent contract. So, I worked for three more years, then got fired again. After that, my mother wouldn't let me go back, 'They can't play with people's lives like that! Meanwhile, she found me a job at a high fashion atelier. There were only twelve of us, all women, we were like a family. We made bride gowns, fancy dresses, everything. There, they gave me a permanent contract. I stayed for six years. Then, the atelier went bankrupt, and that's when I really resorted to living on unemployment benefits. It was like that for one year, and so I also took the chance to get some rest.

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'THIS TIME, SCHOOL WAS VERY DIFFERENT – I LOVED IT!'

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Later, at sixteen, she returned to school and completed the fifth grade, moving on to take a course in educational assistance which was followed by a traineeship. She states that she 'liked all the subjects she was taught at school':

When I was sixteen I started taking evening classes, on my own initiative, and so I finished the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades. By then it was my mother who didn't want me to study because I was already sixteen and had a job. She would say, 'You come home from work in the evening and you'll have to walk across the whole neighbourhood to get to school, it's dangerous.' But I got along well with one of our neighbours and he was studying there too. My mother went over to talk to his and that's how I managed for her to allow me to go. This time, school was very different. It didn't fit to the bad memories I had – this time I loved it! The mindset was different: nobody teased the others or got into fights.

All my siblings finished the ninth grade at night. We all went back to school when we were older.

After she left school for the second time, she frequently changed jobs due to precariousness: working without a contract or with fixed-term contracts by the end of which she would be dismissed. This strategy was used by her employers to avoid offering her a permanent position. After some time, Mariana would be hired again for the exact same job function.

Before she had her first child, she still worked as a teaching assistant at a school, providing in-classroom support to a child with cerebral palsy.

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‘I FELT HUMILIATED. THE RESORT TO WELFARE’

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Mariana first applied for ISA in 2002, after giving birth to her youngest daughter (following an unplanned pregnancy). She was fired two weeks after having given birth, with no claim on unemployment benefits. Her first contact with a social worker to apply for social benefits was stained by an experience that Mariana considers humiliating. She felt that she was being judged based on the clothes that her baby was wearing during their brief encounter. The judgment call of the social worker in question prevented Mariana from receiving the welfare benefit to which she was entitled. Therefore, in the following four months, the family was forced to survive solely on her husband's salary plus the child allowance. Mariana reports how powerless and humiliated she felt in the face of such an abuse of power by the social worker:

The first time I talked to a social worker – it was Dr Susana – I told her that we were going through difficulties, but she saw my daughter's clothes and told me right away that I didn't seem to need help since I had enough money to buy her clothes from *PréNatal*<sup>17</sup>. I left her office that day and burst out crying... Because, for better or for worse, I had to tell her my whole life story, and in the end, she made a decision based on the clothes my baby was wearing!

That was the first time. I was expecting some understanding because I hadn't even been unemployed for a long time. I had been fired fifteen days after giving birth, and I had no rights because I was working without a contract, as a maid, paying no taxes... You already go there feeling ashamed of your situation, and then you are judged because of a piece of clothing. When I got out I cried and cried, because I was already feeling ashamed when I arrived and I left feeling much worse.

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<sup>17</sup> An expensive children's clothes brand

It was only months later that her ISA entitlement was approved by another social worker who knew Mariana through common acquaintances. For two years, she benefited from the ISA although, during that period, the benefit would be suspended whenever she attended courses with a training allowance:

Then I met another social worker at my daughter's daycare; her son was in the same class as Vânia. She is now a coordinator there, but at the time she was a social worker. She heard about my story and scheduled an interview with me to see if I was in need of any help – because even for Vânia's medication I had no financial support, I wasn't entitled to anything. That social worker was like an angel fallen from heaven! She told me to go and see Dr Lúcia. They have a service desk for those looking for a job, so I signed up because I had finished my course and couldn't get a placement. I explained that I needed to work in order to support my two little girls, that I lived in a rented house, 'My husband is earning very little at the moment, so I need a job'. That's when they told me about the minimum income and then took care of all the paperwork. It was only for me or for my little girls; my husband earned enough for two. I received 20 *contos* (€100) per month, on average. Not much, but already good if you're unemployed. At that time, the ISA made such a big difference for us! My husband was earning an average of 70 *contos* (€350) per month, maybe a little more than that. We needed 30 *contos* (€150) for rent, water and electricity. And, on top of that, we had to eat and we had two children. How I got pregnant with Vânia, we still don't know how... I only found out when I was three months along. Ana was three years old at the time. Anyway, a few days later, the social security office called me to come and read the contract. My obligations were to continue searching for a job, to always take my children to the doctor. I was entitled to medical aid because they understood that Vânia's disease was chronic.

Although the ISA has been financially important for Mariana and her family, and even though she considers that she had the right to receive it, she admits to feeling ashamed every time she had to go to the mailbox to pick up her check. This reflects an internalisation of the social stigma and control faced by the recipients of social benefits:

On payday, I felt as though people were watching me. I was ashamed to take the money from my mailbox. On one hand, I felt I was entitled to the money because I was living in a bad situation – I had a right to it. But, at that precise moment, I felt ashamed to go to the mailbox; I was ashamed to withdraw the money. I was the

first in my family to apply for any sort of social benefit. My mother had always worked. The man who raised me worked his whole life. He even had two jobs.

The interviewee also mentions some situations of fraud regarding the attribution of the ISA, and she weighs the pros and cons of the Income Support Allowance:

Many people would rather stay at home than, in their own words, ‘go and clean other people’s crap’. I used to tell them, ‘You only say that because you get the minimum income, otherwise, you would have to go and clean’. I have heard of people who quitted their jobs just to have the right to the minimum income because it was very complicated to hide that they had also some kind of paid activity. My mother usually says, ‘Those who have managed to get a job in the last three or four years are okay, but those who didn’t get a job won't be able to find one now. Now, everything is more complicated’. There were people earning more with the ISA than if they had been working. And even if they earned the same amount, with the ISA they had other advantages: they got discounts on transport fares, on their children’s school and after-school activities, on health-related bills... Of course, it was worth it. The government made things pretty easy for them.

As previously seen, Mariana attended several state-sponsored professional training courses which she herself sought, without having been led to by social workers:

In the meantime, I had the opportunity to attend those courses and so I started to. I would still be earning money, just like when I had a job, but this was a more relaxed kind of life, with less responsibility. It was never the social workers who found me the courses: the initiative was always mine. I would hear about a new course, inquire where it was taking place, check if it was suitable for me... And I always managed to enrol.

The courses I took were my first option. I was very lucky with the programs, the people, the teachers – I never had problems with anyone there. I became friends with the teachers themselves! I never thought about quitting. They would give us an allowance, plus an extra for the food and transport. Altogether, it added up to as much as the minimum wage. Each course lasted for almost two years.

As an ISA recipient, Mariana had the opportunity to enrol in vocational education and training in which she carried out several traineeships. With her typical critical eye, she draws

from her experience in the traineeships and narrates a few episodes which raise questions about the behaviour of the kindergarten teachers she trained with:

The first course I took was on educational assistance. It was a good course, but nothing special. As I already had the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, they got me a traineeship at a public nursery school where the teachers were very, very sweet. There was only one who I hated, but I got away from her just in time. She was one of those teachers who cajole the mothers Mariana mimics how the teacher would talk to one of the mothers while caressing her child, 'Ah, nha-nha-nha, ah ti-ti, ti-ti...' and then, behind their back, do hateful things. I was there during the 'potty training' phase and I was shocked to see how, if one of the children peed on the floor, she the teacher would sit her on the ground, naked, saying, 'Come on, now you'll see how cold the ground is!' Not even the nursery assistant would say a word – she must have had a lot of influence in that place! Only after she left the room, the assistant would hold the child and say, 'Come on, sweetie, let's get you dressed.' Still, the traineeship at the nursery school was my favourite - also because the children who went there came from poor families.

Finally, some years later, she completed a vocational course in educational assistance (which gave her equivalence to the ninth grade) and a two-year traineeship in the same area.

A few years later, I decided to finish the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. That traineeship lasted for two years and the course went deeper into how to become an educational assistant so that I would be able to work as an educator in the classroom. I loved the course - although I had never pictured myself doing that kind of work - I hated the traineeship because it took place at a private nursery school in a well-off neighbourhood in the city of Porto. I hated those children – dear Lord... They were so mean and so rude... They acted as if they were the ones in charge there! I was told, 'Here, parents pay and their children are the bosses.'

Mariana found many differences between her elementary studies (characterised by a difficult relationship both with the school itself and with her teacher, whom she describes as 'old' and 'mean') and the vocational training course which gave her equivalence to the ninth grade. During the latter, and despite the difficulties related to the subjects of study, she benefited from her husband's help in the evenings. The attendance of the ninth grade also required a significant effort on her part, because her youngest daughter had health

problems at the time.

Now, finishing the ninth grade - that was more complicated! By then I already had Vânia her daughter and she was struggling with health issues. I had to take her to many doctor appointments. When I was on my last traineeship, she was rushed to the hospital and I had to skip work to look after her. That made it complicated for me to continue with my studies, because we had many subjects to learn, including subjects about children. We had lots of homework to do – and I had left school a long time ago! My husband has the ninth grade and he helped me a lot while I was attending evening school. We would put the girls to bed and then sit together: he would help me with the school work, guide me through it... I don't know if I would have made it without his support.

Regarding her motivation for attending vocational training courses, the fact that they were sponsored by public funding (including a training allowance, as well as an allowance for food and transport costs), and that the total amount was the equivalent to the national minimum wage were strong incentives for Mariana.

Another motivating aspect was that the courses she attended corresponded to her learning interests. Indeed, she has applied the knowledge and skills that she acquired to her current job as a childminder.

Mariana moved on from ninth grade and then tried to graduate from school through the New Opportunities<sup>18</sup> program. However, a health issue combined with the fact that she was simultaneously working and taking care of her young daughters prevented her from continuing her studies:

Now is not a good time. It's better if they continue their studies, instead of me.

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<sup>18</sup> The New Opportunities Program was the first example of a formal recognition of informal and non-formal qualifications within the Portuguese education system. It aimed to open possibilities for low-qualified workers to build on their professional experience and skills developed through their working lives to obtain a secondary diploma.

Not wanting to continue to depend on the ISA, Mariana approached the social worker, who suggested a job for her. Since she had two small daughters, she requested a state childcare facility. However, having met the nanny designated by social security to take care of her daughter, she protested against the lack of conditions and refused to leave her daughter there. In fact, the lack of state structures concerning childcare would have forced her to remain dependent on subsidies, as she would otherwise have no means to afford private childcare. She is aware of a certain class-based discrimination in the admission to daycare, but still, she defied the rules:

Meanwhile, I spoke to Dr Lúcia and told her that I needed a job because the ISA didn't work for me. I had two children. Vânia started to go to nursery school and she got a chronic disease, from a virus that she caught there... Now she is going to have a graft done because her ears are like those of an 87-year-old, her eardrums are destroyed after so many infections. She had to undergo surgery when she was one year and a half because she was fainting all the time. And, every now and then, she is in hospital, because her body stops responding to antibiotics and the infections start to spread to her brain.

Then, they made me an offer to take care of the elderly. And that was my salvation... I told them, 'I'll do it, but please find me a nursery school'. They didn't provide a nursery, but they got me a childminder from social security. When I met the woman, I found her attitude very strange. I went with the baby to her house. And I thought, 'There's something wrong. I won't let my daughter here, in a house where I see nothing but a glass door hiding what goes on inside'. She must have had other kids there, at the time: it was the middle of the morning on a weekday! But I couldn't hear any children or anyone! So I went directly back to the social worker's office and told her, 'No. Look, my daughter will not stay there. I'd rather survive on soup or keep on struggling, but she won't stay there.'

Later on, I returned to her the childminder's neighbourhood. I was from there and knew everyone around. People started telling me that the childminder's son stole diapers and baby wipes from his mother to sell at a profit. So, I decided to tell the kindergarten teacher what had happened. And I told her, 'My daughter won't stay in that house'. I also began to put my foot down, 'If you don't get my daughter a place in the kindergarten, I will apply for ISA again. So, when you call me to tell me you've got a job for me, you will already know why I'm applying for the benefit.'

The social worker at the kindergarten replied, 'But you have had a vacancy at a social security childminder'. Over there, there were only children of well-off people, that's why they didn't want my baby girl to get in. So, I told her, 'Hey, this is very simple: let the poor stay here and send the rich back home to their private nannies, because I'm going to ask for the minimum income. My daughter won't stay in that house!'. 'Some people don't mind having their children there,' she replied. 'After what I've just told you, you tell me that people don't mind?!'. 'A lot of people don't mind, they need a place for their kids.' Two days later, she called me to say that they had an available place in the kindergarten for my daughter. But I still filed a complaint. What I don't want for my children, I don't want for the others'. I have nothing to lose, this is all true...

She also provides an example of a violent episode in which a kindergarten teacher used violence against her eldest daughter, causing the girl to undergo group therapy for four years - an experimental therapy at a public psychiatric hospital:

She has done a four-year therapy, in child psychiatry, because of her anxiety issues. For years, I took her every week to the appointments, to group therapy... A kindergarten teacher slapped her. Since then, we have been having some problems with Ana. She gets down very easily. She doesn't believe in herself. But, in the end, she has achieved as much as the other kids: she was never kept back a year, although the child therapist expected that she eventually would. That kindergarten teacher - she was new in school, she had started two weeks before. She slapped Ana from behind when she wasn't expecting it. When it happened, Ana told me, 'It was a boy who slapped me' and I replied, 'It couldn't be a boy, dear. This mark is bigger than my hand!' Then I remembered that the kindergarten teacher, every now and then, was picking on her. I had gone there once to talk to her, but we got into a fight. Well, two days after that, the girl comes home with a huge slap mark on her face! She didn't take it on me, she took it on her instead... Ana was so scared that

she didn't go there anymore. And I told the kindergarten's assistant, 'If that teacher shows up tomorrow, I'll beat her so bad that she won't even know what happened to her. And I'm going to report her to the Northern Regional Education Board<sup>19</sup>, my aunt had some connections there. Obviously, the teacher didn't show up the next day. I filed complaints against her everywhere I could - and, in the end, she was fired.

When my daughter turned five, the trauma started to show and to affect her relationship with her elementary school teacher. On our third appointment at the child psychiatrist, they suggested a weekly group-therapy session for her, plus a bi-weekly meeting with us, the parents. Ana's therapy was based on painting; another group had a music-based therapy. Since then, she has attended therapy for three years. Her hair grew back - she had a hair treatment done - but the vomiting will continue for life, whenever she feels more anxious, more nervous. The headaches also continue.

After ISA, she began to work as a geriatric nursing assistant, providing care for the elderly at their homes for seven years.

So, I spent seven years taking care of the elderly - Dr Lúcia got me that job. Social security paid for that, together with the children of the people I looked after. They made it easy for me to take time off to go to the hospital with the girls when I needed... In a regular job, nobody would accept that: I was constantly being fired because of my little girl.

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'IT REALLY WAS A HISTORICAL MOMENT'

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Besides unemployment issues, Mariana and her family had been struggling with a housing problem. In fact, they had been living in places with poor housing conditions, or she had had to pay high values considering the family's income. These housing problems have had a

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<sup>19</sup> DREN – Direção Regional de Educação do Norte

profound impact on her youngest daughter's health.

Until I got the council house, I still went through a lot. The other house had no windows and it was very damp, so Vânia's health wouldn't improve. I waited five years for the new one. In the meantime, I told the social workers, 'My husband has a job. I have two homes: if you get me one more, I can rent a better house.' I went to see the president of the parish council and I told him that the new house was better but that he had to speed up the process. After all, we were talking about €325 and he had all the paperwork on his side for a very long time - the clock was ticking! In the end, the social worker found out that my files were not even there... It was a mess. Since we moved out, Vânia's health improved by 60%. The doctors told me, 'The new house really makes all the difference.'

I haven't lived here since long. I get on better with the neighbour from upstairs. Sometimes we run into each other and then we talk for a while – but it's nothing special. The neighbour downstairs is crazy: she's always yelling and cursing. The ones from across the hall, they're from Morocco, so they don't understand what I say. The other one... Sometimes we go down the stairs together, but she doesn't say anything, not even 'good morning' or 'good evening'. They're weird. Where I come from, all the neighbours talk to one another. I used to manage that building she was in charge of the tenants' association. Sometimes I even go back there just to visit them. But these ones here, they're very weird.

Mariana regards the moment when her two-bedroom apartment was allocated to her by the council as a 'historical moment':

It was a very important moment, that when we were given a council house. It was such a joy! Because we knew that our quality of life would improve. At that time, one of our salaries was just to pay for the rent. It really was a historical moment.

Despite the importance of having been allocated a social house, Mariana expressed the fear that her daughters might in future become victims of discrimination at school. In fact, the council estate in which they live is contiguous to luxury condominiums located in a privileged area of the city. This has some implications in that area's public schools, where there is a profound social heterogeneity as well as social discrimination from the school board and teachers regarding students who come from low-income backgrounds.

I've never felt this gap, but since my daughters started going to school here, I don't want them to say they live in the X or Y council estate, because I know that those children are discriminated. In a few years, they will be attending high school, where discrimination will be even worse. So, since then, I've always told them, 'Never use the words 'council estate'. Your street is not called council estate; your street is - there is the street sign - is P Street. If they insist and tell you, 'It's a council estate,' you reply, 'No, my address is P Street. I live in my house, I don't live in the council estate.'" But, in schools, there is huge discrimination! Even by the teachers themselves. When she gets to secondary school, it will be more complicated. They interview the children, there: ask them where they are from, what their parents do for a living... I've been told that teachers are the worst thing over there. Those children may even get very good results, but the teachers try to lower their marks so that they won't be able to follow through with the others. They even try to separate the classes. I wish my girl wouldn't have to attend that kind of school...

In spite of knowing about these situations, Mariana states that, in her daughters' case, such issues never arise. She describes the strategy she has employed to go around established rules:

At first, when Ana moved on to the 5th grade, I thought, 'She is going to be put down because this is a school for rich kids.' It's very difficult to get your child in. I had the chance to enrol Ana in that school because I gave the address of a friend of mine who lives nearby and owns a terraced house. She enlisted me as her housemaid. I thought that wouldn't work out but, instead, it turned out alright. Ana never felt any kind of discrimination. I spoke with the head teacher and she told me that everybody likes Ana. From time to time, she tells me, 'Mom, my friends have more money than us...' – their parents are businessmen, lawyers – '... but, sometimes, they are the ones who borrow money from me!' By then, she was the only one whose parents were an electrician and a housekeeper. Even the teacher used to tell me, 'Why would you think that? Is Ana any different from the other children?' And I replied: 'No, but she is the only one who comes from a poor family'. 'But, you know, looks can be deceiving. Sometimes, Ana is the one who looks like she has rich parents, while the others...'

The job market crisis has also been experienced by Mariana's husband, who is an electrician, and was unemployed for a period of four years. This situation was strategically managed by the couple during the first two years, during which the husband stayed at home taking care of their children, while Mariana went to work.

My husband is an electrician. He was unemployed for four years. He registered as unemployed but, even then, they couldn't find him a job. So, I took the chance to focus on my work while he stayed at home, for two years, looking after our daughters. To be honest, for me that was also an opportunity to take a break. And, at least, he was home, he was earning some money, and if something happened at the girl's school, for example, he could go there and take care of it. When the benefit was coming to an end, he started asking around, talking to his colleagues... Even so, he remained unemployed for more than one year.

Later (during the period of austerity, imposed by the Troika), when the government started to cut on social benefits for the elderly, who could then no longer support those charges on their own, she was unemployed:

When all these changes started taking place – cutting on support for the elderly - I became unemployed. Just like that, no subsidies, no salary. Fortunately, I only stayed home for one month: I got a job straight away, and that's where I am now.

She currently works as a housekeeper for a couple of medical doctors and also looks after their daughter. In this job, she has been able to put into practice the training she received as an educational assistant. She earns the national minimum wage and her employer pays the mandatory social security taxes:

I've been there for practically three years. I'm there the whole day, from 9 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. I could never get a placement in kindergartens. The course I took was helpful because this couple that I work for, they are doctors and they wanted to make sure that the person they hired would be up for the job – after all, I'll be looking after their daughter until she turns three. It's not just about taking care of the house and being with the baby: in these first years, there are some other activities I have to do with the child. And in the future, they told me, they'll send for another baby! The mistress needs help because they don't have the time: they

work late and they often go abroad to congresses, so she needs someone trustworthy to look after her daughter.

They pay me the minimum wage and take care of all the additional taxes, at their own expense. I'm paying social security taxes as if I was one of their office workers – more than a housekeeper would. For me, that's great! Before that, and since Vânia was born, I only had jobs and courses where I wouldn't pay anything to social security. So, now I'm making up for that. I'm making up for lost time. They pay me more and they also give me other benefits: I can take a leave of absence if I need to, for example, which is again something that a maid wouldn't be able to do. They are really very fair and helpful.

When I interviewed Mariana, her husband had a precarious job: he was employed as a 'false' independent contractor 'green receipts' and earned, in fact, less than the national minimum wage:

He's been there at the company where he now works since last year, always on three-month contracts. He signed his first contract. During his second one, his boss told him, 'Look, I'm very pleased with your work' – because he does a very good job, he's very clean – 'I really like your work, but I can only keep you if you accept to issue green receipts self-employed invoices. And he's still there on the green receipts scheme, that's what he's doing now. He gets the minimum wage and pays €124 in social security taxes. He really only works to keep himself busy and to bring some money home.

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'MAYBE IF MY MOTHER HAD PUT HER FOOT DOWN, I MIGHT HAVE GRADUATED'

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Concerning the family's ways of pedagogical investment (Lahire, 1995), Mariana and her husband follow their daughters' study practices by participating in school meetings (they meet with teachers and class directors, and have also been members of parents' associations). Mariana describes this participation in many of the interviews, providing several examples of persistence, strategy and initiative, often in combination with reports of moments of conflict and even of aggression.

Her other strategies were, for example, to request the transfer of her youngest daughter to another elementary school due to the behaviour of one of the teachers:

At another time, Vânia wasn't getting on with her teacher. She cried, refused to go to school... She wouldn't even look at him! So, I went there to discuss the issue. As he didn't want to listen, I told him, 'When we're not well, we should do something about it. So, my daughter will go to another school.' I transferred her to the same school where her sister's teacher was, and it all went well.

Luís her husband says, 'I'm not sure if she will make it to university.' Because Ana has a problem, you see. When she is under pressure, she gets a lot of headaches, for example. She blocks out when she is a little more anxious. Ana is one of those girls who, during exam season, need to take *Valdispert*<sup>20</sup>, otherwise she starts getting headaches and feeling sick after eating.

Mariana describes how the strict household moral and the appreciation of academic work are a part of the family's commitment to and investment in her daughters' education (Lahire, 1995):

Now, they have failed many subjects and their punishment is: when I get home, they have to stop whatever they're doing and come study with me. So, I keep popping up every now and then. Ana starts complaining, 'My head hurts!'. 'Does it hurt? Never mind, you can do it, come on'. 'O mother, I've failed the math test, you know I'm not very good'. 'Never mind, you can do it'.

Mariana does not establish a link between the pause on her studies and her present socioeconomic condition, mainly due to the current undervaluation of school diplomas. However, she attaches great value to her daughters' education, which she manages rationally (Lahire, 1995), performing an educational care work (O'Brien, 2009). This involves the consideration of and choice between attending high school or vocational education and training, the choice of a field of study, and even a possible migration of the eldest daughter with the aim of pursuing higher education. Mariana compares her daughters' education pathway and the possibilities in their horizon with her own

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<sup>20</sup> An homeopathic tranquiliser

professional experience and her future education, which has been postponed:

My daughters are aware that they will have to complete the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, at least. And I try to tell them, in Portugal's economic situation is bad, but if they don't have a degree, it may be worse. Maybe if my mother had put her foot down, I might have graduated. So I put my foot down when it comes to my children. For me, it is important. Though we sometimes get a little discouraged: we are forcing our children to study for so many hours and we still can't be sure if, in a few years, they will get a job, or stay in bed because they have no chance of being employed.

Ana the eldest daughter wants to study Psychology or Law. She wants to go to college and she's yearning for that, but she told me, 'Here in Portugal I'm even afraid to attend school for so many years and then end up as a cashier or sales assistant...' She is so excited because my brother told her that she might go to college in London. In case she moves on to the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, I told her that I would advise her to attend a vocational course. I would rather she attended a vocational course because it's also a three-year program but she would have the advantage of graduating at eighteen, already with a certificate - something she could show to an employer. She says, 'Oh, but then I want to go to college', 'Yeah, but with that certificate, you can attend college.' Instead of going to a public university, she could save some money and attend a private one. Because, if Ana attends a public university, she will not be able to study and work at the same time! She is very anxious, she starts losing hair... So, perhaps a private university would make things easier for her because she would be a working student.

Regarding her daughters' education, Mariana admits that she disciplines them more than her husband and she compares her childhood, affected by economic deprivation, with the conditions that they can now provide to their daughters:

The relationship between my husband and our daughters is good. Indeed, it's good. Sometimes, I tell him, 'You let them take advantage of you!' My husband lets them do what they want; I discipline them more. Ana only gets an allowance because he gives her one. He always makes sure they have everything they need. But I keep saying, 'You end up having so many things, that you don't appreciate them anymore, you lose sight of them. I used to live with so little, Ana, and you want everything at once and more. You never get attached to anything!' And she agrees,

‘Yep, you're right... You're right!’

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I NEVER GOT USED TO GOING TO THE THEATRE, OR THE CINEMA, OR EXHIBITIONS'

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Currently, her only friends are her sisters-in-law and she usually goes out with her husband and daughters. She stopped going to her husband's concerts as she must stay home and look after their daughters, and she mentions that she sometimes feels lonely:

Sometimes, I think to myself, ‘It would be nice to have a girlfriend who would come over and spend time with me.’ There’s only this colleague I talk to once in a while. And I have my sisters-in-law. When I’m feeling sad, if I’m alone with Vânia, I usually call up a colleague of mine from the old neighbourhood. She has twin babies. I ask her if she wants to go to the park and there we go! We bring some food with us, sometimes even a cake... On other occasions, I’m feeling down and I call her but she tells me that she’s not home, and so I have to stay here...

When Ana was small, we wouldn’t miss my husband’s concerts. Then, Vânia was born and, as she’s been suffering from those ear infections since she was very young, I stopped going out. Nowadays, I don’t go with my husband to his concerts very often. The atmosphere in those places can be a bit heavy. Even now that she’s having her ear surgery done, we should be careful and avoid taking her to noisy places. So, I wait for him at home, instead.

We usually go out on Sunday evenings. My husband plays every Saturday night and Sunday afternoon; when he comes home, we take the kids to *McDonald’s* or *Pizza Hut* – the places they enjoy - for dinner. Then, we go for a walk in the shopping centre and return home. I also go out when someone from my in-laws’ group of friends has a birthday; it’s a small group. We go out for dinner, then. Afterwards, they continue to somewhere else and I come back home because I can no longer stay out at night until very late. Apart from that, I don’t go out often.

I never got used to going to the theatre, or the cinema, or exhibitions... and I don't care much about those things. To 'Serralves em Festa'<sup>21</sup> we like to go. We prepare some food and take the children there; I usually try to convince my brothers-in-law and my nephew to come along. We have some snacks and the kids can walk around. It's the only place we go to. And if there is a party - for example, on International Children's Day - once in a while, I will take Vânia. There are also other events which are nice for children, but they aren't advertised. We hear about them in the news, when it's too late, and we think, 'Ah, if only we had heard about it!' Instead of showing what has already happened, they should advertise what is still going to take place! We can't just go to the entrance and ask, 'Hello, is there any party planned for this weekend?'

Mariana has been part of some associations: she has led a tenants' association and has also been treasurer for a parents' association. As the interviews were conducted during a campaign period for local elections, Mariana confides in me that she has been approached by two of the candidates to campaign for them.

When she is on vacation, she usually travels with her husband, daughters and her dog to a campsite in the mountains (except in the year when the interviews took place):

For our holidays, we go camping in the countryside. We go to Guimarães, where the air is so fresh – there are lots of trees, like eucalyptus. It's our park of choice. That's where we found Panther their dog and brought it home. We became friends with some people who also spend their holidays there – so we go to that place every year. I don't like the beach.

Mariana's resilience in the face of adverse circumstances has already led her to consider emigrating, but she explains that she quitted those plans because her husband is not 'too adventurous':

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<sup>21</sup> 'Serralves em Festa' is a weekend-long annual event that takes place in the gardens of Serralves, Contemporary Art Museum, with art (performances, concerts, theatre, dance) and other activities for children and adults.

He's not very adventurous. He says, 'At least, here, I know what I can count on. Better the devil you know.' I already talked about moving abroad many times but, in the meantime, I also gave up.

When inquired about her future plans, Mariana doesn't sound very optimistic:

Look, for better or for worse, we just want to have a job. But honestly, I don't really care about myself anymore. I just want to get to the end of the month and have a paycheck. I'm almost 40 and I don't see a bright future for us, to be honest. What I see is people who are turning 65 and cannot even enjoy their retirement. That happened to my father-in-law: in the year he would have retired, he passed away, and the same happened to my father. Let them her daughters make their way and hopefully they'll have a bright future. I just want to keep my job and to have my pay at the end of the month, because I don't see much else happening for us and I think it will get worse.

Concerning her professional dreams, Mariana confesses that she 'would love to work with animals':

One thing I know for sure: I would love to work with animals! If I'd win the lottery Euro Millions, I would build an animal shelter in my backyard, next to my house, where I could see the animals and watch over them. I love animals! I don't have more pets because I don't live in a proper house, but I'd love to. And I encourage everyone to get a pet.

## 6.2. LURDES, 'WE END UP HAVING NO NAME'

*During our first interview, Lurdes cried and told me about her problems in finding a job, mainly due to transportation and her health problems, having had to interrupt the interview because she was in pain.*

*The following interviews were held at Lurdes' house, in a rural area. She insisted on showing me the laundry, the barbecue area and a backyard with fruit trees. The husband was making small domestic repairs. On the bedside table of her bedroom, there was a book by Nicholas Sparks. She showed me some drawings made by her son and daughter and cried while telling me about her traumatizing childhood.*

*She trusted me and our interviews were held around the kitchen table, talking to each other as friends. On the last day, I got a gift for her daughter and I bought her some homemade patties. She wanted to offer them, but I did not accept. We said goodbye and I already missed her.*

Lurdes was born in 1973. When I interviewed her, she was 40 and lived in an urban municipality in the district of Aveiro. She was married and had three children; at the time, only the youngest - a five-year-old girl and a fourteen-year-old boy who was in the ninth grade - lived with her. Her eldest son, aged 22, was living in Brazil; he had completed the ninth grade, was married and had a daughter.

Lurdes's mother used to work as a farmer and a door-to-door salesperson; her father had finished elementary school and had a job in a rope factory. They had six children, but two of Lurdes's brothers died at a young age: one drowned when he was still a baby and the other was run over by a truck when he was fifteen.

Lurdes started to work in the fields and as door-to-door bread seller when she was only eight. She worked and studied at the same time. She left school at the age of twelve, after finishing the 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

In 2012, she completed the ninth grade through an Adult Education and Training Course [EFA]. When I interviewed her, she was unemployed. In her last job, she had worked as a seamstress. Her husband had taken an early retirement and was receiving the corresponding pension.

Lurdes has a brother who suffers from drug addiction and a sister who migrated to France. Her other siblings live nearby, as do her mother and her father-in-law.

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‘IF SHE WASN’T ALWAYS PREGNANT, HE WOULD BEAT HER’. STRUGGLING THROUGH  
CHILDHOOD: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, CHILD LABOUR AND THE UNTIMELY DEATH OF  
TWO BROTHERS

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Lurdes’s childhood was marked by her father’s abuse of his wife and children. In fact, his violent temperament deprived Lurdes of the love and care she needed from him. The cruellest examples of domestic violence include him threatening his wife right after she had given birth, or physically punishing her if she didn’t become pregnant again soon.

He kept his wife and children in a state of subordination, exercising power through verbal and physical abuse.

In ten years, my mother had seven children and three miscarriages. The three younger ones were born more or less ten months after one another. As soon as she gave birth, she had to get pregnant again; if she wasn’t always pregnant, he would beat her. She delivered one of the boys at home; the midwife had just pulled him out, she was going to cut his umbilical cord, and she asked my mother: ‘Maria, what a nice boy you have here! How are you going to call him?’ ‘I still don’t know, Ms Paula. I would really like my Rosa to be his godmother because I’m her godmother too.’ And just because she said that my father grabbed the plastic stick with which he used to hit her and stood at the door, legs crossed, cursing: ‘You bitch! If you start talking about those people, I’ll screw you right here and right now!’

I suffered a lot, financially and physically. My father was very aggressive, he used to hit my mother. When I was five, I ended up in hospital: he grabbed me by the pants and threw me against the concrete floor. I fell on my face, I was hurt everywhere. My brother told me that, once, our ten-year-old brother was down in the bottom of a well we had in our land. My dad was down there with him, digging. My other brother and our mother were outside the well, pulling the buckets - you had to turn a small wheel to pull them. And just because my brother, who was thirsty, asked my mother for a bit of juice, my father hit him on the legs with the edge of the hoe. Lurdes becomes emotional while recalling this episode

I had a brother who was born in between the three younger ones. He died drowned in the tank when he was five years old. My dad gave my mother a big beating.

Our neighbours thought my father was a saint because he kept his bad temper behind closed doors. He threatened to kill, to skin... He was very violent. His

father was the same, but none of his sons took after him.

Lurdes describes several situations in which her father used extreme physical violence against her mother, her siblings and herself. On other occasions, he showed distrust for his wife in spite of all the effort she put into taking care of the house, raising their seven children and working in the common land. He did not recognize the burden of performing household chores or bringing up their sons and daughters. He also showed no respect for his wife and children; instead, he oppressed them and disregarded their rights and individuality.

My father worked from 3 to 11 p.m. In winter, at 5 or 6 p.m. it's already dark. Meanwhile, my mother did a lot of work around the house. She always had the laundry done and the house sparkling clean - and there were 8 of us... And always three or four babies to look after. And I mean two-year-old, three-year-old babies, still wearing those cloth diapers, and my mother always kept them clean, white, perfect. If my father came home at 11 in the evening and found her in a nightshirt, he would call her sloppy. If she was wearing normal clothes, he would accuse her: *'Why did you dress up - were you waiting for your lovers?'* Everything was as an excuse for him to pick on her. And if we children said something, he would beat her and all of us!

In terms of work ethic and household budget management, Lurdes's parents were at opposite poles: her father's hedonism, irresponsibility, inconstancy and tendency to live for the moment contrasted with his wife's strong work ethic, effort and responsibility. The situation became unbearable so that mother and children were forced to flee their home with the help of teachers and neighbours. The father remained and kept most of the family's possessions. In the end, Lurdes's mother got nothing for all the years she had spent taking care of their children and working at home and in the fields:

My mother bought a piece of land with him her father in *Esmoriz* and my father had a job, he did rope work all his life. He had the 4th grade. She worked in the farm and looked after us – all seven of us. We had a farmhouse with lots of rooms and storage place for crops and a big area of land. When they bought the land, my father stopped sharing his income with my mother. He started wasting all the money. Soon, my mother wasn't able to feed us, so she began to sell fish door to door... It's not like we didn't have something to eat, we always did. But we lacked other things. My mother had cows that gave us milk and chickens that gave us eggs;

rabbits, fruit - all those things we had a lot. But sweet little things like a yoghurt, for example, those we didn't have... At a certain point, he didn't give her any money - not even one cent! - for ten months in a row. He said he was saving to build a house. The two of them argued all the time, and my mother said, 'Then show me the money, I want to see your savings.' My father went to get it: he had only 13 *contos* €65 when he should have 110 *contos* (€549)... That was the last straw. He gave her a huge beating. It got very complicated, so my mother felt that enough was enough and left my father - we ran away from home. Our teachers from *Esmoriz* got us in a car at the end of the school day and *take* us to *Espinho*, to my grandparents' place. We lived there for a year and, in that time, my mother managed to 'raise the walls' she built a house on the land my grandparents gave her. She owed a lot of money to other people because she left with nothing but the clothes she had on. The few things that she managed to pull out of the house in those last days before she left, like clothes and dishes, she took to a neighbour's. And then the neighbour filled a van with all the stuff and brought it to our new home. My father kept everything else.

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‘WHEN I WAS EIGHT, I STARTED TO SELL BREAD DOOR TO DOOR’

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The gender division of labour which was evident in Lurdes's family empowered her father. The only option for her mother to become independent was to leave him and find work outside the household. However, as a working-class single mother with a low income, even though she worked for long hours, she had to rely on her children's help. The economic difficulties she faced were mainly caused by the power and affective inequalities related to her marriage. Despite her debts, Lurdes's mother used the effort, perseverance and organization skills that characterized her to build a new life for herself and her children, thus being able to 'raise the walls on the land' that her parents had given her. This strong work ethic and ascetic spirit ('worked even twenty-four hours a day') were passed on to her children, in what Lourdes calls 'the struggle'. This will have been the genesis of a disposition toward asceticism, saving, planning and organization which so often emerges in Lurdes's discourse and which she learned from her mother during childhood. In fact, the 'struggle' was not only the mother's: besides regarding her as an example of hard work, the children participated directly in the activities, selling bread door to door or working in the fields. Such a disposition for hard work was, therefore, built early and internalized,

becoming deeply rooted in Lurdes's character and playing a constant role in her life. In fact, her ascetic disposition has surfaced in situations of financial hardship and is evident, as a diachronic tendency, in her attitude toward work, school, household management and her children's education.

When my parents split, the 'struggle' begun. When I was eight, I started to sell bread door to door, bag on my back, cracked hands. I wasn't even strong enough to carry the bag, I was so thin. My mother started selling door to door: bread, fruit, small beach toys, children clothes... whatever she managed to sell, she would. She worked very hard - even 24 hours a day if she had to! And the older children had to come along. We worked the land; some people owned portions of it but they didn't want to grow anything, so they lent it to us. My mother would grow and sell everything she could: potatoes, beans, corn, greens, turnips, sprouts... And she built a small house too, a very neat annexe with three bedrooms. She did it all by herself, with our help. She was a true fighter. My life now is like hers; the only difference is that she used to sell door to door and that's not common anymore.

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'BACK THEN, ONLY THOSE WITH A LOT OF MONEY COULD STUDY'

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She states that she liked school and that she learned the subjects easily, having even become her siblings' 'teacher'. At home, the existing moral order provided a framework for day-to-day activities and guided the organisation of study time and leisure time. Nevertheless, due to the family's lack of economic resources, Lurdes left school when she was twelve years old, after completing the then compulsory schooling (six years of education). She had to work to help support her siblings as her mother's efforts, on their own, weren't enough.

At school, I liked everything because I learned very easily. At home I was my brothers and sisters' teacher; they were older than me and felt more the trauma in our family. They were always on the run because he the father used to beat them a lot.

We always managed things so that we would have enough food, clothing and education. The only books in our house were school books.

In 'normal' school I went on until the sixth grade; I only finished the ninth grade later, as an adult. I was smart enough: I came out of school at age twelve with the 6th year done... I worked, but mostly around the house, not like working in a

factory or so. I helped in the fields, or at home, cleaning, for my mother to be able to sell fish and other things. In the morning, we all joined to sell bread, and then in the fields too, because in those days we had classes either in the morning or in the afternoon. The time we had left was for doing homework. Back then, we organised our time in a different way.

My brothers also finished the 6th grade. My younger sister almost completed the 9th grade. She was a bit naughtier, that sister of mine, she didn't care about school at all.

Another tragedy - the death of her eldest brother, ran over by a truck on his way to work, when he was fifteen - caused a great deal of pain to Lurdes's mother and brought upon her other children several constraints which ultimately led them to adopt life-defining behaviours in their search for freedom. Lurdes's mother never fully recovered from her son's death nor from the lack of love and the abuse that characterized her relationship with her husband.

My older brother passed away when he was fifteen. He was working at a printing place then; he hadn't finished school yet. He could work, he was above the legal age; he went to school in the evenings and was one of the best students. He was a great boy and he wanted to carry on with his studies. He used to ride his bike to work. On that day, the vibration from a TIR truck made him fall off the bike and he was crushed under the truck's wheels...

My father didn't attend the funeral, he didn't want to leave work; the officer had to go on his behalf... At that time, he didn't live with us anymore, it was three years later. He said that my mother would end up getting all of her children killed. But later, when the insurance company of the truck driver gave my mother a compensation, he went to court and demanded part of it, as the father of the victim. Then, he went and spent that money on coffee shops with friends. That's the closest I had to a father figure. I never had a father's figure sic - not in my youth, not in my childhood.

My brother's accident was tragic. Afterwards, because my mother was dealing with her pain, she wouldn't even let us switch on the TV. We were young girls then, and she wouldn't let us listen to a little bit of music. That went on for many years. We gained our freedom after we got married because while we lived with our mother, everything was a scandal. My father was the only man she ever knew - she never

had any boyfriends - so it's normal that she loved him. She should have talked to a psychologist; she was traumatized and, because of that, she wouldn't let us flow sic.

The interviewee recognizes that her mother is manipulative and that her children have moved away from her. Separation seems to be the way to deal with the mother's dominant character; in Lurdes's case, an early pregnancy and marriage were her means to leave the house:

My brother who is in France got into drugs and partially destroyed our family; he pulled us apart. He took away my younger sister, who also lives there now. She has four children. My mother doesn't know about it because my sister doesn't allow anybody to give her information about her. She went away because of that brother of mine. My mother used to make my sister go to *Espinho* or *Esmoriz* in the middle of the night, on a scooter, to get cash for drugs... She even forced me, when I was pregnant and almost due, to go to a neighbourhood in *Esmoriz* to buy drugs for my brother!

Nevertheless, due to the family's lack of economic resources, Lurdes left school when she was twelve years old, after completing the then compulsory schooling (six years of education). She had to work to help support her siblings as her mother's efforts, on their own, weren't enough. In the following twenty years, she was employed in factories. When she became unemployed for the first time, she joined a union in order to reclaim her work rights and to claim entitlement to unemployment benefits. The only time she terminated a contract was when she was working for a company where she was being bullied by a male co-worker. He would cause accidents with the factory's equipment to deliberately hurt his female colleagues. In some cases, those accidents led to the colleagues becoming disabled:

My first job was looking after a baby. After that, I worked for a clothing manufacturer. When I started working, I noticed that all the other girls had the 4<sup>th</sup> grade too. And some of them were younger than me, and they already worked there because they wanted to earn their own money and help their parents.

I also worked for seven years for a company that made home and office products: paintings, clocks, items made of cork and aluminium. I worked for one year in the car component industry and, before that, five years for a carpet company. And then

I worked for two years or so for a clothing manufacturer, then another two years for another one - and that was, unfortunately, when unemployment came about. In total, I did factory work for about 21-22 years.

When I started working in the factory, I was already thirteen – then I had to leave school. The sixth grade was the minimum you had to do, in those days... Now everybody studies but, back then, only those with a lot of money could study – the mindset was different. Of course, if there was a father figure by my side, if we had some kind of economic stability, then I could have had another kind of thinking. But, at the time, all my brothers did the same and we weren't very excited about studying, anyway. I left school in order to work because my mother couldn't pay for me to study further. It was during the period when my mother was building the house and she owed money to some people, so we had to work, there was no other way.

I left the job at the paintings company because there was a very bad person there: a man who was mean to us, to the female workers. He would even switch off the machines for us to get hurt. I was on sick leave many times then, because of my son's illness, and each time I got back to work he would make my life hell. I saw some of my colleagues getting hurt and becoming disabled for life - their hands got trapped in the machine rollers... That was the only job I gave up; in all the others, I left because they ended the contract... Apart from that, I never had difficulties or put any obstacles to whatever job I had.

The first time I was unemployed - because they closed down the factory - I wasn't part of any union. But four of our colleagues were members and we ended up going there with them. We paid two years of fees and the union people took care of all the paperwork for us. Her boss ended up not writing the letter we needed for the unemployment claim and it was later the 'doctors' at the Labour Court who handled everything. From then on, I became a union member.

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'HE WAS THE BEST THING THAT COULD HAVE HAPPENED TO ME'

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At home, with her mother, there was no freedom: the mother manipulated her children through emotional blackmail. Lurdes married at seventeen, following an unexpected pregnancy. After four years, she took the initiative to end a marriage marked by conflict and financial hardship, not allowing herself to be dominated by her husband. Although

Lurdes's first husband did not display the violent behaviour that characterised her father, we can draw parallels between the two men in terms of their 'live for the moment' attitude, hedonism, irresponsibility and neglect towards their children.

We had everything we needed at my mother's house but we lacked a bit of freedom. I met a guy, got pregnant, and so at seventeen I married him. After four years, the situation just didn't work out. There was no stability, no spiritual rest, no peace. When we separated, it was because of an argument we had about our son. The next day would be Father's Day and the boy wanted to give his father a present. He was lying down, sleeping, and the boy went, '*Dad, here is my Father's Day present for you!*' He was sleeping on his side; the boy placed the gift next to him, he moved and the gift fell to the floor. I asked him why he did that, why he wouldn't get up and pay attention to his son... It was the last straw. I grabbed his things and said, '*Get out of here right now! Get out of my sight!*' Our economic situation wasn't good either. It's not like he spent his time at the coffee shop, but he had other vices: he was addicted to motorcycles, always assembling and disassembling them... After that, he spent a long time trying to get back together with me, but I had already given him too many opportunities. He is still like this today: he has had two or three more women, he has a ton of other children and he pays no attention to them. I had to take him to court for him to give me some money for his son!

Lurdes's had a troubled relationship with her first child. As a consequence of his parents' separation, the conflicting education rules followed by his mother and grandmother, and the mother's new relationship (which he never accepted), the boy expressed the wish to move in with his father at the age of ten.

After the separation, we moved in with my mother, and that also didn't help. I would say one thing and she would say another. When he was bad, I tried to punish him and my mother would come and do the opposite. When I met my second husband, my son was four years old. I don't know if he was influenced by someone, but he always gave my partner a hard time. He would break the seats and the mirrors in his car... He lived with me until he was ten and then he wanted to move to his father's house because nobody would give in to his wishes.

With her second marriage, Lurdes found stability and a close partnership. In fact, her relationship with her new husband has a high level of emotional significance, since it is based on love, union and mutual understanding. Her mother-in-law also played an

important role, as she was an affectionate person who gave Lurdes significant support.

My current husband was the best thing that could have happened to me. I was 21 when I met him; he is 19 years older than me and he was single at the time. We are one. If one suffers, the other one suffers; if one is happy, the other one is happy.

I met my mother-in-law already after my son was born. She was a key part of my life. She was over eighty at the time and had an amazing state of mind sic. She knew how to use good words, comforting words.

Later, Lurdes found herself unemployed for the first time. Her husband gave her the strength to cope with the situation and she decided to have another child because she felt lonely.

This is what unites us and, after facing unemployment together, we felt even closer. On my first unemployment, I sometimes cried; my husband was still working and he would come over and give me a strong hug - and it felt like everything was okay. And then he would say nice things, he never put me down. That's what kept me going. I always tell my husband that I won the lottery the day I met him because he is so kind to me, so sweet. Do we ever argue? Yes. But we even argue very little. Our complicity - that is an amazing thing. If we have to cry, we cry; if we have to raise our voice, we raise our voice; but we always find a way to sort things out. Because if it wasn't for the union and the understanding we have, we couldn't do half of the things we do.

I felt very lonely about six-seven years ago. I was unemployed for the second time and I panicked, I cried. And I told my husband, 'Let's go buy us a baby girl.' That was the reason I wanted my daughter: I felt lonely, empty... And then I asked my husband and we went together to *Continente* a popular hypermarket and we bought my daughter Sofia, the most beautiful girl who was on display. She turns to the daughter, who is also in the room: '*Am I right, my flower? I waited ten months to buy her, I had to save enough money!*' And I got sad and my husband got happy. But Sofia arrived healthy and perfect. '*Wasn't it, sweetie? The most beautiful girl in the world!*' She arrived on 'Three Kings' Day 6th Jan, a very important date! And she was anxious to come out, she was born with 35 weeks! Very early. So, this little brat arrived to fill my emptiness.

Following a situation where both husband and wife were dismissed with unpaid wages, Lurdes strategically requested a loan from the bank, calculating the amount that she would need to keep the house. With the additional help of her mother and mother-in-law, she managed to survive through that period *‘without owing a cent to anyone’*, a fact of which she is proud.

My husband worked in a cork factory. He was sent home with six months of unpaid wages. After that, he still had to wait from March to December to get the unemployment benefit; I waited for six months. That year, I had to borrow money from the bank to survive. We had our house to pay, two children, both our mothers were retired and unable to support us... So, I told my husband, *‘Let’s ask the bank for a loan so that we don’t miss our mortgage payments and are able to buy at least the bare minimum to survive.’* At the time, we borrowed €3.500, part of which was to cancel another instalment... My late mother-in-law and my mother also lent me some money, because the amount I got from the bank was basically just to cover the mortgage. When we started receiving the unemployment subsidy, we said: *‘Let’s keep one month’s money to ourselves and the rest we can split between our mothers and settle our debts.’* At the end of it, I didn’t owe a cent to anyone. I’m very proud of that.

In 2009, being unemployed and no longer entitled to unemployment benefit, she decided to apply for the Income Support Allowance (ISA). Her interactions with the social workers have been characterized by a certain resistance, on her part, to imposed rules, whenever she considers them unfair and humiliating. She has displayed initiative and perseverance, always harbouring the desire to be independent of welfare benefits:

I applied for ISA a year after my daughter was born - around four years ago, I think. I went to a Social Security office, it was the first time I talked to a social worker. The unemployment benefit had run out and I didn’t have any other income. I’ve been on ISA twice: that was the first time and the second was when I finished school. But these things are very badly planned. The income is very low: no one survives with €58, which was how much I was receiving, lately. Besides, I had to wait for many months to get the money in the first place because of technical issues, paperwork, things that shouldn’t happen.

I received ISA payments for a little more than a year. Finding work was as difficult

as before. The ISA depends on the situation, on the people who are getting the support. Unfortunately, I was unemployed because my bosses closed down the factories and I couldn't find another job immediately, also because of my health problems, but that means nothing for those on the other side of the fence. You can complain and whine, you can lie on the floor crying - it doesn't do you any good. And it got really complicated because, in the first months, they gave me a subsidy of €172, but then they cut it by €99. Soon after that - I don't know why - they cut it down again and I started to receive only €58. There are no words to describe that amount. I told the doctor the social worker, 'Okay, that's enough to buy water and bread.'

Classified by Social Security as a welfare recipient and as dependent on subsidies, Lurdes felt that the social workers with whom she had contact trivialized her problems. Perceived as being poor, she felt powerless to change the situation. The State did not provide the care she needed in her vulnerable position and there were even cases of abuse of power by state employees. She felt humiliated and ashamed of having to ask for food:

Here in the parish I never asked for food because my mother-in-law always begged me not to. I didn't think I should be ashamed: a lot of people go there and ask for food when they don't need half the money I need. And because I was ashamed, there was no other possibility to get help. To earn the right to a food allowance for my daughter, I had to struggle a lot! A social worker even told me, 'Your husband receives €290, that's enough money for you to eat.' I said, 'But all that money is to pay the mortgage on our house, there's nothing left for electricity, water or gas, and the little that is left - €30 or €40 - he has to spend on petrol.' And she told me that, if I didn't have enough money for the mortgage, then I should give the house to the bank. And where was I going to live, on the street?! For owing only €12.000, I should give up my house? I started crying. Why not give us a little help, increase our allowance a bit, if we were going through temporary difficulties? Why not help us when we had already contributed so much?

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'GOING TO SCHOOL WAS LIKE WALKING ON CLOUDS'

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Returning to school to complete a course which would give her the equivalence to the ninth grade was a dream come true, a reactivation of her disposition to study which had been interrupted, for financial reasons, at the age of twelve. There is a sort of accepted

domination in terms of the range of courses suggested by the social workers, with Lurdes ultimately agreeing to attend the one she was selected for. Her ambition to graduate from school is not yet set aside, but it appears to be a remote possibility.

At school, she displays autonomy in learning in parallel with an excessively correct behaviour regarding the rules established in the classroom by the teachers: she clearly fulfils the role of the good, well-behaved student. At the same time, other colleagues are perceived as marginal. In her discourse, there is the stigma, devaluation and condemnation of 'those who behave badly'.

In her suppressed desire to become an accountant or a mathematics teacher, we see a mismatch between the job she aspires to and the one she can actually have, given her lack of financial resources and the need to interrupt her studies.

When I started receiving ISA payments, they invited us to take courses and I accepted. There was no intransigence at all: I applied for several courses and took the one they chose me for. If you refuse, there are other consequences. But I never said, *'I'm only going because I'm being forced to.'* I was offered the chance and I enjoyed all the courses I took.

Before the EFA course, I took a 50-hour one on computers. And after I finished the 9th grade, I did a sewing course that lasted for 225 hours.

Two years ago, when I started the 9th grade, I got addicted to reading. Learning is good and useful. I took the EFA to complete the 9th grade and I loved it because I didn't know anything about English or computers and with the course I learned a bit about those things.

If I didn't know how to use a computer, I couldn't work as a cashier at the supermarket. But my English fell short of what I wanted: I wanted to learn more. And I still keep that in mind. To continue until the 12th grade? If I get the opportunity, why not?

According to the technician the social worker, I had the conditions and skills to

move on to an RVCC<sup>22</sup>, which is a course where we go two or three hours to school and then do the rest of the work at home. For a person's qualifications, I think that's not enough. If I would do an RVCC I wouldn't end up with the learning skills and the knowledge I got by attending normal school. And with the RVCC you don't earn any money; that course I took was one of the last ones that paid €400. At the time, I was not receiving unemployment benefits, so I got the best of both worlds: I went to school and I got an allowance. I didn't want to complete the 9th year through the RVCC because, as far as I know, people just go there once or twice or three times a week and then do all the work at home. I don't think that is instructive. I chose to do the 9th grade like kids do: going to school from 8 to 5 and following the normal learning process. I think it's much more enriching that way.

Lurdes reproves the attitude of some of her classmates, telling us they often behaved in a disrespectful, even aggressive way, in contrast with her own good behaviour and dedication to learning.

I never had any problems, but the way some of my classmates acted was absurd: adults behaving worse than children. I wouldn't allow my kids to do what those people did in the classroom. One student was thrown out for misbehaving in class and she was almost in her 40s, she had a son in college. These are aggressive people: they don't listen, they don't follow orders and they have no respect for anyone. At the time, that lady was living off the ISA and she said she couldn't care less about everything; she disturbed the class, we couldn't focus because of her. We all live in this country and some people just don't know how to get along, how to interact with others. They're like small animals, attacking everyone. But people like that don't change just because they go to school. Worse than that, they just get in the way of those who want to learn and move forward. I think that, if a person doesn't want to be helped, then she won't change; there are still many people out

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<sup>22</sup> Recognition, Validation and Certification of Skills

there with this kind of mentality. As for the highlights, that's all. Everything that you can learn is great, doesn't matter if it's at school, or in a professional area, or somewhere else.

I always did my best not to skip school - only if I had specific appointments to go to. Even then, I hurried back and forth so that I would miss as little classes as possible. I had absolutely no difficulties learning. Everything was good and very interesting. Going to school was almost like flying into the clouds, wandering, letting your imagination run wild. There was no teacher I would point my finger at... The math teacher - everybody spoke badly about him, but I didn't agree with any of that. Maybe because I loved the subject... There was a topic I couldn't understand, so I asked him, *'Please explain this to me again as if I was very stupid'* and he started to laugh: *'Let's try it another way'* and I managed to solve all the exercises. I'm crazy about numbers! All that has to do with numbers is amazing to me and I would love to be a math teacher or an accountant. Maybe because of that I have an unusual way to handle our family budget. I keep saying: *'We deserved a prize for being in the situation we are now without owing a cent to anyone'*.

I think very highly of school because it doesn't do you any harm; on the contrary, it evolves people sic. But it also depends if they want to be evolved or not. Because some people go to school just to pass the time.

Returning to school also posed new challenges to Lurdes. The time she had to look for her daughter was reduced, so she decided to send her to pre-school. She complains that the Social Services were not cooperative at first, but in the end, she managed to achieve her goal.

I also had a problem with the social worker when I had to go to school. At the time, my daughter was only two years old and my husband was no longer employed, he was doing odd jobs. He didn't receive the unemployment benefit anymore, so he had to be available if work appeared, and I had to go to school because I made that commitment and there was no one who could look after my daughter. I didn't have enough money to pay for a kindergarten - over a €100 a month, plus one month in advance, and even some more for registration fees and all those bureaucracies. So I spoke to the pre-school teacher and she accepted my girl. She was turning three in January and could already have lunch at school, and I had to pay €17 a month. And then, the teacher told me, *'Get your papers and take them*

*to the social worker at the Education Division and explain your situation.* And the social worker told me: *'But pre-school is not mandatory!'*, - *'It's not mandatory but I have to go to school, so what should I do? Take my daughter with me? Or stop going to school to take care of her? I can't pay for a kindergarten. And I won't give a full month's salary to pay for school - we have to eat! What do you want me to do: do you want me to fight for my life or do you want me to kill myself and my children?'* I started to cry, I was really hurt! Because we are human beings - we shouldn't be forced to bury our head in the sand like a stork sic. We need at least the bare minimum to live... The social worker came to my house and started looking at the floor. I said, *'I may not have money for bleach but I keep my floor clean, even if only with water.'* They crucify us! After one week, the teacher told me, *'Your girl can have lunch here for free'*. There's no need to make you despair. It's too humiliating. I have more than 20 years of experience in companies; my husband paid taxes for 30 years - and when a couple finds themselves in this situation, both unemployed at the same time and needing the bare minimum to survive, it's very difficult.

Lurdes admits that ISA is a useful tool to help those who are in difficult situations, however, she also points out that it will not solve all problems by itself and may have negative effects on the recipient's motivation and self-esteem:

The ISA is helpful in extreme cases. It won't solve the problem, but it's an additional help. But living on benefits, either high or low, gives you no encouragement, no motivation, nothing. It's living on the breadline. When I joined the clothing company - that was encouraging! It took me almost one month to be able to say, *'I'm back on my feet.'* I was floating on air, I looked like a child with a new toy, all because I no longer knew what it was to have a full salary, an allowance, to have a month's salary in your bank account. I started to cry with emotion - it's so good to have a place to work! I was hoping to stay, but they had signed a contract with the jobcentre for only half a year, and when it came to an end we had to leave, even though there was work.

Despite being forced to 'live one day at a time' due to her current economic conditions, she still makes a rational assessment of her possibilities, organising her daily life, deferring consumption desires and saving.

I live one day at a time and it takes a lot of strength. I hope it will change. We see our children grow and try to give them everything so that they don't feel different

from the others because my son Rui is a very understanding child. When I say, '*I have no money*' he says, '*You can go to my piggy bank, mum!*'. They think that, if they have some coins there, it's enough to pay for everything! laughter Sofia is the same.

When I interviewed her, Lurdes was unemployed and she earned an unemployment benefit of €248. Her husband, who took early retirement, received €290. In our conversations, she provides examples that illustrate practices of saving and managing the household budget: making chicken rice for four people with only one chicken thigh and one drumstick; making patties to sell, distinguishing between the investment in the ingredients and the profit that can be made with the sale; working as a cleaner or having her husband do odd jobs; ingenious ways to spend as little as possible, such as producing her own coffee machine capsules or following a 20-cent-per-day saving target to be able to afford books for her son:

Right now I have my husband's early retirement benefit, which is €290. He used to work in the cork industry, but at the age of 60 it gets complicated, no one will employ him anymore - if they don't even employ the young! I'm earning €248 because I worked for half a year in a clothing company.

I make patties to sell – I'm not ashamed to say it, because I need money to feed my children. When I was studying, I brought them along and sold them to my teachers and classmates... If I make €50 or €100 with the sale, I don't spend that money, I save it for a worse month. As long as I have customers, I'll keep on selling patties. Once I even wore a mask while I was cooking, because I had a cold. And even when I'm on benefits, as long as I have the time, I'll make the most of what I have, be it patties to sell or land to dig. I've been selling patties for four or five years now; I'm not stopping just because I'm getting an allowance. I have a jar with the money I make with the sale... The money I need for the ingredients, I put it aside. At the end of the month, I'll know how much I've earned, if I have patties to sell and if I can make a profit with them.

That half year when I worked for the clothing company, I also worked after hours cleaning for a lady from *Esmoriz*. She paid me €17,50 a week. I would come back from her house feeling drained, but all the time that I was cleaning and selling patties, I managed to save €900 in half a year! And that money saw me through two or three months when I didn't have any income, later on - to buy food and all that. I get €248, it's not enough. If I hadn't earned those €900, how would I manage? We

already do without everything we can.

Just yesterday, I made a delicious dinner of chicken rice with only one chicken thigh. I boiled it, then cooked the rice with a bit of carrot and peas, plus the chicken - amazing! If I make soup for dinner, that's it: in my house, we either have soup or a main course. We don't eat much, anyway - if we were big eaters, I would have a pile of debts!

I have to earn money to feed my children, that can't be helped. We watch certain things on TV and, many times, we cry and I tell him, 'Thank God, at least we're not starving'. We have the essential things. Just now, two days before I had my operation, I went to buy books for my son. I'm entitled to a discount; still, every day, religiously, my husband and I put 20 cents into a small jar. By the end of the year, there's enough money there for my son's books. And then, the money I get from Social Security can be used for other things...

Lurdes refuses been labelled as 'poor', devaluing and condemning other recipients who face similar circumstances, in an attempt to distance herself from their situation:

If you have the slightest ability to manage things, then you're not poor. We are not poor. I have food, a roof over my head, mental capacity to govern me: I am not poor. I'm poor because I can't get a permanent job. But if you consider that being poor has to do with the person's mindset, then I'm very rich. I don't go to coffee shops. If we go shopping on Sunday, I don't stop at the coffee shop, because there I spend 60 cents on four coffees and, with that money, my and I husband can make enough coffee at home for a whole month.

If my husband goes to the coffee shop, I never wanted people to say, 'Look, they get money from charity and now the husband is sitting there having coffee.' But most people who receive this benefit have their breakfast and lunch at the coffee shop. I never do that because I know I can't. Nobody has to support me.

This year, I didn't give my son any birthday presents because my sister spent her vacation with us, she was sleeping here in my living room, and she offered my son two backpacks. They cost €60. I usually buy them on sale, 50% off. I try to catch every discount or special offer; even when it's not the right season, if it's something that I will need it later and I can buy it, then I buy it. And so, since my sister gave him the backpacks, I told him: 'Son, auntie Jacinta already offered you backpacks, so mom won't buy you a gift'. 'Oh, that's okay, mom!' Everything is always alright

for that kid. My fifteen-year-old son already realizes that I can't buy him what he wants. I never failed to give him books, school supplies, clothes... But, of course, I'm not going to give him things that I can't afford.

As we have seen, Lurdes values school and education - hers and her children's. As to the latter, she is in charge of housekeeping and organizes the domestic moral order, investing in her children's education to ensure that they don't lack 'essential' things: 'books, school supplies, clothes.' Her way of exercising authority is to 'always put pressure on him' to study; as a way of pedagogical investment, she developed a saving strategy to be able to put her son through college, at the same time instilling such desire in him. Her care work consists of encouraging her children, providing them with economic and cultural resources, being attentive to their needs and planning their educational options, and trying to provide them with the best. As for the emotional dimension of education, she guides them through decision-making, helps them with homework and provides for educational and cultural activities outside school hours:

Regarding my children's education, my concern is to make sure they have the best. My son is a ninth grader and, at first, he didn't want to go to college. The teachers work on that and explain to them that you need to study in order to be someone. We tell him this all the time because he's very naughty when it comes to studying. He could do much better at school, he is average. We always have to put pressure on him to study... He was kept back in the 8th grade, but he's very smart. He started in the 5th grade when he was nine and began to have music lessons. He wanted to go because he was able to play the songs he heard in church on the flute. Last year he flunked and lost his scholarship, so he doesn't have music lessons anymore. When it comes to drawing, the kid is crazy about it, he makes amazing drawings. I'm thinking of putting some money aside for him to go to college. He wants to go and, as long as we can afford it, he will continue with his studies because he has to move forward. That's the priority. I had to quit school when I was thirteen because, at the time, the minimum was to finish the sixth year. I try to instil that on sic my son. When he was little, he said he didn't want to go to university, but now he already made up his mind: 'I want to go to college, I want to draw.' And I'll do everything I can to help him.

When I interviewed Lurdes, her son was twenty-two and was living in Brazil. He already had a daughter and his behaviour was directed toward immediate gratification:

I hardly ever speak to him now. He is 22, married and he lives in Brazil. He already gave me a granddaughter. Psychologically, he's like his father: he's never satisfied, he never makes an effort... I think he was trying to finish the ninth grade, I'm not sure if he made it. He went to a boarding school. And, then, He lies a lot: my mother lives in misery now, she's full of debt, because of him. Because he only cares about his computer and the internet, he has many expenses - and then he went on trips to Brazil and my mother paid for everything. She used to say, 'The poor thing, he has to live without a father,' and I would reply, 'I also lived without a father!' Today she doesn't have enough money to eat because she's still paying off the debts she got into because of him.

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'WE END UP LOSING OUR IDENTITY'

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In her daily life, besides working in the fields and selling patties, she looks after her children, her father-in-law and her mother. She regrets that care work is unpaid and unrecognised by the State since it contributes to the well-being of dependants and would have to be paid to strangers if her husband and she were not available:

About my day-to-day life... I have two children at home: a boy of fourteen and a girl of five. I take care of them, do housework, cook for my father-in-law. I go to his place often - he lives nearby - and that's how time goes by. He's turning 90 and he's alone since my mother-in-law passed away, so we're the ones who give him all kinds of support. And none of that is paid.

On top of that, I work on my land. I have two pieces of land: a small one of my own and a neighbour's backyard where she lets me farm - and I go about doing these chores and searching for work, always waiting for an opportunity.

In terms of the factors which hinder her from finding and keeping a job, she points out her health problems and difficulties in using public transport, in addition to the limited number of jobs available.

In this house I have more difficulties with public transport, there's no direct link. We can take the train but there's no fixed schedule... If I have to be at work at 8, I need to leave the house at 6 a.m. If I take the bus, I have to change twice and sometimes the schedules don't work out. It's complicated. It would be much easier if each of us had a means of transport because I have a driver's license as well.

Normally, I go to the workplaces, fill out the registration form they provide and that's it. I don't have internet at home - I can't afford it. I'm also registered at the jobcentre. I haven't been yet to a few companies I worked for before because I know I'm not fit. Even without a job, I get a lot of back pain. I have arthritis, hernias and spine problems, and a serious arthrosis on my hip - I think it was the effort of starting to work when I was still growing up, between eight and fifteen years old...

You stay unemployed for so long that you end up going to the same places several times; people already laugh at you, they make fun because you're forced to go there. We have to go and ask for work, and they say, '*Here they come again to get their papers stamped!*' and it's exhausting.

A while ago I went to a job interview and the people sitting next to me were saying, '*Here's one more who will be joining the good life!*' They don't call it '*unemployment*', they call it '*the good life*'. '*They stay at home, doing nothing, earning subsidies. They don't want to work.*' It makes me feel like trash. Those who are lucky enough to have a job treat others like that: '*Look, it's the ISA people!*' We end up having no name, no identity of our own. We're divided into those who want to work and those who don't. I've heard it from jobcentre clerks: '*They just want to earn money while they take courses*'. It's sad to be judged because of how others act, but unfortunately, some people think like that.

Last year, I broke two front teeth, I was desperate! I had to get new ones, I couldn't go to the companies to ask for work looking like that!... It was horrible. Sometimes we just feel desperate. And then we don't want to pass that suffering on to our children.

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'IF WE DON'T HAVE MONEY, WE CAN'T SOCIALIZE'

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Planning and asceticism are always present, especially when she has to make decisions regarding practices of leisure and consumption. The pedagogical investment she made by enrolling her son in the Music Academy, therefore cultivating a taste for more elitist forms of culture, contrasts with her choice of not going to the cinema, the theatre or even coffee shops. She doesn't participate in parents' associations because she feels unsuitable and unconfident, and she considers it a privilege of '*those who are more capable than her*'.

She dedicates her free time to her children, playing with them and caring for them. She

organizes their outings and their leisure time on the beach or in the countryside in the cheapest way possible:

Currently, I am more often in contact with my relatives, brothers-in-law, brothers... It's a bit frustrating: if we don't have money, we can't go out and if we don't go out, we don't socialize. Even if we decide, '*Let's go to Espinbo on Sunday for a coffee*' we might go, but we need to check if we have money for the petrol and the coffees. After all, if that money is needed for rice or noodles, that's going to be my priority.

I attended many concerts when my son was at the Music Academy. They had concerts, rehearsals, Christmas parties, Easter parties. To the cinema or the theatre, I can't go. But there's no lack of movies on TV... I went to the cinema for the first time when I was eighteen, to see Rambo III [laughter].

I was never part of parents' associations because there were always people who looked like they could handle the situation better. And we end up feeling a bit shy: there are always people who seem to be more capable than us...

All the free time we have is for our kids. If I have to roll on the floor with them, I do... Sometimes they play hide and seek. But all the time we have, we spent it with them. From time to time we go to *Arouca* and once it was snowing. It will be two years in March. My daughter was still small, it was crazy. We arrived on the right day, at the right time. It was amazing!

We don't need a lot of money to keep our children happy. In September, we go to the beach and we have picnics. We bring our own food: juice, yoghurts, fruit. And we don't even go to the coffee shop! You don't have to spend money to enjoy a day out.

Let's look at the bright side: I will find work. And, if I find work, I won't need anything else.

Right now, what I wanted the most is to get a job. I'm healthy, I live in peace, I have a home and family support. The only thing I'm missing is a job. And what keeps me going is hope: I feel that it's about to happen... It has to because no one can survive without money. I keep saying: let's live one day at a time and wait for the sun to shine because for sure it won't always rain.

### 6.3. ESTELA: 'MY MOTHER TRIED TO KILL ME WITH A KNIFE'

*Estela é uma mulher bonita de olhos azuis e cabelo louro. Grande parte das nossas conversas girou à volta da sua depressão e da diabetes do filho, que aparentavam ser os eixos centrais de estruturação da sua identidade no momento das entrevistas. Tinha muitas resistências em falar na família de origem, as palavras eram entrecortadas por lágrimas e silêncios.*

*Por sua vontade falou-me das suas relações amorosas, sobretudo dos seus admiradores dos quais não gosta, mas ia mantendo por perto.*

*À medida que as entrevistas foram avançando fui ganhando a confiança de Estela, que me abriu a porta do seu apartamento, localizado num bairro social, e que encontrava bem decorado, limpo e arrumado. Nesse dia conheci o filho de Estela, uma criança linda, loira e de olhos azuis, parecido com a mãe.*

*Estela era apaixonada pela internet e grande parte da última entrevista foi passada a ver fotos de no seu portátil, desde os seus fins de semana com um homem (o filho estava em casa do pai nestas ocasiões) até à sua ida à Roménia, no âmbito de um projeto europeu do município, onde teve a oportunidade de conhecer e fazer amizade com pessoas de outros países, apesar de não conhecer a sua língua e não dominar o Inglês, recorrendo a gestos.*

Estela nasceu em 1976 (tinha 36 anos quando foi entrevistada) e residia num bairro social, num concelho urbano do distrito de Aveiro. Vivia sozinha com o seu filho, que sofria de diabetes.

Estela tinha três irmãos e uma irmã e os seus pais separaram-se quando ela era uma criança. Os seus pais, irmãos e irmã tinham baixas habilitações literárias. O pai era varredor da Câmara e a mãe era operária do calçado. A progenitora atacou-a com uma faca quando Estela era ainda uma criança, tendo sido por isso retirada à mãe e ido viver com os avós paternos.

Quando estes a obrigaram a deixar a escola, contra a recomendação do diretor de turma, tinha doze anos e acabara de completar o 6º ano. No momento das entrevistas encontrava-se a concluir um Curso de Formação Profissional de Técnico Comercial (com estágio), com equivalência ao 12ºano. Durante o Curso esteve catorze dias internada num Hospital Psiquiátrico.

Quando Estela era criança, vivia num bairro social com a mãe, os irmãos e a irmã. Aí viviam com dificuldades financeiras. A mãe trabalhava numa fábrica e trazia trabalho para fazer em casa.

A violência doméstica foi uma das dimensões que mais influenciou a infância de Estela. A sua mãe foi descrita como uma mulher ansiosa e perturbada, que discutia frequentemente com o seu ex-marido e as crianças. Da mesma forma, Estela e os irmãos e irmã foram vítimas de castigos corporais e de falta de amor e cuidado na sua infância. Este abuso e negligência prejudicaram Estela que, em adulta, sofria de problemas de saúde mental. A relação de abuso que teve com a mãe, a impotência, humilhação e violência física que sofreu na sua infância transformaram-na numa adulta traumatizada, com baixa autoestima e baixo autoconceito.

Apesar de a família não valorizar a educação, Estela cresceu em contextos de socialização caracterizados por uma moral de trabalho e de esforço. Frequentou a creche e o ensino pré-escolar, e recorda-se de se sentir responsável pelo seu irmão mais novo, que protegia das outras crianças, recorrendo por vezes ao conflito e à agressão.

Andei na creche e lembro-me que já na altura me pegava com os outros miúdos, porque o meu irmão Miguel era mais novo e tinha que o defender. Era muito querido, uma paz de alma. Deitava-se no chão com meia dúzia de carritos e ficava ali. Olhava sempre por ele e quando o apanhava a chorar, lá estava um ranhoso a tirar-lhe os carritos. Se a coisa não se resolvesse e o miúdo não os devolvesse acabava por me pegar *à bulba!*

Entrou para o 1º ciclo com cinco anos, porque gostava da escola e pediu à mãe. No entanto, a relação entre esta última e os filhos era, como vimos, marcada pela violência:

Um dia a minha mãe tentou matar-me com uma faca, eu tinha cinco anos, por eu ter partido um prato de enfeitar que lhe tinham oferecido de prenda de casamento. Mandou-me lavar a louça, a mim e ao meu irmão, e eu e ele começámos a discutir porque não queríamos, queríamos brincar. Lembro-me de ter puxado a toalha... Não sei como foi, o prato caiu ao chão. Nem sei se fui eu que o parti ou o meu irmão. Ela estava a fazer bonés, veio à cozinha e bateu-nos com a colher de pau. Depois pegou num facão de cortar carne, vinha para me mandar e eu fugi para casa da vizinha. Os vizinhos foram chamar o meu pai e ele veio com a GNR. Levaram-

me num jipe para casa da minha avó. Cheguei toda contente, a fazer de conta que era uma festa, porque ia no jipe.

A minha mãe ainda esteve em Custóias [estabelecimento prisional] a cumprir pena por minha causa, entrava à 6<sup>a</sup> feira à noite e vinha ao domingo. Durante a semana não podia sair de casa à noite, eram ordens do tribunal. Na altura a Dra. Inês [assistente social] ia lá a casa obrigá-la a tomar a medicação, só que ela não tomava... Lembro-me que quando ela era mais nova o meu avô andou com ela no hospital, em Psiquiatria. Se calhar ela também teve maus tratos na infância...

Depois voltei a viver com a minha mãe. Ela prometeu-me que nunca mais me batia, lá me conseguiu iludir e eu fui. Em casa éramos obrigados a lavar a loiça. Depois era a fiscalização, a minha mãe ia lá, se estivesse sujo: 'trás!' Obrigava-nos a fazer os trabalhos de casa e se não estivesse bem também levávamos. Por isso é que eu detesto Matemática, porque sempre que ia fazer os trabalhos e não sabia, ela batia-me e dizia: 'Minha burra!'. Nunca nos pediu desculpa, dizia que fazia aquilo com os nervos.

Quando Estela frequentava o 3<sup>o</sup> ano os seus pais separaram-se. Os maus tratos por parte da mãe continuaram a marcar a sua realidade:

A minha mãe era má, muito má. Às vezes obrigava-me a ir pedir, porque o meu pai não dava pensão de alimentos: 'Já que o teu pai não dá, vais pedir na rua'. Batia-nos e dava-nos maus tratos físicos e psicológicos. Não tinha demonstrações de afeto dela, do meu pai, dos meus avós. Ela tinha de estar sempre a trabalhar, não tinha tempo de contar histórias. Trabalhava na fábrica, depois ainda vinha para casa fazer bonés e o meu pai trabalhava na Câmara a varrer estradas. Ela obrigava-me a arrumar a casa, a lavar a louça e era cada sova! Tinha que ajudar a criar os meus três irmãos, eu e o meu irmão mais velho tínhamos de tratar dos mais novos.

As denúncias de maus tratos feitas pela escola levaram a uma retirada definitiva da guarda de Estela e irmãos e irmã à mãe. Na casa da avó paterna as condições de habitabilidade não eram as mais adequadas e também existia violência física, mas não ao mesmo nível da que existia em casa da mãe:

A minha mãe continuava a bater-nos muito, dava-nos maus tratos. As professoras apresentaram queixa às autoridades e ao meu pai e avós, porque chegávamos à escola todos pisados e mordidos nos braços, até que mais uma vez fomos levados a Tribunal e aí sim, fomos todos viver com o meu pai e avós paternos.

A casa da minha avó não tinha condições, só tinha dois quartos. O meu pai dormia no quarto e eu e os meus irmãos dormíamos todos juntos no sofá: eu e a minha irmã dormíamos à cabeceira e os meus dois irmãos aos pés. Aquilo era uma risota! Na casa da minha avó também havia maus tratos, mas era com um pano da louça e dizia muitas asneiras: ‘Filha da curta!’, *pimba*, arremessava-nos o pano cheio de água de lavar a louça. Mas aquilo à beira do que a minha mãe nos batia não era nada!

O interesse pelos estudos intensificou-se através do relacionamento com a sua melhor amiga de infância (que era, juntamente com Estela, a melhor aluna e que seguiu advocacia) e a influência positiva da sua professora primária, que recorda com carinho. Com efeito, esta professora e a mãe da melhor amiga davam-lhe o carinho e a atenção que não tinha em casa. No polo oposto desenvolveu um trauma (ainda hoje visível) com a disciplina de Matemática, relacionado com as atitudes violentas da mãe sempre que Estela não conseguia fazer os trabalhos de casa dessa disciplina. A sua dependência emocional em relação à professora era tal que quando esta saiu da escola Estela reprovou, comprovando a importância da dimensão emocional da educação, nomeadamente o papel fundamental do apoio da professora para o sucesso escolar.

Na minha infância as boas recordações são da minha professora primária, a D. Estrela, e da Gisela, que é advogada e era a minha melhor amiga. De manhã a mãe dela levava-me para a escola e dava-me sempre o pequeno-almoço: belgas e um pãozinho torrado com manteiga. À noite vinha com a D. Estrela, ia fazer os deveres para casa dela, parece que ainda hoje sinto o cheiro daquela casa! Nós éramos as melhores alunas e a professora metia-nos a ensinar nos intervalos os meninos que tivessem mais dificuldades, dava-nos chupas ou rebuçados. Fui sempre uma excelente aluna até ao dia em que os meus pais se separaram de vez, no 3º ano. Perdi o gosto pela escola porque a minha professora que eu tanto adorava, D. Estrela, decidiu mudar de escola, aí foi o caos. Sofri muito e isso notou-se nos estudos porque de melhor aluna passei a pior e reprovei.

Passada esta crise teve um percurso normal até ao 6º ano, tendo inclusive participado em competições desportivas escolares, até ao momento em que foi obrigada pela avó a abandonar a escola para ir trabalhar, em 1988, contra a vontade de Estela e a recomendação do diretor de turma, para ir trabalhar numa fábrica de calçado e ajudar a sustentar os irmãos e a irmã.

A minha relação com a escola, com os professores e os colegas continuou a ser

boa, nunca havia problemas. Gostava de andar na escola, era boa aluna. No Ciclo cheguei a fazer corta-mato e a ganhar uma medalha e um saco verde e cinzento, com uns risquinhos, fiquei em segundo lugar.

Foi a minha avó que me tirou da escola, no 6º ano. O meu pai não queria, mas a minha avó obrigou-me para ir trabalhar e ajudar os meus irmãos. O meu pai foi chamado pelo diretor de turma que lhe disse que era uma pena retirar-me da escola, porque eu era uma aluna bastante aplicada e que poderia vir a ser alguém na vida, mas não adiantou. Ia fazer treze anos quando saí da escola e comecei a trabalhar. Os meus pais e avós não davam valor a que andássemos a estudar. Queriam o dinheiro, eram materialistas. Os meus irmãos fizeram até à 4.ª classe e ao 6.º ano.

A minha adolescência já não foi tão complicada, apesar de continuarem as idas a Tribunal, devido aos meus avós não terem condições. Os meus irmãos foram para centros de acolhimento e eu, como era mais velha e já trabalhava, os meus avós não me deixaram ir. O Juiz deu-me a escolher e eu decidi ficar com eles, até porque o meu pai já tinha refeito a vida com outra pessoa. Eu era a filha querida do meu pai antes de ele conhecer a minha madrasta. Depois disso nunca mais ligou grande coisa, teve mais cinco filhos. Nunca fui ver os meus irmãos aos centros, por medo, talvez, de não me controlar perto deles e chorar, porque sabia que eles lá não eram felizes.

Desses dias, recorda como momentos felizes passar as vésperas de Natal sozinha com a prima quando eram ambas crianças.

O Natal era quase sempre sozinha com a minha prima. A minha avó ia passar o Natal a casa dos meus tios e eu e a minha prima passávamos o Natal sozinhas. Os meus tios não ligavam nada ao Natal nem à filha. Eu e ela ficávamos lá em casa, pegávamos naquelas velas vermelhas de cemitério e acendíamos, púnhamos uma mesa toda bonita e comíamos à luz de velas. Os pais dela moravam por baixo dos meus avós e depois andei a chatear os meus tios para a deixarem vir dormir comigo, quando os meus irmãos foram para o colégio. Ela depois ficou também a viver connosco em casa da minha avó.

Frequentava o Grupo de Jovens Cristãos, fiz o meu Convívio Fraternal com dezasseis anos e o Crisma com dezoito anos, fui catequista. Era muito dedicada a tudo o que estava ligado à Igreja. Fazia retiros, convivia com jovens de outras Paróquias e a minha juventude resumiu-se basicamente a isto.

Estela começou a trabalhar aos doze anos, por vezes acumulando dois trabalhos, para ganhar mais dinheiro:

Comecei a trabalhar com doze anos, mas antes disso já trabalhava nas férias da escola. A minha avó mandava-nos para uma fábrica de calçado, fazer caixas. Depois comecei a aprender a fazer sapatos, estive nessa fábrica até aos dezoito anos. Saí porque nunca quis trabalhar em sapatos, gostei sempre de trabalhar em comércio. Fui trabalhar para um pronto-a-vestir, estive lá quatro anos. Como o patrão pagava mal resolvi ir trabalhar para uma fábrica de bordados. Trabalhava das quatro à meia-noite, tinha a manhã livre, comecei a trabalhar no supermercado, das sete ao meio-dia, a fazer limpeza. Acabou o contrato no supermercado, comecei a fazer promoções de vendas nos hipermercados. Para sair às quatro horas não dava tempo para chegar à fábrica, porque não tinha carta de condução. Saía mais cedo meia hora, pedia aos chefes e ia a correr para a fábrica para pegar ao trabalho e sair à meia-noite. Depois trabalhei *part-time* noutra hipermercado, quando tive o meu filho.

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#### ‘QUANDO EU O VI FOI AMOR À PRIMEIRA VISTA’

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A falta de amor e a negligência na infância e juventude poderão estar na base da sua instabilidade nas relações íntimas da vida adulta. Tornou-se mãe aos 27 anos e quando a criança tinha nove meses decidiu deixar o pai do seu filho, acusando-o de ser demasiado possessivo.

Tive o meu primeiro namorado aos dezoito anos, namorei com ele nove anos, antes de conhecer o pai do Daniel. Já tínhamos comprado um apartamento e vivemos quase dois anos juntos. Depois comecei a gostar do pai do Daniel e deixei o meu namorado, fui viver com ele. Atraíu-me a voz, trabalhava na rádio e eu punha-me a imaginar como ele era. Comecei a falar com ele nos discos pedidos, depois começou a falar comigo em privado, dizia que achava que eu era uma pessoa triste e com as conversas dele, lá me conseguiu *elubriar*. Quando eu o vi foi amor à primeira vista e para ele também. Começámos a namorar e só o via a ele! Nunca tinha-me aparecido um rapaz que me desse rosas, que me fizesse jantar à luz de velas. Era meigo, carinhoso, amigo, tudo o que uma mulher desejava num homem.

Houve uma altura em que dizia que não queria filhos, porque não queria fazer aos

filhos o que os meus pais fizeram a mim. Mas andei numa psicóloga e ela disse que isso não ia acontecer. Com o pai do Daniel comecei a mudar de atitude e decidi ter um filho. O momento mais feliz da minha vida foi o nascimento dele, quando tinha 27 anos. Não casei, por opção, só estivemos juntos na parte que estive grávida e antes um tempo. Acabámos quando o Daniel ia fazer nove meses, porque não nos dávamos, parecia o cão e o gato. Ele sempre deu pensão de alimentos, é um pai presente, mas foi uma ilusão. Era muito obcecado, possessivo e tinha ciúmes doentios, não me deixava trabalhar, ir ao supermercado sozinha, tinha de viver em função dele.

Após a separação viveu uma temporada com o filho em casa da mãe que demonstrou continuar a ser uma pessoa conflituosa e Estela teve de sair. A autarquia atribuiu-lhe então uma habitação social onde Estela reside desde então.

Estive um tempo a viver com a minha mãe, mas ela não nos deixava tomar banho todos os dias, dizia que estávamos sempre a gastar água. Eu fazia limpezas no espaço de atendimento da Câmara no bairro e foram eles que me arranjaram a casa, porque eu chegava lá todos os dias a chorar e a minha mãe ia lá implicar comigo, fazer barulho. Às vezes tinham que a pôr de lá para fora. Fazia-me a vida negra! Foram eles a minha tábua de salvação!

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#### ‘DISCRIMINARAM-ME POR DIZER QUE TINHA UM FILHO DIABÉTICO’

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A vida laboral de Estela sofreu um revés quando o filho teve uma crise provocada pela diabetes e teve de ficar internado durante três meses. Nessa altura foi despedida e depois disso foi discriminada quando procurava emprego por causa da doença do filho. Sente que foi alvo de discriminação devido à doença do filho, uma vez que perdeu três empregos e uma bolsa de estudo devido a absentismo. Ao mesmo tempo, a escola do filho desresponsabilizou-se por cuidar da criança em situação de crise, não lhe dando insulina e chamando-a de cada vez que tal era necessário, o que impedia a mãe de manter uma vida profissional, e excluía a criança das visitas de estudo e idas à praia. Numa tentativa de influenciar a posição da instituição de ensino, e chamando a atenção para os direitos de cidadania do filho, Estela denunciou a situação à CPCJ, resolvendo-a.

Vim trabalhar *part-time* para outro emprego, estava no talho. Entretanto, fui trabalhar para um restaurante italiano. O Daniel ficou diabético aos dois anos e

esteve três meses internado, foi quando fui despedida, porque eles não podiam estar sem funcionários na altura do Natal. Depois fui trabalhar para a *McDonald's*.

Por causa do Daniel estar doente, estive desempregada muito tempo. Discriminaram-me por dizer que tinha um filho diabético. A escola também não ajudou, porque estavam-me sempre a chamar: ele tinha hipoglicemias, hiperglicemias ou tinha crises e ia para o hospital em coma. Só comecei a ter mais estabilidade quando a Dra. Ana [assistente social] começou a aprender a dar-lhe insulina e a saber atuar. Ela ia à escola dar insulina, porque lá ninguém lha dava. Depois tinham a praia, ele não ia. Havia passeios, era discriminado, não ia porque era diabético, tinham medo que acontecesse alguma coisa. Não queriam assumir responsabilidades nenhuma. Tivemos que pôr isso na Comissão de Proteção de Menores.

A primeira vez que me candidatei ao RSI foi quando o Daniel ficou diabético, em 2005. Não mo deram, disseram que não era carenciada. Estive dois anos sem receber nada, não tinha dinheiro para comer, para medicação, para nada. Tinha casa, mas não tinha dinheiro para pagar luz e água. Foram a Dra. Ana, a minha amiga que agora é advogada e a mãe dela que me ajudaram dois anos. Eu estava no hospital de dia e de noite com o Daniel, passávamos lá muito tempo.

O RSI na altura ajudou e fazia-me falta esse dinheiro. Ajudou-me a pagar a luz, a água, os bens de primeira necessidade, a medicação.

Estela confessa que não se recorda das obrigações do contrato que assinou porque na altura estava sob o efeito de medicação para os seus problemas de saúde mental, mas admite que a sua inserção profissional não foi afetada pela atribuição do subsídio pois a iniciativa de procurar trabalho foi sempre da sua parte. Por outro lado, há no seu discurso a manifestação de um desejo de autonomia face ao RSI:

Já nem me lembro do meu contrato. Nem sei o que é que assinei porque nessa altura, andava a levar medicação intravenosa, estava toda atrofiada das ideias. A mim não mudou nada, porque eu recebo o RSI e nunca me chamaram para trabalho. A Dra. Paula chamou-me para fazer uma formação em Higiene e Segurança no Trabalho, mas eu já tinha essa feita e não podia fazê-la outra vez.

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## ‘EU JÁ ESTIVE NA CASA DE TOLOS’

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Estela avalia o seu regresso à escola como importante, no sentido em que aumentou as suas qualificações. Gostou das aulas, dos professores, dos colegas e das disciplinas, embora tivesse preferido um curso de Restauração, que não estava disponível na altura. Por motivos geográficos, financeiros e para cuidar do filho, acabou por ficar no curso que tinha vagas e que ficava mais perto de casa. Estela afirma que gostou da turma, dos professores, que obteve bons resultados, bem como se preparou melhor para uma futura profissão:

Quando estava a trabalhar na *McDonald's* fiz o RVCC<sup>23</sup> do 9.º ano à noite, mas não aprendi nada com aquilo. Depois tomei a iniciativa de fazer o 12.º ano, porque queria estudar, mas vi que durante a noite não valia pena fazer, não se aprende nada. Durante o dia valeu a pena e é mais puxado. Não é como o ensino recorrente, é mais fácil talvez. Mas para quem já saiu da escola há uns anos é difícil.

Optei pelo curso de Técnico Comercial, com equivalência ao 12º ano, num Centro de Formação profissional, que estou a acabar agora, porque não tinha mesmo nenhum de Restauração. Ainda tentei ver com a Dra. Ana onde havia de Hotelaria, mas era um curso de três anos e eu não tinha possibilidades de pagar propinas, não fui. Também havia no Porto, aí já não era a pagar, só que era chato por causa do Daniel, ir e vir todos os dias... Tive uma turma espetacular, muito unida, éramos seis raparigas e um rapaz. Todos os formadores nos elogiaram bastante porque quase nunca íamos aos intervalos, ficávamos dentro da sala, ajudávamo-nos mutuamente e eles apreciavam a nossa colaboração dentro e fora de aulas. O ambiente com os professores era bom. Na sala de aulas cumpriam com o que tinham de cumprir, havia rigidez, mas havia aquele espaço para brincar connosco. Eles sabiam até onde podiam ir e nós também, estudar é estudar, brincar é brincar.

Foi um ano e três meses, para ter equivalência ao 12º ano e um curso profissional. Gostei de Cidadania e Empregabilidade, Língua e Comunicação, Marketing/

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<sup>23</sup> RVCC – Reconhecimento, Validação e Certificação de Competências

Publicidade. Gostei também de Atendimento ao Público, Atendimento Telefónico, Arquivo. Inglês não, Gestão de Stocks também não, tudo o que seja números... Gostava de fazer outra língua, porque não tive bases de Inglês, estudei Francês e foi muito difícil acompanhar. Na parte do Inglês acho que devíamos estar todos no mesmo patamar, porque tínhamos colegas que já estavam mais avançados e outros que não tiveram bases de Inglês. Não conseguíamos acompanhá-los. Tirei boas notas praticamente em tudo.

Enriqueci a nível pessoal e profissional. Aprendi bastantes coisas... Não vejo nenhum aspeto negativo, acho que foi tudo bom. Amadureci, adquiri novos conhecimentos e fiquei mais preparada para a área profissional.

Apesar da satisfação que a frequência do curso profissional lhe proporcionou, Estela caiu num estado depressivo, na sequência de uma relação amorosa de codependência com um homem viciado em jogo:

Quando namorei com o Chino, o engenheiro, apanhei uma depressão, porque ele era viciado no casino... Namoramos dois anos, estava praticamente a viver comigo, só não tinha a roupa, era muito meu amigo e do Daniel, era tudo à grande e à francesa, mas comecei a ter crises de ansiedade e ataques de pânico. Ia buscá-lo ao casino, para ver se ele perdia o vício, chamava táxis, os meus colegas, a minha irmã... Queria ajudá-lo, queria que ele fosse para uma casa de recuperação no Porto. Ele disse que ia mudar mas nunca mais mudava. Consegui que durante dois meses não fosse ao casino, mas quando começou o meu curso, ele passou a ir lá todos os dias. Foi aí que comecei a ficar doente. Estava nas aulas sempre a olhar para o telemóvel, a ver as horas, à espera que ele mandasse uma mensagem. Quando não mandava, já sabia que estava no casino. Eu criava *Facebooks* falsos para entrar na conta dele. Ia muitas vezes da escola para o hospital, na ambulância, com faltas de oxigénio no sangue, ia a tremer, no hospital pensavam que eu tinha epilepsia, metiam comprimidos debaixo da língua, às vezes não passava, tinha que ser com injeções. Uma vez enganei-me a dar a insulina ao Daniel, podia tê-lo matado. Em vez de dar a injeção lenta, dei-lhe duas unidades de insulina rápida. Nesse dia tomei a decisão de deixar o Chino. Quando eu deixei-o ele ficou a chorar, disse-lhe: 'Escolhe. Ou o casino ou eu'. Era boa pessoa, tinha bom coração, era bonito por dentro, e eu sofria mais por saber que ia-se tornar num farrapo humano. Depois ele estava-me sempre a procurar, mandava-me mensagens.

Na sequência destes sintomas ansiogénicos, teve uma crise e foi institucionalizada num hospital psiquiátrico, depois de ter tentado atacar a irmã com uma faca (tal como a mãe lhe tinha feito quando Estela era criança). A seguir à sua institucionalização, foi fortemente medicada com antidepressivos e ansiolíticos.

Entretanto, no ano passado, apanhei uma grande depressão e tive que sair a meio do curso para ser internada catorze dias. Eu já estive na casa de tolos. Tinha discutido por causa da minha mãe com a minha irmã, atirei-lhe uma faca e depois eu e ela andámos à porrada. A minha mãe denunciou-me. Depois veio aqui o agente falar com a Dra. Ana, ela nem queria acreditar. Mas foi bom, se eu soubesse já tinha feito isso antes, porque estava a precisar de ser internada há muito tempo. Eu já faltava há uma semana às aulas, só me vestia de propósito para vir buscar o Daniel, vinha com os livros, faz de conta que vinha da escola, e ia outra vez para casa. Chegava a casa tirava a roupa e ia dormir, mas ninguém sabia. Chegámos ao posto da polícia, eles chamaram a ambulância e foi o agente Silva e a Dra. Paula [psicóloga] sempre comigo. Antes de irmos a Dra. Ana estava aqui a chorar e eu ia toda contente. Foi um alívio para mim quando me vieram buscar.

Primeiro fomos ao hospital de S. João. Estavam lá um ror de psiquiatras a falar comigo, com a Dra. e o polícia: ‘Não vejo por que é que ela há de ser internada. Está com uma depressão, precisa de acompanhamento e precisa de ser medicada. Ser internada só lhe vai fazer mal e para lá ainda pior’. Mas eu fui. Nunca tinha ido a uma casa daquelas, mandaram-me tirar o relógio, os travessões, o cinto das calças... Fui falar com o médico e a Dra. Paula foi comigo... Tiraram-me o telemóvel (foi bom, quando vim embora nem tinha vício de mensagens, nem da *internet*). Fecharam a porta à chave, a Dra. Paula do outro lado com o polícia... Tinha vidros, um quartinho e estava lá os enfermeiros e os médicos, e nós estávamos todos, eu e uma série de rapazes e raparigas. Eles é que estavam doentes, todos pedrados mesmo! Uma rapariga tirava as calças do pijama, andava de fralditas, tirava-as e começava, sem cuecas, sem nada: ‘Aiiii!’. Alguns andavam à porrada uns com os outros... No segundo dia estava cansada de estar lá! Disse ao enfermeiro: ‘Preciso de falar com o médico para ver se ele me deixa ir lá fora arejar, porque estou a ficar maluca aqui dentro!’. O médico deixava-me ir passear durante o dia, duas horas de manhã e duas horas de tarde. Estava na sala pior de todos, a ser vigiada a toda a hora. Alguns estavam lá por causa da droga, ficaram todos atrofiados. Eu disse ao médico: ‘Não consigo estar ali. Já estou a ficar maluca da

cabeça, estou cansada! Ainda estou pior do que o que vim para aqui!’ O médico começou-se a rir: ‘Está bem, então vamos passar para outra sala’. Depois fui para uma sala dos intermédios, que já estavam melhores, aí é que arranjei amigos. Não tinha consultas nenhuma, só estava medicada. A única consulta que tive foi quando fiquei lá internada. Estava sob medicação, comia e descansava, mais nada.

Depois de estar internada estive quase o ano todo aqui no hospital em Psiquiatria e a fazer psicoterapia. Fiz psicodrama, hidroginástica, vários tratamentos. Não gostava nada de psicodrama, mas fez-me bem. Se fosse agora fazia, mas na altura estava sempre a chorar. Também fazia sessões de relaxamento, mas só com a música adormecia! Uma coisa que eu conseguia fazer e sentia-me mesmo bem, era hidroginástica. Sentia-me relaxada, sentia-me leve, quando saía não pensava em nada! Aqui no hospital a gente fazia jogos, terapia ocupacional... Agora só vou às consultas regulares, não faço lá nada, mas se eu ligar para a enfermeira a dizer que não me estou a sentir bem, vou lá, almoço no hospital, e falo com o médico ou com a enfermeira. Eles estão sempre disponíveis para mim.

Estela confessa que, num momento de crise, se tornou violenta em relação ao filho, ativando a sua disposição para a violência, reproduzindo atos de que tinha sido vítima enquanto criança e revivendo a frustração face à disciplina de Matemática:

Uma vez no inverno dei banho ao Daniel em água fria. Fiz isso uma vez, porque ele faz chichi na cama e eu pensava que ele fazia por ser porco... Houve uma altura que também lhe bati. Agora mudei, depois que fiz o tratamento no hospital. Inconscientemente, estava a fazer o que a minha mãe me fazia a mim e aos meus irmãos. Outra vez estava-lhe a explicar Matemática e dei comigo a bater-lhe e a chamá-lo burro. Depois vi-o a chorar como eu chorava, a soluçar, de muito nervoso e reví-o em mim.

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#### ‘DEPOIS DE TER ESTADO INTERNADA SENTIA-ME UMA BURRA’

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Após o internamento, Estela teve de lidar com grandes dificuldades de concentração nos estudos devido à medicação que teve como consequência uma diminuição do aproveitamento escolar. Tal situação causou em si sentimentos de tristeza e revolta, pensando mesmo em desistir do curso. No entanto, nessa altura foi decisivo querer concluir o 12º ano esforçar-se para conseguir atingir o seu sonho. Apesar de não descartar a

possibilidade de tirar mais cursos no futuro, admitia que sente dificuldades em conciliar o estudo com o cuidar do filho.

Voltei este ano para continuar o que tinha parado e estou a fazer o estágio. Depois lá vou eu para o fundo de desemprego. O estágio estou a fazer no *shopping*, numa loja de roupa de desporto...

Depois de ter estado internada sentia-me uma burra! Queria escrever textos, não sabia. Sentia-me mesmo sem capacidades nenhuma. De uma das melhores alunas passei a pior. Este ano fiquei outra vez com uma depressão, pensei em desistir porque não tinha forças, não tinha capacidade de memorizar as coisas... Não conseguia ouvir os professores, eles estavam a falar para mim, mas a minha cabeça estava sempre a Leste, eu estava ali mas estava só o corpo, a cabeça andava a vaguear não sei por onde, nem eu sabia. Baixei as notas, foram mesmo más. Alguns professores deixaram passar algum tempo e depois é que fiz as minhas simulações... Começava a enrolar a língua por causa da medicação, não conseguia. Chegava a casa e chorava, ficava desanimada, queria desistir do curso porque sentia-me mal, via que estava a ser uma má aluna, sentia-me triste porque estava a baixar as notas. Não conseguia, não tinha poder de concentração. Houve um teste que eu fiz como se estivesse a escrever *smx*... Ficava revoltada quando tirava más notas, começava a chorar. Os professores sabiam, mas às vezes entravam professores novos e não queria estar a contar a mesma coisa. Comecei a chorar porque não queria sair da escola. Ir outra vez para a escola era um sonho que eu queria concretizar, porque nunca quis sair, gostei sempre de estudar. Nessa altura foi decisivo eu querer mesmo acabar o 12.º ano e ver que faltava só meio ano.

Ir estudar foi bom, mas custou-me muito, porque não é fácil conciliar a escola com a vida de casa e depois com o filho, ainda para mais sozinha... Eu ainda gostava de estudar mais só que agora sinto-me muito cansada, não sinto capacidades para me licenciar. Para fazer o 12.º ano vi-me um bocado atrapalhada.

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‘NINGUÉM É PAI DE NINGUÉM PARA ANDAR A PAGAR PARA OUTROS  
ESTAREM EM CASA SEM FAZER NADA’

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Na altura das entrevistas, Estela recebia 100 euros de RSI, 145 euros da pensão de alimentos e do abono do filho e 201 euros do subsídio de doença de Daniel.

Temporariamente estava ainda a receber um subsídio (com duração máxima de seis meses) atribuído pela CPCJ para despesas com o filho, no valor de 150 euros e ajuda alimentar. As suas principais despesas eram com a alimentação e a medicação (sua e do seu filho).

Agora estou a receber RSI e este mês tiraram-me 30 e tal euros, não sei porquê. Só recebi 101 euros. Costumava receber 134. Recebo esse, 145 da pensão de alimentos e o abono do Daniel, mais o subsídio de doença dele, que são 201 euros. E também estou a receber da Comissão de Menores, para as despesas do Daniel, 150 euros, mas é só seis meses, já deve estar a acabar. A Dra. Ana dá ajuda do Banco de Alimentos. E depois tenho a minha medicação e a do Daniel. Acho que o valor do RSI devia ser mais, porque 100 euros não dá para nada. Nem para a minha medicação dá.

Nas suas palavras tentava demarcar-se do estigma de ser beneficiária do RSI, embora, paradoxalmente, o reproduzisse relativamente aos ‘outros’:

Na escola sabiam que eu recebia o RSI e falam disso... Eu sei que aquilo que eles dizem não era para mim, os meus colegas não dizem isso, e os professores também dizem que não era para mim, porque sabem da minha situação, mas sei que eles falam dessas coisas e às vezes sinto-me triste, aquilo mexe comigo, porque também sou beneficiária. Pensam que as pessoas que estão no RSI são umas malandras e é verdade, eu concordo com tudo o que dizem: ‘estão em casa sem fazer nada, passam as tardes nos cafés, vão comer todos os dias fora quando vem o dinheiro e vão aos hipermercados compram bolachas de qualidade, guloseimas, chega-se a meio do mês já não têm dinheiro...’ Mesmo que uma pessoa não queira dar razão a essas pessoas, tem que dar razão. Aqui no bairro acontece muito isso. Não é o meu caso. Concordo com o que estão a fazer no Porto. Quando fui ao fórum da EAPN<sup>24</sup> já tinha dito que as pessoas que estão a receber RSI deviam estar a fazer algum trabalho, não deviam estar a receber sem fazer nada. O Estado devia dar oportunidades de trabalho, já que as empresas não dão, haviam de os obrigar a fazer

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<sup>24</sup> European Anti-Poverty Network

alguma coisa, nem que fosse pintar casas, limpar matos. Ninguém é pai de ninguém para andar a pagar para os outros estarem em casa sem fazer nada. Esse dinheiro é dado, mas é mal empregue. Se é aquelas pessoas que estão mesmo por necessidade, que têm filhos doentes, pais acamados ou que têm pessoas que estão mesmo doentes e que não podem fazer nada, concordo em dar esse dinheiro. Se é aquelas pessoas que estão em casa, que podem trabalhar, que estão bem de saúde, acho que era pô-las a trabalhar. É agora o meu caso: estou a acabar o curso, estou bem de saúde, posso muito bem trabalhar. Ajudou-me muito, mas não quero estar toda a vida a depender disso. Quero estar a depender de mim, quero ter a minha vida, sem ter que estar a viver à custa dos outros. Se conseguir trabalho já não preciso disso para nada, porque não tenho vícios e sou organizada nas contas.

Seguindo o raciocínio anterior, demarcava-se do rótulo de pobre. Considerava a assistente social que trabalhava no bairro social onde Estela residia como ‘uma mãe, amiga e confidente, a irmã que nunca teve’. Era ela que tomava conta do filho de Estela quando estava está doente ou tinha de trabalhar. Ao mesmo tempo, havia uma forte dependência e obediência da entrevistada relativamente àquela profissional, bem como às recomendações do seu médico:

Pobre não sou, só se for de espírito. [risos] Ser pobre é não ter nada para comer, como eu já estive quando o Daniel foi internado, não tinha trabalho, considerava-me mesmo pobre, vi o que era pobreza. Desde que tenha o comer para o dia-a-dia, os bens essenciais, não me sinto pobre. Pobre é não ter saúde, como o Daniel, que é diabético... A Dra. Ana diz: ‘O seu mal é estar sempre à espera que as pessoas a ajudem. Qualquer coisita vai ela: Dr. Miguel, Dra. Ana’. Às vezes vou abaixo, deixo de tomar a medicação. Deixo-me ir abaixo porque quero e como sei que eles estão sempre lá para me ajudar, recorro a eles. Abuso um bocado nisso, é o que ela diz. Ela é como minha mãe, chego lá a qualquer hora e ela atende-me. Acabo por ter um bocado de ciúmes quando ela não está ali.

Estela demonstrava ainda responsabilidade e estratégia nos cuidados ao filho ao ter entrado em contacto com a Associação de Diabéticos de Portugal e obtido informações sobre recursos de saúde para melhor o poder ajudar.

Agora está tudo bem. Melhorou muito depois que o levei para o Hospital de S. João, no Porto, porque agora está a ser seguido por um Professor. Foi através da *internet* que o consegui meter nesse Hospital. Faço parte da EAPN e convidaram-

me para ir dar o meu testemunho por causa da pobreza envergonhada. Fui para o debate e perguntei por que é que não pagavam os medicamentos aos idosos e por que é que não pagavam esta injeção e os coisos aos diabéticos. Estava lá o presidente da Segurança Social e eu discuti com ele, mas depois deu-me razão. Também estava lá uma senhora a substituir a Ministra da Saúde e no final ela disse que tinha gostado muito do debate e das perguntas que eu fiz. Disse para entrar em contacto com a Associação de Diabéticos de Portugal, através da *internet*. Cheguei a casa, foi a primeira coisa que fiz, estive a ver o *site* deles e adicionei o presidente no meu *MSN*. A Associação deu-me um contacto de uma enfermeira do Hospital S. João. Aproveitei logo e mais tarde comecei a pedir informações. Ela disse-me o dia em que os especialistas estavam nas Urgências e fui com o Daniel de camioneta, apanhei o metro, lá estava eu. Nem sabia onde é que aquilo ficava, não conhecia nada. À médica que me atendeu disse que o meu filho estava todo descontrolado. Ela retificou as doses de insulina e depois disse 'Para a semana está cá o Professor, que faz parte da minha equipa, vai ser visto por ele e depois fica aqui a ser seguido'. Anda lá em tudo: no psicólogo, na nutricionista, na médica dos rins, dentista e oftalmologista.

Estela também necessitava de acompanhamento médico e medicação permanente, devido a questões de saúde mental. Revelou-me que, por sofrer de uma perturbação *borderline* da personalidade, o seu equilíbrio emocional é delicado, passando por vezes por períodos de instabilidade e outros de depressão. Nessas ocasiões tem tendência para duvidar das suas capacidades como mãe:

Tenho uma personalidade *borderline*. De vez em quando tenho recaídas, tenho que ir ao hospital, porque o comportamento é muito instável, uma hora estou muito bem e de repente vou muito abaixo. Já estive este ano a levar medicação intravenosa, porque tive uma recaída. Bloqueio muitas vezes, o médico diz que é da minha ansiedade. Manda-me tomar metade de um ansiolítico de manhã, metade ao meio-dia, metade à noite, mas eu não estou a fazer isso porque dá muito sono. Já tomo muita medicação, se eu fizer isso estou sempre a dormir. Às vezes fico bloqueada e quero dizer certas coisas e faltam-me palavras... Não me sinto capaz de continuar os estudos.

Quando tenho recaídas deixo de ir à escola, meto-me logo na cama. Agora nas férias vou ter que me pôr a pau, senão não saio de casa, meto tudo escuro... Deixo de arrumar a casa. É logo o primeiro sintoma. Depois deixo de ter gosto em mim,

deixo de me arranjar. Parece os bichinhos, não faço nada. Fico enfiada dentro de casa.

Estou a tomar antidepressivo e um estabilizador de humor também... O médico da escola diz que é muita medicação... O médico já me reduziu, só que agora tornou-me a aumentar e como tive uma recaída forte ele não me reduz tão cedo. Eu parei e estive mesmo aflita desta vez. Estou bem com o Dr. Miguel, gosto muito dele. Não é de falar muito, mas o olhar dele já diz tudo. Deixa-me falar, falar, falar, depois põe-se a olhar e com o olhar parece que entendo o que ele quer dizer. No final dá a opinião e diz: 'Agora tu fazes o que quiseres, deixo ao teu critério...' Ele antes tratava-me por 'você', agora trata-me por 'tu'. Estou com ele desde o ano passado. Uma vez disse-me: 'Não pode estar sempre a dizer que é uma má mãe'. Obrigou-me a escrever no papel que eu era uma boa mãe e olhar para o espelho e repetir isso.

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#### 'PASSATEMPOS? *INTERNET* E DORMIR'

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Estela declarava gostar do apartamento onde residia e a renda que pagava era bastante acessível, no entanto demonstrava algum desgosto face ao bairro, protegendo o filho de brincar sozinho na rua:

Estou a pagar de renda 4,85 euros, por um T2. A renda é baixinha, porque estou a estudar. Gostava de mudar, mas não estou a fazer conta de ter nenhuma relação, estou bem com o Daniel.

Na casa gosto de morar, no bairro não gosto muito, mas tem que ser, não tenho mais nada. O ambiente não é muito bom, mas quando eu vim para aqui era muito pior, estava sempre aí a Polícia, havia droga, discussões entre as pessoas. Era um bairro mais conflituoso e tinha muita fama. As pessoas é que estragam, porque as coisas estão em condições, estão bem conservadas... Devia ter um campo de futebol para os meninos, muitas vezes eles estão ali a jogar à bola e vai para os vidros. Eu não deixo o Daniel ir para lá sozinho.

Admitia que tinha vergonha de dizer que residia num bairro social, devido ao estigma e preconceitos associados a este tipo de habitação e assumia que essa vergonha era sentida mais a nível pessoal (colegas de escola, amigos, namorados) do que a nível profissional:

Às vezes na escola começam a falar de bairros sociais, em conversas com os

professores de Cidadania. Criam-se estereótipos e nem tudo é verdade, que há droga, prostituição. Eles têm todas essas ideias e às vezes digo: ‘Eu moro num bairro de habitação social’ e eles ficam a olhar para mim. Já aconteceu sair com amigos, vêm-me trazer a casa e dizem:

‘Tu moras aqui?!’

‘Pois moro. Tens algum problema contra isso?’

Às vezes sinto-me mal, evito que eles me vêm trazer a casa, porque tenho um bocado de vergonha de dizer que moro aqui... Antes era mais, agora já não ligo muito. Se for sair com uma pessoa, digo logo: ‘Moro num bairro de habitação social’ e não tenho problema. É mais a nível pessoal, profissionalmente nunca me disseram nada.

No momento da entrevista, Estela não tinha qualquer companheiro, ainda que chamasse a atenção do sexo oposto:

Já namorei com vários rapazes, porque às vezes sinto-me sozinha e precisava de alguém, mas querem todos o mesmo, não querem nada sério.

Tenho dois rapazes que gostam mesmo de mim, tenho pena de não gostar deles. Um já anda atrás de mim ainda eu trabalhava na *McDonald's*. Esse rapaz não desiste, está-me sempre a convidar para sair e eu trato-o tão mal... Fico irritada porque não há nada nele de que eu goste e dá-me nervos. Às vezes tenta comprar o Daniel para ver se também me compra a mim. E tem outro que é pasteleiro, esse todos os dias me chateia. Eu não gosto deles.

Na altura das entrevistas, quando não se sentia deprimida, passava uma grande quantidade de tempo na *internet*, nomeadamente no *Facebook*, e a pesquisar sobre diabetes. Para além disso falava com médicas/os, enfermeiros/as e outras pessoas. Fazia parte da associação de diabéticos num hospital e da EAPN Portugal, e era voluntária. Também participou num Projeto Europeu dinamizado por uma entidade pública, que incluiu uma viagem à Roménia, a realização de trabalhos manuais, a dinamização de um grupo de teatro, visitas e atividades de intercâmbio cultural:

Estou sempre em casa, não sou muito de sair. Dou-me mais com a família de parte da minha mãe, com uma tia e primas. Aqui no bairro não se pode dar confiança. A única para quem eu falo é a minha vizinha da frente, as filhas dela estão formadas, e a D. Teresa, a de baixo, mas é difícil encontra-las. Na escola tenho os meus amigos

e falo com eles, trocamos mensagens e no *Facebook* também, às vezes *e-mails*. Passatempos? *Internet* e dormir. Ando na *internet* desde que fiz o 9.º ano, porque tinha que fazer trabalhos e mandar para a plataforma. Não tinha computador, depois é que o comprei. Na *internet* estou no *Facebook*. Às vezes ando num *blog* de diabéticos a pesquisar e a ver receitas. Vejo a telenovela da TVI, à noite, só a primeira. Ao cinema fui com o Daniel na semana passada, porque a minha tia me pagou, senão não ia, não posso andar a gastar dinheiro. Teatro, espetáculos de música ia aos Paços da Cultura porque fiz parte de um projeto do Museu, em parceria com a Câmara, e tinha acesso a bilhetes de graça. Ia com o Daniel quase todos os fins de semana, mas agora já acabou. Através desse Projeto também fui à Roménia: fomos a museus, a mosteiros de freiras, a igrejas ortodoxas. Gostei muito, foi muito bonito. Tenho saudades, foi uma risota. Elas mal falam Inglês, eu desenrasquei-me com elas em Francês. Também fizemos trabalhos manuais. Está no Museu a manta de retalhos que fizemos e onde escrevemos uma mensagem. Eu escrevi o que tinha sido importante para mim: ‘O que eu gostei mais foi ter ido à Roménia. Hoje deixo ficar nesta mantinha de retalhos um pedacinho de mim, uma das coisas mais lindas que aconteceu na vida, o facto de ter gerado uma criança linda e perfeitinha, que é o meu rico filhinho, amo-te muito’. Em Portugal, gostei das visitas que fizemos a museus, às caves do vinho do Porto, à Casa do Infante. Tivemos um espetáculo que foi de fado e um em que eu também participei, do grupo de teatro. Gostava de fazer voluntariado fora. Ainda hoje se não tivesse o Daniel ia fazer. Aqui dentro só fiz com as doutoras a recolha de alimentos.

Ainda faço parte do fórum anti-pobreza. Estão sempre a mandar *e-mails* para ir a reuniões e de vez em quando telefonam. Quando sair da escola já começo outra vez a ir a reuniões, enquanto não tiver trabalho. Já fiz lá 2 cursos de *coaching* com o psicólogo, sobre o que temos de fazer para alcançar as nossas metas e nos ajudar a tomar decisões. Eu sei que tenho que trabalhar na minha autoestima. Quando ando mais em baixo, às vezes sinto-me gorda, feia...

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### ‘QUERO O QUE NUNCA ME DERAM A MIM’

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No futuro, os seus objetivos passavam por concluir o 12º ano e começar a trabalhar. Gostaria ainda de frequentar um curso de Restauração e de Hotelaria e sonhava em tornar-se cozinheira.

Estela era uma mãe preocupada. As suas preocupações e anseios eram com a saúde e os estudos do filho, escolhendo estrategicamente as disciplinas que mais tarde lhe poderiam dar vantagem competitiva.

No futuro espero acabar o 12.º ano, espero que corra bem o estágio para terminar, trabalhar... Quando começar a trabalhar, quero mobilar a minha casa, mas agora não tenho dinheiro.

As minhas preocupações são com a saúde e a educação do Daniel. A primeira coisa que o preocupa muito é fazer os trabalhos de casa sempre que chega da escola. Não é capaz de deixar os trabalhos para mais logo ou para amanhã. Às vezes nem quer lanchar! Uma vez castiguei-o, mandei-o deitar sem fazer os trabalhos de casa. Acordou no sábado às cinco da manhã, queria fazer os deveres. Não sai a mim, ao pai não sei. Anda sempre preocupado com os livros da escola [o filho aparece e pergunta à mãe se os livros da escola já vieram]. E já está a perguntar: 'Ó mãe, e se eu não passar na 4.ª?'. Já está a perguntar isso desde que foi buscar as notas! Todos os anos é isto. Tem Inglês na escola, mas é muito pobrezinho. Para o Daniel é importante a Informática e o Inglês, quem não souber trabalhar bem com a Informática e não dominar bem o Inglês não se safa nos dias de hoje. Gostava que o Daniel fosse licenciado. Se eu puder, quero que ele vá mais longe. Quero o que nunca me deram a mim, uma boa vida para o meu filho, que eu não tive.

#### 6.4. SALOMÉ, 'WHY WAS I BORN BLACK?'

*Salomé forgot the date of our first interview, having changed it a few times in order to go to her cleaning jobs. The first time we met was at the community centre in the neighbourhood where she resides. She is from Sao Tome and Principe and always appears to be cheerful.*

*The second interview took place in her apartment, where African music was playing and an Angolan soap-opera was playing without sound on the television. She complained of severe back pain because of carrying heavy bags of free food she picked up from a charity.*

*In the third interview, she was making some changes in her apartment, a small three bedroom apartment. I arrived at the end of lunch and the family was all at home, the daughter, the stepdaughter and the youngest son, but also the former companion, who was painting the boy's room, and they show me the works. I ask Salomé if she has returned to her husband but she denies it. She tells me that he had not been drinking drunk for a while and that he is painting the child's room, but that they are not together. I observed that her children obeyed her promptly.*

*I noticed an envelope from a credit company in the apartment's hall. Before the beginning of the interview, she tells me about the incident with her eldest daughter when she flew to England to study a few weeks ago. All the family took her to the airport but, because of the luggage's excess of weight, the airline staff wanted her to pay another €60, a value she did not have. She also refused to leave her belongings behind, so she called her mother, who promptly spoke to officials at the low-cost airline company. They informed her that she could only travel if she paid. In her own words, Salomé made a scandal involving the airport's security. One of the security guards recognised her from a television program that, years before, promoted the reunion between Salomé and this same daughter. Right there in the queue a collection was made, and money left over, and the girl was able to continue with her journey.*

*At the end of the interview, when the recorder was already off, she told me smiling, 'I would spend the whole afternoon talking to you!'. As if a confession, she tells me that she does not like to 'give a kiss on a man's mouth', 'only the breath makes me sick, Dr.!', as well as to show her naked body. Her companion also does not like to kiss on the mouth, but he told her that he is curious to know what it is like to be with a white woman, to which she replied: 'well if you don't even know how to kiss!'. Salomé laughs a lot while telling me about this episode as if she was a teenager sharing secrets. She tells me that she does not know what dating is. In Sao Tome, young people her age did not date 'to kiss on the street or walk around hand in hand. This, my brothers, wouldn't have allowed!'. The 1st time she had sex with a man she became pregnant and was not married. Mothers leave their pregnant daughters to the boy's mother's houses and they become their responsibility. 'Passion as you see in soap operas, I don't know what it is!'*

Salomé was 40 years old when I interviewed her and was born in Sao Tome and Principe, a small group of islands off the African coast that used to be a Portuguese colony. She started working in the fields at the age of six after her mother died, but she went to school with her godmother's help. Her father, who lived in Angola, later took her to Cabinda and enrolled her in school. Salomé lived there for five years until the war forced her to return to her homeland. On her return she was passed on 'from family to family', resumed work and finally dropped out of school.

When Salomé got pregnant by her first boyfriend, her brother threw her out of the house. At the age of 23 with two small daughters, she came to Portugal, following a decision from a medical committee. She brought along one daughter who suffered from a heart condition, leaving the other one behind. Salomé and her daughter lived in her boss's house in a room without windows. When Salomé became pregnant her boss tried to convince her to have an abortion. As she refused, the woman started giving her 'migraine medication' which, Salomé suspects, was the reason for her later miscarriage. When she quitted this job she found out that her employer had neither paid the required social security taxes nor kept the money she had promised to save for her.

After becoming unemployed, she took a nine-month vocational training course on Child and Elderly Care, during which she improved her Portuguese.

Salomé has been an ISA welfare recipient since 2005. When she was interviewed, she was earning €419 and had three children and one stepdaughter under her care. She benefited from child support and food aid for two of the children. She had also requested support from the Court for alimony payments since the children's father could not contribute (he was unemployed and had four children in Sao Tome).

Salomé reports many situations of double discrimination: racism at work, while job hunting, at the medical centre, on buses, at the post office, and discrimination for living in a social housing estate. She describes episodes of drug trafficking in her neighbourhood and tries to keep her children indoors.

Although she feels very lonely, it is not her intention to return to Africa. After more than ten years together, she separated from her husband due to his alcoholism.

Her eldest daughter graduated from high school and was one of the best students of her year; during our interviews, she was living in England and working to pay her college tuition fees. Her son was a fifth-grader and her other daughter was attending a vocational course. Finally, her stepdaughter, who lives with Salomé, was trying to enrol in a vocational

training course; she finished the sixth grade but 'badly'.

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'I LOST MY MOTHER WHEN I WAS SIX, I STARTED TO WORK IN THE FIELDS WITH MY  
AUNTS'

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Salomé's mother died when she was six years old. At that age, she started to work in the fields. In her first years of life, the father was absent from her education:

My father worked at an oil company. My mother died when I was six. My brothers told me that she was a factory worker at a coffee company. She had fourteen children: thirteen boys and one girl, me. My little brother and I didn't remember her but people tell me that my face is just like hers. She shared her house with no husband. I prefer it that way too, the husband in his house and me in mine. My father had many women. Some men only have one woman; other men feel they need one, two, three or more women – it makes them feel superior, manly. But it's a whim, it's not tradition.

Her family network did not have enough resources to put her to school. She did not go until her godmother decided she had to have an education. Her childhood was branded by the lack of care and economic conditions. She had no contact with books and the school conditions in Sao Tome were very poor. There was only one book in the classroom, the teacher's, which would circulate between the students.

At six I started working in the fields with my aunts. That's the way in Sao Tome: children this age, they all go to work; no child stays in bed. I worked the fields until my godmother took me from my aunts; she said I had to study. She sent me to elementary school. In Sao Tome, we studied with no books. The book was with the teacher and we borrowed it from him to make copies. The book passed from hand to hand, two students at a time.

After some years, a new moment of rupture and change occurred, Salomé went to Angola, to live with her father and her stepmother, where she suffered from physical punishment from her father and had a problematic relationship with her stepmother. There were books in her father's house but they were 'untouchable'.

My father was in Angola and I only met him when he sent for me and my stepmother. He gave instructions for me to have a passport. He took me to Cabinda and enrolled me in school. In Angola, each student had their own book! I

had books for Mathematics, Portuguese... But we mixed up Portuguese with *fiote*, the local dialect. Also at home, we had books but they belonged to my father. Nobody set foot in his office because it was a place of great responsibility, it was always closed. My relationship with my children has nothing to do with my relationship with my father. My stepmother would get into his head and he would start beating me. I lived for five years with the two of them in Angola. There were few good moments there.

She studied until the third grade in Cabinda, but the war made her return to S. Tome. This return symbolised the definitive departure of her father, who remained in Angola and stopped sending her money, as well as the end of her studies, because her extended family did not have the resources for the basic expenses such as food, and so she was forced to work.

Then, between third and fourth grade, I stopped going to school because of the war in Cabinda. Many people were dying, our school was blown up. I went back to Sao Tome. I wanted to study there but there was no one to help me. No father, no mother, nobody. Father stayed in Angola and sent no money. I stayed with my older brother, then with my aunt, then with my grandmother... I went from house to house, there was a large yard with houses of aunts and uncles, I would eat where I had the chance. They all liked me, still today, because I was well-behaved and quiet... I helped with all the chores. But they couldn't put me through school. Their own children couldn't go to school, how would they send me? So I didn't study.

Orphaned by mother and affectively and economically neglected by her father, Salomé has, however, some good memories of the time spent in the woods with her brothers, playing and picking fruit to eat. She also reports some episodes of gender violence in Sao Tome and Principe against young women who would even be raped by the police forces and remembers that she kept these episodes secret because she was afraid.

My brothers used to carry me around, hanging on their backs. Where they were, I was too. We had no fish, no rice, nothing, then let's go into the woods. There we found mango, papaya, sugar-apple... Many fruits. Here in the city, you can't find anything to eat. Over there we had sugar-apple, jackfruit, sugarcane; there's avocado and guava... Here only monkeys and birds...

I missed having a mother and father. A child without a mother and father is raised by this one and that one; she might be raped by her own relatives, or beaten, it's a

risk... Only in time, I came to know the evil... Boys grabbed girls, covered their mouth, took their virginity. I only saw blood on the floor. I ran, didn't stop; I was always near my brothers. If the police gets you, the same thing happens. Policemen would offer bread to the girls, to convince them to come over. The police has food, they have everything, then they start, a girl already knows what it's for... We went there, complained. What for? Nothing. They like girls, virgin or no virgin, because girls feel tighter, not like women who have already given birth. They want them 'fresh'. I wouldn't tell anyone about these things. Even now, the secrets of other people are sacred to me.

In the first years of adult life, she gave birth twice, having separated from her companions (these girls' parents). The first pregnancy came unexpectedly, due to her inexperience and as the result of her relationship with her first boyfriend. In the wake of her young daughter's heart problems, she came to Portugal for the baby to undergo surgery, due to the lack of medical and hospital resources in her home country, and there she stayed residing:

I got a boyfriend, I had no experience and he got me pregnant with my oldest daughter. My brother kicked me out of the house and I went to sleep at my cousin's house. Tomorrow stayed with another aunt... I was pregnant and in the third grade at the time. I studied no more. My older daughter's father and me, we didn't stay together. Only after I got together with the father of my second daughter, we went to live in the same house. When the girl was four or five, we separated.

In Sao Tome, when the girl was born, I noticed she wasn't breathing normally and took her to the hospital. The doctor, a paediatrician from Porto, said, 'This girl has heart problems.' She sent us to the medical board. The Ministry of Health in Sao Tome and Principe has an agreement with Portugal. We came here, my daughter had surgery when she was four months old. At the hospital, they had a nursing home where I could stay. There were meals, there was a place to sleep - I can't complain. When the girl was discharged, the doctor said, 'This girl has to follow appointments.' So I reached out for a cousin and I stayed with her.

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I DIDN'T SEND HER TO JAIL BECAUSE SHE WAS LIKE A MOTHER TO ME'

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Living in Portugal and without the resources to own a house, Salomé stayed with her sick daughter in a windowless room at her boss's house, the owner of the restaurant where she

worked. There she suffered abuse on the part of this same woman who without her knowledge gave her pills to interrupt her pregnancy.

The 1<sup>st</sup> time I had my own room was when I came to Portugal. I lived almost eight months in a nursing home next to the hospital where my girl was being treated. After that, I went to a lady's house to work. She threw me out, I went to another lady's house. Then an African man got me a job in a restaurant and the boss set a small room, with a bunk bed and no windows, where my daughter and I could stay for free.

I helped in the kitchen and cleaned. I worked there for two and a half years. The lady was very good to me. I was fired because I got pregnant and she didn't like it. She asked me to stop the pregnancy. She recommended a nurse... I said I wouldn't do it and she told me I had to make a choice. When I told her I was pregnant, she started to speak very ugly words. She looked like the devil. I told her, 'I'm not your wife, I'm your employee'. She said, 'We're doing fine, why did you have to send for that man...?' She waited that my colleagues left the restaurant and then came to talk to me. She had called a nurse she knew, told her about my case, my age, that I was three and a half months along... I told the nurse, 'I don't have enough money to pay you.' I was taking pills for my headaches at the time. The boss gave me a pill, I swallowed it without knowing, crazy with the pain. She said, 'This will make the headache stop, it's very good medicine.' I took it but the pain remained and I felt dizzy. She gave me another one, same size, white, with a streak in the middle. Suddenly, the next day, I started to bleed. 'Is it a miscarriage?' I wanted to go to the hospital but she told me to sit down, that I was very tired. I sat for a while. The bleeding stopped but the headache didn't, because of all the stress. And she gave me the same pill again, dizziness again. I didn't feel better so I went to the pharmacy and got paracetamol, that eased the pain a bit. I asked my boss if the pills were real medicine for headache. She replied, 'Yes and they are very expensive! I shouldn't even give them to you!' 'And are they safe when you are pregnant?', I asked. 'What do you want this baby for?'. That was when I got suspicious! I started to feel a very strong pain. I went to the hospital and was seen by a doctor; he told me everything was fine but it wasn't. When another doctor did an ultrasound to listen to the baby's heart she couldn't hear anything. There were two dead babies inside of me.

Despite having shown some initiative to solve the situation, she did not present a complaint

against the woman who explored her in the first years of her life in Portugal:

I did everything around the house, I worked more than a slave! I gave her a lot of money to earn. I cleaned and cooked and stayed until two or three in the morning after all the others left. But they only paid me what they had to, €600, no money for the long hours I worked. And my boss kept all my money herself. She went to the bank for me. I trusted her so much that I didn't even worry to know how much I had. Sometimes I took €50 to buy clothes for my girl. Other times I asked her for some money to send to my daughter in Africa, she gave it to me and I wrote it down. When my husband was about to come to Portugal, I told her, 'My husband will arrive soon, we can't stay in this small room...'. I asked her for my money and she said she had it in the bank. She made so much fuss that I started to suspect. She really fought me on that! That's how I found out that there was no money left. First, she gave me €150. I really needed the money so I took it. I asked her, 'Give me all of it' and she didn't. Then someone told me to go to the Labour Court but she had a boyfriend who worked there and my case ended up exactly in his hands! So I left. My husband confronted her, 'Salomé told me everything that was going on here, are you going to pay her the money you owe her or not?' The lady called for me, told me the bank had cancelled the money, that she was in debt and couldn't pay me the whole amount. She gave me another €400 then, and nothing more until today. She had always said she was keeping half for my taxes, but I went to Social Security and they had received nothing. I didn't file a complaint. If I had someone to help me I would file it and I would win. But on my own, without experience, not knowing my rights... She only gave me half the money. I worked there for two years and eight months. Every month I was supposed to earn €600 and took €50 for myself, there was €550 left. She must have kept a lot of money! She gave me €1.000 in total. I didn't send her to jail only because she was like a mother to me and I remembered the good times we had. Because I had enough proof to put her in jail.

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'THERE ARE NO LIMITS TO WHAT YOU CAN LEARN'

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Following this episode of unemployment, Salomé followed the advice of a neighbour and looked for the support of Social Services to apply for ISA. At the Job Centre, she was guided to a vocational training course, chosen by the social worker, on Child and Elderly

Care.

After the job at the restaurant, I was unemployed. That's when I met the first social worker here, in 2005. I had no job, I had a daughter to support there, in Sao Tome, two other children here in Porto. No income, no means of support, and I had to pay for electricity and water. 'Dr' Sónia, from the Job Centre, helped me. When she saw that there was a vocational training course on Children and Elderly Care she put my name down and I went. The job centre chose the course for everyone. I have the certificate at home.

During the course she proved her perseverance and strategy to learn, opting to study with the trainers during breaks.

So, in 2005 I attended the New Opportunities program for nine months. At first, I couldn't follow the subjects, especially Maths, so I thought it was very dull. When I can't understand something, I felt a bit down. But then I thought, 'If people without even the second grade can be here, why can't I?' We had recess but I didn't go. I stayed in the library with the teacher, she helped me while I read. The environment was very good and the teaching as well. In the end, they told me I could now read better than a tenth grader.

We were there from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday. Nine months it lasted, and that's where I learned to speak better and to understand some difficult words. Now I speak proper Portuguese! In Sao Tome people mix Portuguese with our dialect. We learned Maths, Computers, Nursing, Citizenship...

The teachers and the teaching, that was what I liked the most. How they deal with someone from a different country. They always listen. They let me talk, if I'm wrong they correct me and they always gave me attention. I had support from everyone and I got on very well with my colleagues. That's where I found the strength to carry on, I felt very safe. I improved my reading, I learned to write, not really well but better. There's no limit to what you can learn, you go on learning until you are no longer in this world.

We did a traineeship and then we presented our work to the board, to see if it was okay or not. I passed. I was the only black woman in a group of fifteen girls. It was worth it!

Although she regards it as a positive experience, Salomé, her daughter's only caretaker, was

forced to interrupt her studies to take care of her daughter when she had a heart surgery. Subsequently, her own vision problems, coupled with the impossibility of acquiring graduated glasses due to a shortage of financial resources, led her to abandon her training and to not be able to complete the ninth grade. She confessed that she gives priority to the children's expenses by calculating and organizing the few resources at her disposal.

I didn't finish the ninth grade yet because of my daughter's illness. She had a high-risk operation and I had to be at the hospital with her. After she recovered I went to the social worker to start the process but that's when I had my eyesight problem. I can't read anything, can't see anything. How can I go to school like this? I have an appointment with the eye doctor, I gave the stuff for the glasses to the social workers three years ago but nothing happened until now. That was when everything stopped. And how can I study like this? I earn the minimum income, €419. I have four children at home to feed, plus me, plus illnesses... The money goes for electricity, water, rent, bus fares, medicine, food... When I can, I do some cleaning hours that helps to pay for milk and yoghurts. That's why I didn't care to finish the ninth grade. Today I have a diploma, something I never expected I could achieve, but I made it.

School is the best thing we have. It's where we learn. You want to write a letter, if you don't go to school, how do you learn how to write it? You go to the supermarket, you need to read labels, read expiration dates. When you get change, you have to check the change.

Her life suffered a new twist when in an accident at the nursing home where she was doing a traineeship. She had to be off sick and had surgery:

I was working at the nursing home when the course finished. I had an accident at work and, because I have varicose veins, a wound opened on my leg, blood spilling everywhere. I got medical leave. Then, when I was ready to return, the 'Dr' fired me. Since I only worked there for five months, I couldn't get the unemployment benefit. That's how my life turned out. Where I worked the longest was in care and cleaning services at private houses. Not every day, just two or three times a week. I did some cooking for another lady as well.

Regarding her dependence on the ISA Salomé, like other interviewees, feels ashamed of having to live on welfare while. This shame is exacerbated by the situations of humiliation and abuse of power that she has been victim to, especially at the Post Office, by the staff and by the users of this service. The abovementioned humiliation has led her to avoid collecting the money from her benefits on the day she receives the voucher, even if she needs it to survive, to face a smaller number of people.

I live on welfare since 2005. It's so important! You have to sign a contract. I'm registered at the job centre, they already asked me to come and bring the papers from the Dr, without the ISA I don't know what would come of me! I couldn't return to Sao Tome because the trip is too expensive. I applied for ISA but had to wait almost five months to get it, then they gave me the house. Half a year went by before I received the income of the months in arrears. That was when I bought a washing machine, a mattress, the bed... I paid my debts, sent my daughter some money and saved some other to pay for her trip to Portugal...

They the government are always making cuts! I don't like it, it makes me feel ashamed... I hear people criticizing the ones who get the ISA. They don't care why someone needs it or what brought it on. They don't want to know. You have no idea how I feel every time my voucher arrives! Sometimes I ask my daughter to go to the post office in my place, it's always so full that some few times I just came back home without the money. Why? Because I was ashamed. Everyone in the neighbourhood goes there to collect their vouchers and everybody there knows me. Some people here, who don't live on welfare, criticize the ones who do. It happened to me already to go there, sit down waiting and then just give up when my turn came because some neighbours of mine were there. It makes you feel so ashamed! And it is getting worse. More and more people. Those who have a steady job, who get their salary at the end of the month, they don't understand. But a lot of people who used to criticize it are now going through the same. I never criticized anyone because I didn't even know there was such a thing as ISA. Each person manages their life the best they can and it's none of our business how they do it. Some, like me, are too ashamed to ask for help, to beg. I had a neighbour who used to help me, she found out I was going through a hard time and gave me a lot of strength. She took me to the social worker and helped me explain to her what was going on

and that's how I got help.

If my neighbours hear about it they might say, 'She is strong and healthy, why is she living on benefits? She should work!'. That's what they say about other people. Once at the post office, when I was picking up my income, the employees don't count the money discreetly... They do it in front of everybody, right there at the counter, '€50, 100, 150, 200...!' One woman was watching and said, 'Fuck! Here in Portugal, the black live better than us! Did you see how much she is getting?' I left the post office. I'm black but I'm sure I turned white with embarrassment! She said it out loud and everyone else heard... I never returned to that post office because I know that woman goes there. Last week I heard that if you have a bank account they can make a deposit for you. I'm going to take care of that, as it is now I don't feel good. I end up staying at home in need of the money... The vouchers arrive today, it's going to look like an invasion of ants at the post office! So I wait today, tomorrow, and the day after tomorrow I'll go there, quietly. The post office will be almost empty.

I think I have the right to get support because I'm living in Portugal and the Portuguese State took me in as a citizen. I have Portuguese nationality. I have worked here and I have paid social security taxes here. So I think I deserve that help. Even if I hadn't paid taxes, once the Portuguese State accepts me as a national citizen, I think I have that right.

Just like other interviewees, Salomé refers to other people's welfare fraud, which benefit from ISA without needing it and perhaps, for this reason, verbalizes her need to make an effort to get a job in order to be eligible for the benefit.

A lot of people who receive ISA don't really need it. If you have a job, a place to work, you shouldn't be getting that money. If I get a job I won't need it. While I'm on benefits, I have no peace of mind, no rest because I know that I can lose the benefit at any given moment. Of course, while I need it, it's my right to receive this money, but it's also my duty to try to find work and not need the support anymore.

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'IF ONLY YOU WEREN'T BLACK...'

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Salomé was a victim of racial discrimination and humiliated while applying to a job, feeling powerless with the lack of respect and recognition that was voted on her.

I accept any job as long as it's something I can do. I didn't study enough to have a 'clean hands' job. And it's very hard now, even those with studies can't get jobs. The other day my daughter saw an ad on the internet and wrote down the address for me. I walked there, I can't afford public transport, with that sort of confidence of someone who already has the job. The lady had told me on the phone that she was waiting for me. When I got there she took one look at me and said they didn't need help anymore, 'But you just told me a while ago that you need someone, and now you tell me you don't?'. Her mother shouted from inside the house, 'It's because you're black. If only you weren't black we would hire you, we really need help.' The daughter opened the door, looked at me... 'It's not what I want, my mother will not like it. We already hired another girl.', 'No, we didn't hire anyone' the mother said from inside, 'but you are black and we don't want black people.'. 'What's the problem with black people?' I asked, 'Don't we have hands to work as well?'. 'I don't like it! It's my house, I'm the boss here.'. I wanted to tell her so many things, to pour all my anger on her... But I managed to control myself, got into the elevator... I'm not sure what time I got back home... Why do I have to be black? Am I only worth something when I'm in Africa? In Europe I'm nothing. Even people who respect me, they always see me as a black person. Of course, I'm black, but people say offensive things. Most of my friends are Portuguese, I speak to them freely, but as soon as I complain about something they do to me, they say, 'You're black, you shouldn't be here, you should live in your own country...'

Salomé describes experiences of suffering, conflict, disrespect, in short, of discrimination that she was a victim of in Portugal and also of the solitude she suffers from living in a land that she doesn't feel as her own.

I went through many things that I didn't expect. Sometimes I cried, I would rather be in my homeland than in a foreign country where I have no one to support me. Those were hard times.

When I answer a job ad I can't use my real address. They think that everyone who lives in this neighbourhood is a thief or addicted to drugs. But I also won't give a fake address. I had this problem many times and now it's also a problem for my daughter. In this neighbourhood, your own mother can be a drug dealer. When the police come people shout the code word, 'Water, water!' and they run away. That's why I don't let my son play with those people, it's dangerous. He stays inside, watches cartoons on TV or plays computer in his bedroom, sometimes I take him

for a walk in the park. He doesn't have any friends. All the other kids at school bully him, they call him black! He replies, 'I'm black, you're toilet paper' and then they fight. He never had a friend over at our house, ever since he started school. Even on his birthday, I never bring a cake to class. He plays with me and with his sisters... Here on the street, he can't play. One time he was playing with his ball, and just because it rolled to a neighbour's doorstep and he went there to get it, the lady called him a 'damned black kid'. To such a tiny boy! And I went to talk to her. Why did she do that? Does he even understand? He knows his parents are black but he doesn't know why he was born black. Do I feel discrimination? Yes. At work, on the bus, in places where I went to apply for jobs... Also once in the health centre, when I went for an appointment with my son.

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'GOOD AFTERNOON MR. PRESIDENT'

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Salomé showed a great capacity for initiative, leadership and strategy. Not being satisfied with the bureaucracy in order to bring the daughter she had left in Sao Tome, she was even able to intercede with the Portuguese President on this subject. When she realized that she could not do it through legal and mainstream procedures, she went to a television station, talked to a journalist and got them to play a piece on the subject. She not only managed to bring her daughter to Portugal, she also was offered a sum of money:

My daughter Sara is in the 11th grade, taking a vocational course. She is 19 years old. She is a little bit behind because of her health problems. Vanessa is the oldest, I left her in Sao Tome and Principe when she was eighteen months old when I came to Portugal with Sara because of her heart condition. I went to a television channel for help and they brought her over here. All the money I earned, I spent organizing the documents for her to come to Portugal. I used to think, 'How is it possible that people who started after me already have their children here and I don't?' I had to

do something. So I went to the SEF<sup>25</sup>, but they just find excuses to delay things, there is always some document missing... I told myself, 'I'll ask the President for help'. I heard it on the news that he was visiting the city. I got up, took a shower, combed my hair, got dressed, grabbed the letter and went on my way. When I arrived the security guard told me, 'You can't go in because you don't have an invitation', they give you a badge to wrap around your neck, and I said, 'But I didn't come here to plant a bomb, I just have a letter I want to give to the President.' He said, 'I cannot let you in.'; I answered, 'Okay, too bad.'. His cell phone rang, he picked it up. While he was distracted I went inside and upstairs. I saw the President for the first time in my life, looked him in the eye, he, his wife and the secretary... I was standing close to a group of journalists, pretending to be one of them, without any shame, standing there proudly! When I saw him, I said, 'Good afternoon, Mr President. I am a mother who is suffering very much because I am from Sao Tome and Principe, I left a daughter there, the medical board sent me to Portugal...', I spoke very fast, no time to lose, 'I have this letter to give to you because I need help'. Then his wife took my letter. 'This letter is from one mother to another. When you read it please pay close attention to what I write there. I am a mother who is suffering, I want to have my daughter by my side. I am a human being, a mother who has been away from her daughter for too long.'. She said, 'Don't worry. I will read it carefully'. That same week I got a reply, a letter that I still keep with me. It had explanations, asking for patience, to have courage, to pray, that everything will go well. I thought, 'They are kidding me...'. Then I got another letter telling me to go to an NGO. I thought 'I have to do something!', because when girls turn ten men already start messing with them, even her uncle at home. And she told me she was at risk, a cousin was going to mess with her. So I walked to the offices of a TV channel. I got there and asked, 'Where is the TV office? I want to talk to someone who's journalist' and explained everything. Eight days later they called me to come to my house and made a tv news report. I showed the papers to

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<sup>25</sup> Immigration and Borders Service

the man who was filming and the journalist said 'Let's pray'. A few days later the telephone rang, 'Your daughter got the Visa'. I screamed louder than a woman who is squeezing a child out of her body! I rushed to the travel agency, 'Ticket, quickly!'. On Saturday my daughter arrived and they came here to my house to pick me up. Journalists came in a TV car... When I saw that girl, so tall, I said, 'It's her!'. She was only one year and a half when I left her and I only saw her again when she was fifteen. She had my picture in her hand. She was looking at it trying to recognize someone. 'Vanessa, mother is here!' I couldn't help myself anymore! They put this thing around to fence us but I was ready to jump over it. I went around gave my daughter a hug. Oh, my God. She was really there! Salomé becomes emotional. Oh, I was so, so happy! I used to send her money every month, a lot of money, €200! What do you think happened? Her aunts, who are her grandmother's daughters, her grandmother is old she can't handle money, they kept most of the money to themselves and just gave a little bit to the old lady. I sent them the money for my daughter, for milk, clothes, shoes, even toys for her. Always on Christmas, on her birthday, on Mother's Day or Children's day I sent the money, but she didn't get almost anything. It was such a joy when she came to Portugal! I sold all my gold to pay for the trip, €850. Then they offered me €2.000. And my daughter stayed here but there was something else I was going to have to face, her behaviour. Because she was a bit spoiled by her grandmother and when she arrived, she started receiving the same kind of education I gave to her sister and this didn't fit her. If I had to raise my voice a little bit she thought I didn't like her, that I was putting her aside... She wrote everything I said in her diary, 'On this or that day, at this or that time, my mother called me so and so...' If you read the diary entries from when she was fifteen you will laugh because she wrote down everything I said when I was angry with her.

The interviewee tells us how she gave money to the daughter to help her settle in England, where the girl wants to do an English course for one year since she was not able to enter the higher education course she wanted in public education in Portugal. Salomé arranged for her to stay in the house of a friend's sister:

Now she is 21. She finished a course in Accounting and wants to go to college. She got the best grade on the national exams... She has a certificate and it seems that they lowered her grade because of two points. She has always had good grades. This year she couldn't get into college, not in the course she wanted, Management.

She said it's a public college, it's cheaper. She wanted to go to London for a year to study English, she speaks good English. She applied to one of those schools there that give you a scholarship and a place to study. It's her dream. Now she told me she has a job in England at a factory, packing salads. They call her when they need her. She gets along there because she can speak English. She is staying with the sister of a friend of mine from the neighbourhood.

Like her son, her daughter was also a victim of bullying because of her skin colour. Furthermore, her daughter was also a victim of attempted rape in the school toilet and was rescued by Salomé, who makes sure she knows the school facilities of all of her children. The situation with the school board that resulted from this incident was solved with confrontation, aggressiveness and threats of reporting it to the media as strategies to fight injustice.

Here in Portugal, it was difficult for her to fit in, both at home and in school. The school was harder, her schoolmates... They all called her 'black', she was the only black person in the class. She was almost raped in the school bathroom once. She called me at my work and I went to her. There were two boys pushing the door, they had planned everything, they were just waiting for the right day to attack, and she was there, holding the door against two of them. The school staff even called the police. I was downtown when I got her phone call, I grabbed a taxi (I had no money on me) and told the driver to wait. 'Help me, mum. I can't hold the door anymore... Mum, help me!', I asked, 'What is it?', 'I'm being raped in the bathroom!' I got there by taxi, the security guard was sweeping, his back turned... I ran... 'Which building?', 'I'm in building x'. I knew where it was because when my kids go to a school I have to know the whole place! I got there, the boys were tall, strong. I grabbed each of them by their sweaters, joined head with head, bang! Blood came out of their noses! One of the boys ran away. The other stayed, 'You have to call an ambulance'. There was an ambulance and the police... I 'took care' of the boys first, and then checked my daughter. The security guard appeared saying, 'You're going to be arrested.', - 'I am going to be arrested? Then the whole staff at this school must be arrested because every one of you is responsible for this. I'm going to call the TV, the television people will come here.'. The headmaster came 'Don't do this, Ms Salomé. Let's solve it in another way...', 'Please call the doctor to examine my daughter!'. But she said the boys didn't do anything, she was inside the bathroom and they were outside. Sometime later they tried to attack me

on the street. I bought a knife from the Chinese shop. I had to defend myself. My little girl hurt her wrist from the effort she made to hold the door, she was flushed and sweating all over, and she peed her pants... She was seventeen at the time.

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‘DO YOU THINK YOU CAN LIVE ON A LITTLE MORE THAN €300 A MONTH?’

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At the time of the interviews, Salomé was unemployed. However, she admits that she does not isolate herself at home and shows initiative to look for a job, responding to advertisements, handing over résumés, asking in establishments if they need help and sometimes even being a victim of unsafe situations.

Right now I’m kind of looking for work because the last operation on my leg didn’t go as well as the others. The doctor says it will improve with time, just apply cream and wear compression stockings. They cost almost €90 at the pharmacy, I can’t afford them. I got a free pair at the hospital but it’s already torn. So I need new stockings and I need my leg to recover before I can go back to work.

Me and my daughters, we check ads on the internet, I check the newspaper, I’m going to apply for something. I can cook, I worked in a restaurant, I can work in a nursing home cleaning, cooking and ironing. I have a broad CV, very broad.

There is always something to do, I never watch TV. Sitting at home gets you nowhere. For example, if I go out, maybe I notice a ‘Help wanted’ ad, there’s no shame in that. Before my operation I saw an ad for a job in Matosinhos<sup>26</sup>, I went there and the man invited me to come in. It was in a garage. I waited, the man was taking a long time, so I got up and tried to open the door, but it was locked. I saw an iron rod next to the wall, I grabbed it and managed to break the door open. I left the place and called the police.

The interviewee lives with a severe case of economic deprivation, needing to appeal to charities to receive food. In the meanwhile, beyond the shame she feels Salomé expresses

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<sup>26</sup> City in the Porto district

an awareness of her citizenship rights:

I put my name down to get food support from Caritas<sup>27</sup>, you can only register in one institution at a time. They know me for many years already. Once, every month, there is food. They usually don't have fish or meat. Today I was lucky. I brought three packs of chicken breast. My rent used to be around €60, now I'm paying 11.

Salomé also describes the strategies she sets in motion to survive, rationally organizing the scarce resources available to her and taking into account the various supports existing in the community. Still, it is flagrant the lack of financial resources for the purchase of medicines and glasses, which do not contribute to an adequate school or professional insertion. Salomé, like other lone mothers, finds herself obliged to disregard her needs according to the needs of her children, sacrificing herself. This situation structurally reveals a lack of accountability of the State regarding child poverty.

Do you think you can live on a little more than €300 a month? When the money for the month comes I go to the grocery store to pay off my debt. They let me buy food and pay for it later. Otherwise, I don't know how I would survive. When I get the ISA, first I put some money aside for electricity and water, then I go to the grocers, and after that, there's already nothing left. If I need medicine I can't buy it, it's expensive. And I won't have any more money in my hands until the next month until the children's alimony comes in. That's when I turn to the social worker, in despair, and she picks up the phone and calls AMI International Medical Assistance, she sends me there with the prescription. But the medication I need is expensive, so they can't give it to me, they only have the cheaper ones. I couldn't afford a pair of glasses for myself. I bought one for my daughter, she was in the same situation. The social workers also couldn't help. I talked to a girl at the optician's and explained the situation. She asked, 'How much do you think you can pay every month?' But you can't bring the glasses home, they have to stay there

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<sup>27</sup> Charity

until you pay! My daughter went through half a year without glasses because I was waiting for help from Social Security. She got bad results at school because she couldn't read the blackboard... She mixed up the letters. I left some things behind and managed to buy her glasses.

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'AFRICANS... MUSIC IS OUR JOY! IT IS WHAT GIVES US STRENGTH AND WILL TO LIVE!'

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Despite the bad experiences, the interviewee says that she does not like to isolate herself and that she has friendly relations with neighbours and even with some vendors at the market. However, loneliness is always present, especially due to the separation from her partner and previously from the lack of love and care and verbal abuse due to his alcoholism.

I've been here for almost 20 years. There are good times and bad times. I don't care if people are white or black or yellow, as long as they get along with me and I get along with them, but here it doesn't work that way. I'm friends with a neighbour across the street and another one downstairs. They were the ones who advised me to see a social worker. I say 'good morning', 'good afternoon', I go to their houses, talk to them, they laugh, then I leave. When I am in a good mood and in no pain, I go out. I go to downtown Porto and meet those ladies at the market who are my friends. I stay for a while and we laugh together... Then I return home, and that's how I spend my time now that I don't have work to do.

I feel very lonely. My husband and I are separated since 2011. He tells me he's done with drinking, so I let him come but I don't give him the keys. I watch him as he comes in. I start a conversation and put on some African music but all of a sudden he says, 'I'm leaving'. I know that when he says it, he's going for a drink. I tried to be with him many times but there is always this thing, wanting to do what you shouldn't do. We lived more than ten years together. He never hit me, never hid money from me, but when he became unemployed at 55 and I was the one bringing home the money, he couldn't accept it, being supported by a woman, so he began to drink. When he was drunk it was impossible to please him. Only his opinion was good and we had to do everything his way, and all the swearing and the bad language that he normally doesn't use, he's a very quiet man, but he starts using it when he drinks... I have small children at home, so I got upset and threw him out of the house. It was difficult because we have no family here. I am his family and

he is mine. If I throw him out, where will he go? But I had to do it because of his drinking. He is living with a cousin now. He comes here to see his boy, sometimes takes him to school, other times helps me with shopping, but we are not like husband and wife, no. I told him, 'If you want to get back to me, you have to quit drinking.'. Not from one day to the next, but slowly. He didn't do a detox. I told him to but he said that he is not an alcoholic, he's not crazy, that I was exaggerating and telling on him to the social workers. Telling them lies... The case is already in court. He took me when I was 22. I'm 41 now, so why should I put him in this situation? He is such a polite man! The social workers told me to complain in court that he isn't giving me money for the boy. He earns €195 of unemployment benefit and has four more children to support because their mother died. The social worker said, 'It's just a formality since he is not giving anything for the boy...'

Although she misses Africa, her feelings are divided, since her house is now in Portugal and she knows which charities to turn to when she goes through difficulties. However, being African is a cause for conflict also when it comes to the different experiences of living in the same building, namely with regard to the volume of music, and she feels culturally marginal.

Family helps me remember the good moments I had. The years are passing by... Sometimes I feel sad. I am here in Porto, I have no means to go there to Sao Tome and at least see my brothers and family. This is also why I have very high blood pressure. To go back for good, no. I already have a home here. If I have nothing to eat I can go to the *Legião da Boa Vontade*<sup>28</sup>, to *Caritas* or to the supermarket and pay later. In Africa, I couldn't do that even if I was starving to death... Your neighbour is also looking for food, life there is not easy! Those gentlemen we see on TV, they are the ones who have everything, not us. But we Africans are like that, with or without money, we are always happy! At home, we can't live without music. The radio must be on, even if with low volume, to listen to music from our homeland

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<sup>28</sup> Charity

or from Portugal, Brazil, Cape Verde. Our neighbours don't like it. They're always saying, 'Oh neighbour, I need to rest!', I say, 'So, what do you want me to do? To live inside my house all the time, like you?' In Africa, we don't live like that. Africans, with or without money, hungry or not hungry, are always cheerful, with the music on. We don't care about TV but the radio has to be on. Africa is different but what matters is that in my house, I can live the way I want. Where there is an African, there is for sure trouble with the neighbours because of music! Africans... Music is our joy! It's what gives us strength, the will to live! If you listen to music, you even forget about loneliness! And sometimes, I feel so sad here...

The practices of sociability also happen in attending the activities of a students' association who are her compatriots. However, as we have seen, when it comes to coexistence within the neighbourhood Salomé selects the friendships of her youngest son.

We take the children to the students' association of Sao Tome and Principe on the 1st of June. We also take them on the 12th of July, it's Independence Day. They even organize a Christmas party there but it's not very well done. The president of the association lives in our neighbourhood. She's a lawyer. Anything we need, we can go to her.

When Carlos was in school, he used to go to the swimming pool, but then the holidays started, so he can't go anymore. I asked about it, they charge €30. But sometimes he plays football around here. He's on vacation so he has nothing to do. There's a community centre but I don't let him go there because the kids in this neighbourhood are the worst. No matter how much we try to respect them and show them how to do things right... It only gets worse. They use swear words, kick each other... And there's nobody there who knows how to deal with this kind of children. That's why I prefer that he stays at home.

She spends time with her youngest son helping him to study with the pedagogical strategy of him being the one 'teaching mum', and encouraging him to read. In addition, in her speech she values education and above all manages the home economy so that they do not lack food and other care. At the same time, she values initiative, effort and responsibility.

I encourage my children to study, Carlos especially. I ask him to teach me. He gives me a sheet of paper and pen, starts reading out loud and I write down what he says. Sometimes he tells me stories about Portugal that I never heard about, he goes, 'Mother, I will read you a story. I start and then you read it too.' He reads and

watches the Panda channel before he goes to bed. From time to time he picks up books when there is nothing to do outside. The neighbours give him books to read and in school too.

My oldest daughter finished secondary school. Carlos is in the fifth and Vanessa in the 11th grade. The other girl is his daughter, she is my stepdaughter. I looked after her because her mother was an alcoholic. She fell down many times, sometimes while she had the girl on her back. She even has a scar. So I was the one to breastfeed her, give her baths and food... She grew up and moved, I see her as my own daughter. I don't have the courage to leave her... She used to sleep in her father's bed at his cousin's place but she came here crying,

'Salomé I can't stand it! I don't want to sleep there with my father.'

'Where do you sleep?'

'In his bed, because there is no more space.'

'Do you want to stay here with me? Will you respect me?'

She is with me now. I told her, 'I won't give you everything you see in the stores, but a portion of food, if I have some for myself and for my children, I have for you too.' She is not studying, she couldn't get in. She went to the school to enrol, they called me and explained that there was a new law and, because of it, she couldn't take the vocational training course she wanted, Mechanics. She could if she was under eighteen. We went to the job centre, they're trying to solve it and get her into some other course. She only has the sixth grade and not well done. She can't read well, she can't write... It means more costs for me. Because girls who come from Africa, they eat a lot! They drink milk as if it was water. I feel bad telling her that. I don't want her to think that I'm scolding her. We who come from Africa, if someone scolds us, we think they are mistreating us!

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'A WOMAN BEHIND THE WHEEL IS SUCH A BEAUTIFUL THING!'

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Regarding the future, Salomé states that her projects and concerns are mainly to take care of and accompany the children, valuing their school education. With regards to the daughters, she fears an unexpected pregnancy (perhaps comparing to her own situation) that prevents them from having a better professional future. Finally, she reveals a personal aspiration for independence:

My projects? Being with the children, by their side, giving them strength. My oldest daughter is in England now, she is doing a BA there... Vanessa says she doesn't want to go to college after she graduates from school (she thinks it's boring), she wants to get a job instead. And the little one says he wants to earn a lot of money to help his mother! He wants to buy me a car and to become a football player, even better than Cristiano Ronaldo! she laughs. Studies are very important. I have nothing to offer them, but if they study, if they get a degree and then a job, they'll be able to take care of themselves. That's my biggest concern. I'm afraid that halfway down the road my daughters find a boyfriend, get pregnant, show up here pregnant... And the boys, nowadays, they get involved in drugs... That's what's happening now in the neighbourhood.

What I would really like, first of all, is to be a cook. Second, is to have a driver's license. When I see women behind the wheel I feel so proud! One day I would like to be like them, to drive a car. A woman behind the wheel is such a beautiful thing!

## 6.5. ELVIRA: WHEN THEY TOOK ME AWAY FROM MY PARENTS' HOUSE I WAS WEARING A YELLOW NIGHTSHIRT

*From all of the interviewed women, Elvira appeared to be the oldest, although that was not the case. Her vocabulary was poor and sometimes she had difficulty expressing herself. During the three interviews, she was anxiously scratching her skin. I sensed that there was something in her childhood related to abuse or violence, but she did not open up about this subject during the first interview. She told me that some of her younger sisters and brothers and she slept with their parents in the living room and that there was no bathroom in the house where they lived. The mother prostituted herself to buy alcohol and Elvira and her sister, institutionalised when they were children, underwent alcoholic detoxification. The mother never went to visit her, even though she never authorized the adoption of her children because, in her own words, 'she gave no children to anyone'.*

*She was always a maid. Employers paid her less than €100 a month. A few years ago she tried to commit suicide and since then she has been seen by a psychiatrist. Following her relationship with a 40-year-old man who was interested in her ten-year-old daughter, the child she was removed from her mother by Court order.*

When I interviewed her, in 2012, Elvira was 35 years old (she was born in 1977) and single. She had been born in a rural area and was now living in social housing in an urban area in the district of Aveiro. She had completed the sixth grade, was unemployed and was no longer a recipient of the ISA (Income Support Allowance) and she underwent psychiatric therapy. She lived alone in a council flat and her only sources of income were her daughter's allowance, food aid, and some additional support to pay the gas bills. Her daughter had recently been taken away from her by the Child and Youth Protective

Services (CPCJ<sup>29</sup>). Elvira's parents were rural workers and her mother had a history of alcohol addiction. Her brothers were alcoholics as well.

Her father was a farmer and never went to school; her mother only completed the 1st grade and had a history of alcoholism and prostitution. She has eight brothers and sisters. Elvira was institutionalised when she was ten 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.

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'IF YOU DON'T WANT ME YOU CAN GIVE ME TO SOMEONE ELSE, BUT I WON'T BE A MAID'  
POVERTY, NEGLECT AND ALCOHOLISM, A LONELY CHILDHOOD

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Elvira's childhood was marked by poverty, hunger, poor housing conditions, child labour and severe mental health issues, related to alcoholism. As a consequence of alcoholism and malnutrition, she developed a cognitive impairment of 5% that prevents her from learning and from having an intellectually demanding job:

I don't like to talk about my childhood a lot. When I was a little girl, I used to work, removing weeds. I worked in the fields with my mother, picking potatoes; instead of studying, we had to pick ferns. My house was in a very bad shape. We used to wash in a basin. I never had my own room - there was a living room and we all slept there. There were a kitchen and a living-room and we all slept together (sisters, brothers, father and mother). It was my grandparents' house.

Both her parents had low levels of cultural capital: they didn't value education and Elvira had no access to reading materials. There were no reading or writing habits in her family; on the contrary, according to the domestic moral order (Lahire, 1995) children should work

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<sup>29</sup> CPCJ: *Comissão de Proteção de Crianças e Jovens* [Child and Youth Protective Services]

in the fields as a means to bring home additional income. Nevertheless, an eight-year-old Elvira defied her mother, who didn't want her to go to school:

My mother didn't want us to go to school – we struggled to make ends meet. She wanted us to work, to serve at other people's houses, and so I ran away, I told her I didn't want that. I was eight and I told her, 'if you don't want me you can give me to someone else, but I won't be a maid.'

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.

Her mother did not want her children to study. She preferred that they worked. Undoubtedly, Elvira's childhood was decisive in her situation of social exclusion. 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. The 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 cornbread. Sometimes it had mould, but we ate it anyway.

Despite the physical punishment of Elvira by her father as she was growing up, her fondest childhood memories include him:

I went through difficult times. We didn't have the freedom we have now. My father would show us affection if we deserved it, but as soon as he thought we didn't he

would hit us with the withy, no matter how old we were. The only way out was to run. My father was very kind to me, I really cared about him. Back then he used to give us 500 escudos €2,50 for us to buy chips and these tiny little candies that they sold at the time. And along we would go, happy, to buy a pack of chips, candy and two packs of vanilla cookies. It was cheap, back then, so we would still get a little change to use another time. Every weekend we would get it. But he would say, ‘Don’t say anything to your mother.’ We kept it secret. It was two *contos* (€10) for each, but in return, we had to pick ferns and do what he told us - and we would be glad to do it. I always walked hand in hand with my father, it was usual. Not so much with my mother, but until I was ten I always walked hand in hand with my father.

She started school when she was eight. Due to her household’s limited resources, she couldn’t afford any books:

When I was little we had no books. I had a plastic bag, a notebook and a pencil, nothing else. We were poor; father told us to go to work first, picking ferns, and then study. The others kids in school had books, we didn’t; my father had no money to buy them.

At school, she was physically abused by her teacher, suffered from loneliness and had to deal with her own failure to learn:

I used to like school, but I grew isolated. Practically alone: I wanted no friends, nobody. I enjoyed being alone because I had so many problems at home with my parents. I never connected with the other kids, like the other normal children did. Always crying, always lonely; it was the others who sometimes came and asked me to play with them. My teacher used to hit me with the cane because I couldn’t learn the multiplication tables, I had to use my fingers to count. She hit me on the head and nobody learns that way... But all the others were good.

The pattern of excessive alcohol consumption by their mother led the children, by observing such consumption, to naturalize it. They showed low levels of school attainment and eventually failed to complete their education. This situation culminated in a detoxification when Elvira was only ten years old:

I could never pass the first grade; I always failed, because we didn't study. I think that if we had more help like children have nowadays - more support, psychologists, monitoring, as they have now - we would have done more. But my mother was an alcoholic, we also drank with her and that also didn't help us learn well, the wine. We did a treatment in Coimbra and stopped drinking until today. Since we were little girls, my mother had these jugs filled with alcohol and we thought that was ok; we saw her drink from them and we drank too.

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'WHEN THEY TOOK ME FROM MY PARENTS' HOUSE I WAS WEARING A YELLOW NIGHTSHIRT?' ALCOHOL DETOXIFICATION AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION: A NEW FORM OF LONELINESS

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Elvira's path was overturned when, at the age of ten, she was committed to a foster care centre, following an alcohol detoxification at the hospital. She criticises the institution's lack of resources to deal with mental health issues:

When I was ten, my sister and I did a detox at the *Patronato*, the parish centre. We went to the appointments and returned with pills and syrup.

Since her mother didn't agree to give up her children for adoption, some of them ended up being institutionalized. Despite that, Elvira's mother never visited her or her sister at the foster care centre:

When they took me from my parents' house I was wearing a yellow nightgown. I thought it was a dress, the social worker told me so. It was summer and I thought it was a dress. It stuck in my mind. My father didn't want them to take us, he cared for us. My mother didn't want me to go and live with my godmother, instead, she wanted me in boarding school, it was her thinking. She said she wouldn't give away no children to anyone; she wouldn't give up children for adoption. I guess she had her reasons, her thinking.

My mother wouldn't visit us. My father, until the day he died, always went to see us, every other week. I would ask him about my mother and he would say, 'She stayed at home. She didn't want to come.'

In her statements, the 'adult' Elvira apologizes for her mother's neglect and lack of affection when she was a child. She still visits her mother at the nursing home where the

latter now lives, and she seems to have dealt with the issues of her childhood, most likely through the psychological and psychiatric support she has received:

My mother used to say that we had issues, that we had some kind of flaw. It was wrong of her but she also didn't know, she didn't have the information we have today. She thought she was doing well and never thought to look for help somewhere else; she could have looked for other support and she didn't - they didn't know, there was no information in the village.

From her life in Catholic foster care, Elvira recalls being forced to study, as well as having for the first time basic sanitation and proper meals. Nevertheless, her emotional void was never filled and she continued to lack a place she could call home.

I spent seven years in the *Patronato*. It was complicated. We were forced to study but I didn't like school, I wanted to work. I thought that working was more important because we could earn money for ourselves and have our freedom. Today they have more skills than in our days. A lot was missing there... If there was a psychologist if I had the conditions I have today, if they the social workers would treat us... They put us to work right away, they didn't think about giving us a better future. We wanted a close family: father, mother, and our brothers and sisters – the things we didn't have. We had no conditions. Then I made a drawing of a house and some people, it was a family. It was a home and a family. Not everything was the way we wanted, but we had a house, clean laundry, hygiene and food on the table. The bedroom was for me, my sister and other colleagues; there were four beds. I didn't like it there.

At seventeen (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.

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'I HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO STAY AT OTHER PEOPLE'S HOUSES IN EXCHANGE FOR WORK.'

PROFESSIONAL PATH: VIOLENCE AND PRECARIOUSNESS

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After leaving foster care, Elvira became a housemaid. Initially, she faced dire conditions such as violent behaviour from her employers, for whom she worked without any contract

or even a fixed schedule. However, she was once again able to limit the negative effects of her personal and professional context by defying the rules and ultimately leaving this oppressive situation and rejecting the near slavery into which she had been forced:

At the age of seventeen, I started to work as a maid. There was never a fixed time to finish work; I worked eight, ten hours a day because I had a permanent place at the house. The people there didn't treat me right, sometimes they would hit me. Like my first boss, she was the one who picked me up from the boarding school. When I turned eighteen I got a letter from Court saying that I was my own boss now. So I said to her that she couldn't tell me what to do anymore. Neither her nor anyone else. I left because they treated me badly. They never paid the social security taxes or anything.

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).

I left, I had nowhere to go, nowhere to stay. I had no choice but to stay at other people's houses in exchange for work. By then I was receiving 15 *contos* (€75), later on, 17 *contos* (€85). When the euro came they paid me more: 25 *contos* (€125) at the time. Then I went to work for a lady from Porto, taking care of her, as a nurse. I kept her company, walked with her... After that I went to the 'Patronato', I got to work there for half a year through the unemployment office. Cleaning the rooms and the garden, setting the table, and cleaning bathrooms.

Following an unexpected pregnancy, Elvira became a low-income single mother. At that moment she returned to social assistance,

The first time I saw a social worker was because I needed a home, I was waiting for five years to get a house from the city council. After that, I got pregnant with my daughter and the doctor asked me if I wanted a room. I told her that a room was not enough for me and her - that was when I got the house from the city council. Before that I was always moving from house to house, I didn't have a roof, I didn't have a place where to put my things - so I was happy.

When she was a little girl I looked after her on my own. I made some mistakes, but I gave her everything that I didn't have when I was little. Nobody taught me. We

had two sessions at the 'Santa Casa' Holy House of Mercy, but at the time I had nothing. At the hospital, they taught me how to dry the baby, how to change diapers, how to give a bath - besides that, nobody taught me anything. It was very difficult for me to look after her. At that time all I had was the minimum income, I asked Dr Sofia<sup>30</sup> social worker for help but I really struggled. Sometimes I had nothing at home, nothing to eat, I had nothing... It was Dr Sofia who gave me everything: bedclothes, food for me and for my daughter too. Many times we don't have enough for our children but thank God my daughter never lacked anything because I asked other people for help. I never asked my family, because they had less than me.

In life there are many more bad moments than good, the *most good* moments were after I had my daughter. I never lived with Rita's father, we just talked, we saw each other, we met on the weekend, but really to live together with someone, that I never have. Her father didn't help us. We get the money from social security. He has an impairment of 15%, more than me, and lives with his mother. Sometimes he works, together with a brother-in-law of his, but there's no proof. He never gave us money. He cares about his daughter, sometimes he would bathe her, but he is slow, he doesn't understand things, he wouldn't let her even touch some of the toys. Apart from that he is not mean to her. He just has that mental problem... But he's like that with everybody. If he decides that he should hit her, he hits her. I love my daughter. If I didn't love her, I would live together with someone else, but I didn't want her to go through the same as I did when I was little. It could happen. I never wanted to get together with anyone, never wanted anyone else in my house. We lived the two of us, me and her. She says, 'Mom, I love you', and I say, 'I love you too, sweetie, very much! Mom loves you.'

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<sup>30</sup>It's common practice in Portugal that those who graduate from University use the title 'doctor', even if their degree is unrelated to medicine. In this case, 'Dr.' Sofia is a social worker.

Elvira’s social worker helps with health issues and/or gives money for medication and treatments, and Elvira is well aware that if she doesn’t comply with the contractual obligations defined by social services she can lose her benefits. In this sense, at least at her discourse level, she agrees with their rules,

If we are polite to the social workers, we get what we need. If we are not, we have to hear things we don’t like. We are the ones who need help, not the social workers. They are doing their job. I have to be humble because I’m the one who needs them, it’s not them who need me. And I have to know how to behave, and say ‘please’, to not demand anything from anyone because I don’t have the right.

I think that if people ask for the ISA it’s because they need it, who am I to judge anyone. I need it, so they must need it too. The State has no obligation because this money comes from people who work, who earned, who paid social security taxes for that. If they help is because they have mercy, they feel sorry for us, it’s for us to have some to eat.

This is, nevertheless, more than a utilitarian relationship. In the afternoons, she attends social activities at the local social support office, and she regards the social worker as a friend:

Dr Sofia is more than a friend, she has helped me a lot, she couldn’t do more for me. Sometimes I don’t have the money for medicines, I ask her and she helps me - she asks the council, it’s the city council that has been helping out.

She explains that the ISA is not a solution – having a job is. Even voluntary work would be a valid option, as it helps to ‘keep the mind busy’, fight loneliness and, in her opinion, has value in itself:

The ISA is very low and it was difficult for me and my daughter; at the time it was only 25 *contos* (€125), only later I started to receive €200. It was too little money for the both of us. But we managed.

The State should provide work, even if just for us to be busy for five or six hours a day, instead of only waiting for the money to arrive. Even if you're receiving the ISA, it's important to have work.

If work comes along, I would like to do the same as I do now; to go to my appointments and to have a job to do to keep my mind busy. It's better than staying at home.

She shows subservience to social workers and believes that people help her out of charity. She is also very critical of the conditions in which her siblings live and of their behaviour, namely that they spend all their income on alcohol and subsist with nearly no sanitation. She compares them to 'black people', adding that 'at least the black, they shower!'

Misery? It's those people who live in a shack. All they earn, they spend it on alcohol. My brothers have it worse than me, it's just misery. They work and they studied, but the money they earn is for wine. They are used to that, in that environment, they live in misery because they want to. When you are used to this environment you never get out of it, until you die. My sister works the fields, she earns €600, but they live for the misery. Poor? They're not poor. Their minds are poor: they can't think straight, only of the alcoholism. They have money but they can't think of anything else. They just think about living in misery, in a pigsty. Because that's not a house, they don't mind not having water to wash them, they walk around all dirty, they go to the café all dirty – black neck, black face, they look like black people. At least the black, they shower! They have no bathroom, no hygiene. They walk around in dirty clothes, without any shame. The social workers go there, see all this misery, and then say, 'You have a motorcycle? You're not that poor, after all! Where is the paycheck?'. When there is work, they go to work. When there isn't, they stay at home.

While she was receiving ISA, she attended a few mandatory courses on topics such as parental training, hygiene, active job search, sewing and embroidery, and first aid. Although she shows little enthusiasm regarding some of these subjects, she is aware that she must attend them to avoid penalties and to continue to receive benefits. She would like to try a different course from the ones she was obliged to:

I think that these training sessions should be fit for agriculture, for the fields, for sowing and planting, seeing things growing and being born, for seeing how it is to

handle agriculture... The land is everything. We know that if we plant something it could be enough to erase hunger. A good teacher has big studies, bigger than us, but they don't know about agriculture, they don't know what it is to farm, to see things growing...

A couple of years ago we joined the Association<sup>31</sup> and we learned to do new things, games, activities: a little bit of knitting, hygiene at home, personal hygiene, how we should treat our children. I learned how to make a *CB* [CV]. I think I failed a lot and didn't appreciate these things then. If it was today, I'd do it in a different way.

These training, they change us a little. If we want to, we change. Like when it comes to the hygiene at home... We also used to talk about how we should treat our children, how to talk to them. This is also important, some things we don't really know how to talk about.

Sometime later I took a course through the unemployment office, in Computer Science. I learned how a person should call and show up at work, looking well, presentable. That we should get there and hand our *CB* [CV], and we would say that we wanted to work. I really enjoyed learning computers; they should give you more time if you have difficulties. We also learned about the dangers of work there, that we could have an accident. I wanted to give up because I couldn't keep up with the other girls. The others did more than me; they had more studies, so they could do more.

Regarding adult education, she highlights the good personal relationships that she developed with teachers and other trainees, and the opportunity to build additional knowledge - namely when it comes to learning about computers, a topic that she has especially enjoyed. However, she also criticises the disparate levels of background knowledge among trainees; she reports having had more difficulties than her colleagues in

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<sup>31</sup> She is referring to a charity that provides customer service and training to recipients of the ISA.

learning, which at the time led her to consider quitting. She points to her mental and cognitive impairment as an obstacle to continuing her education:

I learned more knowledge, new things, it was good for me. I met friends and people, new faces, people who cared for us... To help us in how we should do things, it's important that we understand each other, I think.

I don't do more training because you need to have the 9th grade and I don't have the ability to study like other people do. I have the sixth grade and very badly done. I can't write, only if I copy the words.

The only activity Elvira seems to enjoy is where she feels welcomed and valued by the teacher, which reinforces the importance of the emotional dimensions of education:

During half a year, when we're sent for training sessions, we have to go. But I don't enjoy that very much, I would rather have other activities - like painting, for example, as I am doing now. Two afternoons. I like the teacher, she is very nice, a kind person. She has a lot of patience: she doesn't scold, doesn't force us to do things. And I go there and I do them.

Aware that she does 'everything wrong, in reverse' and that she needs to continue with her psychiatric treatment, she wonders whether she should be hospitalized and admits to a moment of crisis (Lahire, 2004) four years before, during which she tried to commit suicide. The loneliness she experienced as a child lingers in her adult years, as she describes episodes of depression, frequent trips to the café and a habit of 'upsetting' her neighbour:

I thought that life was no good, I was upset with life. I thought life made no sense, but it makes sense because I have a daughter. If it was today I wouldn't do what I did then, but when we are in despair we do things without thinking. I spent two days in Oliveira to do a stomach flushing and then I went back home. Rita went to live with her aunt for two years and I went to Coimbra for treatment. Then she returned to me.

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'MY DAUGHTER WAS THE BEST THING THAT HAPPENED IN MY LIFE.' THE  
INTERGENERATIONAL REPRODUCTION OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION

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Unlike her parents, Elvira attributes great meaning to her daughter's education. She

verbalizes strong concerns with her daughter's well-being; in order to help her, she asks for the advice of teachers, social workers, psychologists and doctors; finally, she gives her daughter medication for her hyperactivity disorder [ADHD], claiming that she wants a better life for the child:

Having a daughter changed a lot of things. The other day she asked me this: '*Did something happen to you when you were little when you were a child?*'. I didn't want to but I ended up telling her, and I think that I opened up more - she helped me get over those things.

We went through everything together. Everything was good... It was all very difficult, but it wasn't her fault, I gave her everything I could: I always gave her love, affection, toys, studies, I always gave her everything, even when I couldn't... But in that, we lived through good moments, always. My daughter was the best thing that happened in my life, she was the best I ever had, my best companion, my best friend.

When we're together we usually watch TV. Sometimes she sits on my lap. I ask her how her day was, how is school going, if she likes staying with her aunt... She says yes and I say, 'Ok if you're happy then I'm also happy, sweetie'. And she asks if everything is good with me: 'Are you happy?'. And I say, 'Yes, I'm happy.' Why should I tell her I'm not? To make her sad? We want to see our children happy. It's not worth it, I think we have to think positive over negative. She cares, she likes me a lot, we care for each other. She says, 'Mom when I grow up and you're an old lady, I'm going to take care of you.' And I think it's funny when she says, 'I'm going to make you food, I'm going to cook, clean the house. I'm going to take care of you, I'll never leave you.'

Her daughter exhibits hyperactivity problems which prevent her from achieving good results at school; she is being monitored by social workers and psychologists. The care shown by these experts for the child's well-being is evident (the monitoring takes place in the same social housing neighbourhood where Elvira lives). Elvira also shows a strong concern for her daughter's health and education, and she is helped by the social workers in a joint effort:

I think my daughter is doing well in school. She's in fourth grade. Right now I don't know, because I'm not with her. She was good, she improved a lot, beyond her

difficulties. She has a speaking problem, but apart from that she doesn't have any other health problems. She has more difficulty learning... It's her hyperactivity. If she can speak loud, she speaks loud; if she can scratch, she scratches; if she can erase, she erases everything. While the teacher is speaking, she is in her own world, in another world. Everything that is within our reach, we try to help with. I give her the medication. She takes it in the morning and at noon. She's being followed by the children's doctor... When we had to change the medication, I went to her school and asked her teacher for the report and took it to the doctor. I ask the people who know more than me for help. The teachers, the social workers, the psychologist, everything within my reach to have the best conditions. 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.

In a moment of crossroads in her life, disregarding the advice of social workers and psychologists, she continued her encounters with a man, knowing that he was sexually interested in her young daughter. As a result, social services intervened and removed the child, placing her with an aunt. Nowadays, Elvira admits that she was wrong; she shows feelings of guilt:

My daughter is not with me anymore, she lives with her aunt, her father's sister. It was my fault - if I wasn't so stubborn... I guess it's been a year, but I'm not sure. Only the court and the doctors [social workers] go and see how things are going. I've been seeing her once a week, here in the 'Espaço Social' social space. It's just a little bit of time, but it's what it is, better than nothing. If she could choose, she would like to be with me at home, but there is no alternative: she has to stay with her aunt, and I trust her. They took her away from me because I was not supposed to go see a guy and I went, I was stubborn, and the doctor social worker and the court, they took her away from me for a while, until I sorted myself out. Because he didn't want me, he wanted her, and that was wrong. He's fortysomething. My daughter is underage. He used to give her a lot of things and she was starting to be smitten with him, that's why she was taken from me before anything happened. When I went to see that person I used to take her with me, and that person was interested in her, and that was wrong. She was at a difficult age, it was me who was

in the wrong, not her, it was my fault. It was for her own sake, and I realized I was wrong.

I have everything I always wanted, I just don't have my daughter near me. I think that one day she will come back to me again. I have to think in a different way, know that I made mistakes so that I don't go wrong with her again. I have to do as people tell me, that's for my own sake. That's why I lost her.

She is turning eleven today. Probably I won't see her, I don't have her contact. But they are Jehovah's Witnesses... It's different religions. My daughter is going to follow the same religion as her aunt. She is used to hearing 'happy birthday', but she doesn't mind if she doesn't, she is a simple kid, all she wants is to be happy. I've always told her, 'Today is your birthday,' but didn't get her used to receiving presents. I normally wish her a happy birthday and when I can I give her a present. When I can't, I give it to her another day and I tell her, 'our birthday is every day.' I still don't know when I'm going to see her.

At the moment she is undergoing psychiatric treatment and is not employed. In fact, her mental health issues prevent her from working:

I'm going to continue with the treatment, but I don't know if it's better to stay in the hospital, I'll see what the doctor says. I'm taking the medication the psychiatrist prescribed. Nervous system. If I don't take it I just make a mess, I annoy people and I take pills. I get bored, I'm always ringing the neighbour's doorbell. And I say, 'I'm going to take pills. Life is no good, there's no point, everything goes wrong for me.' And the others get sick too. My neighbour, she says, 'Enough, I can't take it anymore, enough of putting up with you!' And I go for coffee a lot, I take another coffee, and many more, and it's bad for me, but at least I forget about life. I do everything wrong, I do everything in reverse.

I turn up at the cafés to clean. It's hard because of the crisis. I have a lot of difficulties in getting a job because I only work with a second person to help me, I have difficulties. I'm very slow, but I can clean and sweep. I think work is the most important thing ... Let it be sweeping gardens, cutting grass, sweeping, it doesn't matter. I don't mind doing what I'm told to. I'm not afraid of working in the fields or anything, we learn to live with a different culture. If the State would create a

module like this: Harvest. A big field; planting lettuce, cabbage, a little bit of everything, so that we could learn. A lot of people don't appreciate the countryside, but there's everything there, it gives us our food. Here in the neighbourhood, there isn't any garden, but if there was it would be nice.

If I could choose I'd like to train as a weaver; I like to work on the loom, to weave. But there aren't many of them now. Before there were weavers and all that, and now there aren't. I'd like to clean, sweep, something that would be an honest work, something that I knew how to do.

My day-to-day now is to come here to the 'Espaço Social' social space every afternoon, to pass the time. In the mornings I stay home. Right now I don't have any income. I managed to get my daughter's allowance; it's not much and it's all I got, nothing else. I have the doctor as well; she helps me with food and with the gas bill.

Living away from her daughter, with no job and no source of income, it's not a surprise that Elvira's time dispositions are present-oriented. She focuses on living one day at a time:

Projects? To have a permanent job, to live our day-to-day life. We wait for tomorrow, to see how it will look like... We're going to live one day at a time, some people are worse off than us, not everything in life is as we want it to be. Some people spend their whole life in a bed, ill, and they are worse off than us. As long as I have legs to walk and arms to move, we can thank God. Right now my goal in life is to have a permanent job and manage to get my paycheck at the end of the month. To work in something I could get on with and knew how to do.

I don't want my daughter to have the same life my parents and I had. My father had to start working young, we couldn't study much, we had great difficulties in life and I don't want that for her. I want her to have the best she can, for tomorrow, and a better future than mine. I could have studied more and my mother didn't let me.

## 6.6. MARGARIDA: ‘YOU GET TO A POINT WHERE YOU JUST RUN OUT OF LOVE’

*Margarida tinha no momento das entrevistas 38 anos e residia numa freguesia rural a norte do Porto, numa rua com calçada de pedra. Avistei uma porta com roupa estendida e esperei um pouco. Margarida chegou sorridente a conduzir um motociclo. Não tinha os dentes da frente e os restantes estavam estragados, os seus cabelos eram longos e escuros. As entrevistas decorreram perto de sua casa, num café sossegado, sob o olhar curioso e atento dos donos do mesmo, ao qual Margarida parece ser albeia, falando abertamente sobre a sua vida. Tem algumas dificuldades de dicção e mostrou-se orgulhosa por ter andado a frequentar o 4º ano. Estava separada do companheiro havia um mês e tinha 3 filhos. No caminho de regresso para o carro, contou-me que outras mulheres que conhecia não têm qualquer rendimento nem alimentos para dar aos filhos. Confessou-me, talvez na esperança de me dizer o que pensava que eu gostaria de ouvir, que receia que a CPCJ os retirasse às suas mães, que considerava negligentes.*

Nascida numa família com poucos recursos económicos e com carências alimentares, Margarida, as cinco irmãs e um irmão viram-se precocemente obrigados a trabalhar para ajudar os pais, analfabetos, e com pouco tempo para dedicar aos filhos. Talvez por isso não reconhecessem o valor da educação e Margarida acabou por sair da escola, também ela analfabeta.

À data das entrevistas tinha frequentado o 4º ano, encontrava-se separada do marido, com quem casara há 21 anos. Há seis anos que recebia o RSI e recebia ainda o abono dos filhos, mas o valor do subsídio, 210 euros, não era suficiente para pagar a renda da sua casa (175 euros) e conseguir sobreviver. O marido tinha contraído várias dívidas, num valor que ultrapassava os 5.000 euros, e Margarida ponderava declarar insolvência pois não tinha forma de as liquidar.

Os três filhos estavam a estudar e eram alunos razoáveis e o filho mais velho sofria de graves problemas de saúde.

Margarida nasceu numa família com graves dificuldades financeiras que se traduziram em carências alimentares e na falta de condições de alojamento (não dispunham de casa de banho e um quarto era partilhado pelas cinco irmãs). Os seus pais não valorizavam a escola e era patente o desinvestimento pedagógico familiar na educação dos filhos. Os pais discutiam com frequência e a mãe tinha atitudes agressivas em relação aos filhos. Em suma, Margarida cresceu com falta de amor e de cuidados, o que, como veremos, precipitou o seu casamento com um homem às mãos de quem foi vítima de violência doméstica e negligência emocional. Neste retrato é ainda visível a ausência de investimento do Estado na proteção social das crianças.

Quando era criança foi vítima de violência por parte de adultos, que demonstravam uma ausência de respeito pelas crianças e pelos seus direitos. A sua mãe demonstrou uma moral de esforço, de trabalho e de organização do tempo que lhes permitia sobreviver, trabalhando arduamente, mas esse ascetismo era transposto para os afetos, negligenciando as filhas e o filho.

Os meus pais não *dava* muito valor à escola... A minha mãe não sabe ler. O meu falecido pai já morreu, também não sabia. Não tem nada a ver, que eu não sei e os meus filhos sabem. Isso é coisa de a gente mandar para a escola, para eles aprenderem.

Ela punha-se em pé às cinco da manhã para ir lavar roupa. Às oito e meia, nove horas vinha o peixeiro, via o que era para ela e ia vender. Ia com uma caixinha à cabeça, vendia porta a porta e muitas vezes íamos com ela. Chegava a casa de vender, lá para as onze e meia, meio-dia... Se estivesse bom tempo e se a gente não tivesse estendido a roupa era logo uma coça. E a roupa bem estendida! Não havia

máquina de lavar, era pôr a roupa em OMO<sup>32</sup> e lavar ao tanque, com a bacia à cabeça. Já passei muitas! A gente não sabia o que era um iogurte, o que era uma banana! Nunca tive nem um bocadinho de mimo, até hoje não sei o que é isso. Ao que os meus filhos têm... Ninguém morreu, só que era outra vida.

A casa da minha mãe não tinha casa de banho. O quarto havia de ter mais um: nós éramos seis raparigas, eu sou a do meio... Eram três quartos: um para o rapaz, outro para a minha mãe e para o meu pai e outro para nós, porque a minha irmã mais velha ficava com a minha madrinha.

A extrema privação material e a negligência da sua família levaram Margarida a trabalhar enquanto ainda era uma criança, uma necessidade feita desejo de ajudar a mãe. O trabalho infantil era nos anos 80 bastante frequente em Portugal, tendo aí começado a ser alvo de inspeções e coimas por parte do Estado que durante décadas negligenciou as suas crianças. Com oito anos Margarida já trabalhava, tendo nessa altura uma forte noção de poupança e de esforço.

No retrato de Margarida é ainda visível a exploração laboral a que os trabalhadores estavam sujeitos, a subordinação das crianças ao poder dos empregadores, que lhes negavam a oportunidade de estudar e de ter um emprego gratificante. Do mesmo modo, os vínculos laborais baseavam-se na precariedade e em contratos a termo certo. Deste modo, é frequente a estratégia da não renovação de contratos de forma a que os trabalhadores percam o direito a um contrato a tempo indeterminado.

Margarida revelou que a sua última empregadora tinha confiança nela e no seu trabalho, mas que a crise na indústria têxtil, baseada em mão-de-obra não qualificada, ditou o destino de muitas empresas naquela área geográfica, que acabaram por encerrar:

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<sup>32</sup> Detergente

Da primeira vez andei sete anos na escola. Sei escrever o meu nome, desenrascar-me, quem tem boca vai a Roma! As outras minhas irmãs também não *sabe* ler. Muitas vezes a gente ia à escola, a maior parte não ia. A minha mãe tirava-me da escola para me pôr a trabalhar (não é como os meus filhos: primeiro a escola) e comecei a gostar, sabia que já ganhava. Gostava da escola, só que não dá para tudo e vi a minha mãe muito apertada. Eu trabalhava, dava tudo à minha mãe.

Somos seis raparigas e um rapaz, mais velho, todos começaram a trabalhar cedo. Era eu, a minha irmã, outras vizinhas minhas, colegas de escola, as mães delas tirava-as da escola para ir servir. Com 8 anos fui tomar conta de uma senhora. A minha mãe vendia para aqueles lados e as senhoras *dizija*: ‘Vocês não tendes lá ninguém que venha aqui dar umas horinhas?’. Depois ia lá ver-me com o meu falecido pai, porque conhecia bem a senhora. Comecei a gostar daquilo... Com oito anos já andava a trabalhar, sabia tudo, buscar batatas, fazer as camas, estender roupa... Andava a trabalhar quando comecei a ficar mulherzita, não sabia o que era isso, a minha mãe nem ensinou-me nem nada, eu disse à minha patroa: ‘Já... Tenho isto!’ Na altura tinha onze anos e *ao* tempo já andava a trabalhar. Comia lá e tudo, fazia de comer, arrumava. Os patrões tinham uma fábrica de calçado. À noite, quando acabasse, ia para a fábrica arrumar. Queria que eu ficasse lá a viver, dava-me casa. O dinheiro que eu ganhava era só para mim, para juntar. Eu gostava de estar lá, ainda estive bastante tempo. Depois saí, fui para uma fábrica de toalhas, para o corte com a tesoura. Agora há máquinas, antes eu sozinha tinha que pôr os rolos em cima da mesa. Um bocado pesado, aqueles rolos para os toalhões... Já andei a sachar também. Toda a minha vida trabalhei. Tenho muitos anos de caixa, comecei com 16 ou 17 anos. Já trabalhei na fábrica dos *chuvas* [guarda-chuvas]... A minha cunhada arranjou-me a *contarto* [contrato], assinei a segunda, se assinasse a outra ficava efetiva. Só que eles ganham muito com *contartas*, mandam embora, depois *mete* outras.

A última fábrica que andei era de meias, queriam para o turno da noite. A patroa queria conhecer bem as pessoas. Ela viu que eu já fazia tanto como as outras – que já andavam lá há cinco anos e tal – eu nem 1 mês andava lá. A patroa gostava de mim e aquela máquina era boa. Nunca pôs nada de coisa, confiava em mim. E eu gostava bem de lá. Sempre certinho, se tivesse que ir à casa de banho desligava a

máquina e vinha à minha vida, ia lanchar... Fazia a minha produção e não se passava nada. Eu gostava bem de andar naquilo. Quando a patroa mandou-me embora, tinha pouco trabalho. Aquilo é *contarto*, fez *contarto*... Duas *contartas*. O *contarto* acabou e a patroa disse que a fábrica estava a ficar em baixo, então ela fechou. A patroa era muito boa, para pagar, chegava aquele dia e pagava.

Gostava de fazer coisa de limpezas... Ou ajudante de cozinha... A fazer o comer. É uma coisa que eu gosto muito, que já andei lá, só que pagavam muito pouquinho. Aquilo era sábado e domingo, muitas horas e ganhava pouco. No restaurante a gente não tinha tempos livres. Saía às quatro, ao domingo, quando acabasse de fazer a limpeza, arrumar tudo. Não tinha dia de folga, não tinha nada. Tinha os dois pequeninos ainda. Arranjei para a fábrica.

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‘SE FOSSE HOJE NÃO CASAVA’

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Como vimos anteriormente, as frequentes discussões dos pais levaram-na a casar como uma estratégia para sair de casa, mas confessa que ao fim de um ano já estava arrependida. Tal como a habitação onde residia com os pais e irmãos, também a casa para onde foi residir não dispunha de casa de banho. Revelando estratégia e iniciativa, Margarida candidatou-se ao arrendamento jovem<sup>33</sup>, conseguindo pela primeira vez ter um alojamento com todas as condições de habitabilidade.

O meu pai fazia muito barulho e minha mãe também. Por isso eu casei nova, saí de casa. Via a confusão, não tinha mimo, não tinha nada (não havia aqueles mimos que os meus filhos têm).

Casei aos 17 anos pelo Civil (já namorava há ano e meio), depois casei pela Igreja. A minha mãe e o meu pai *teve* que assinar. Eu toda contente... Se fosse hoje não

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<sup>33</sup> Medida governamental que permitiu aos jovens arrendar casas, sendo que uma parte do valor da renda era comparticipada pelo Estado, mediante determinados critérios de elegibilidade.

casava, foi mesmo para sair de casa. O casamento é respeito. Para casar não é a Igreja que conta, não tem nada a ver. Na Igreja, todos muito bonitos, com o vestidinho, o jantar, muito bem. No dia do meu casamento, estava lá fora e a minha madrinha era assim: ‘Não chores...’. Passado nem um ano, já estava arrependida, não sabia se havia de casar [pela Igreja], sentia saudades da família.

Quando casei fui viver para casa da minha falecida sogra. Fui para cima, tinha casa de banho, ela ficava cá em baixo, estava bem lá. Depois como queria um espaço, arranjàmos uma casa. Lá também não tinha casa de banho, tinha a sala e dois quartos. Não tinha máquina, não podia meter a roupa à máquina, na cozinha também tinha que lavar a louça à bacia. As outras casas que eu fui já tinha tudo. Adonde o Quim trabalhava, o senhor disse: ‘Vou-te arranjar uns anexos para vós vir morar para aqui’. E fez uns anexos, um quarto, uma sala, casa de banho, tinha um coiso grande para pôr o carro também. Mais tarde o Quim e a vizinha fez uma marquise para estender a roupa, de chapas. Nós os quatro comprámos as chapas, ele fez, de ferro. Aquilo era até jeitosinho, o coberto, para estender roupa, uma casa mesmo arranjadinha. Depois saí, fui para outra. Também tinha casa de banho, tinha tudo. A outra tinha recibo de renda, *contarto*. Tinha direito ao *coisa* jovem. Não tinha os 30 anos, nem eu nem ele, consegui.

Mais uma vez revelando estratégia e responsabilidade, e antecipando as necessidades do seu filho que ainda não tinha nascido, poupou dinheiro para que o marido pudesse tirar a carta e a criança pudesse ser transportada com maior conforto.

Tal como outras entrevistadas, também Margarida teve gravidezes não esperadas o que colocou a necessidade de uma nova casa.

Estive três anos sem ter filhos... O primeiro foi o Pedro. Só quis quando ele teve a carta e o carro. Ele tinha uma mota, e eu disse: ‘Vem aí o filho, vai andar à chuva...’. Eu trabalhei sempre, juntei um *dinheirico* e ele tirou a carta e ficou logo bem em tudo. Tive o Pedro, tinha feito 3 anos de casada, tinha 21 anos. Depois tive a menina, tive um aborto... Tinha lá na sala, a dividir, metade para a menina e para o menino. Depois vinha o Francisco [filho mais novo], já não dava a casa. O mais novo veio porque... Não o queria, mas sabe, é perfeitinho. Já tive dois abortos. Tive um aborto já tinha o mais velhinho três aninhos. Depois tive outro aborto, que

o bebê tinha quatro mesinhos, ia para o quarto mês, vinha com problemas, daquelas crianças que são todas iguais. Como a médica disse, eu piquei logo a barriga. Tinha 32 anos, ainda era nova. A Dra. disse assim: ‘Você vai já fazer o exame’. A médica fez, viu logo. Mal eu saí da maternidade, ligou-me: ‘Margarida, vem com problemas. Você quer fazer já o aborto? Pode fazer, ainda é pouco tempo’. Preparei as coisas, fui logo para lá. Era melhor ter um filho do que ter um aborto! Custou-me tanto.

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‘NO QUERER DELE ERA SÓ AMEAÇAR E BEBER’

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Após alguns anos de casamento o marido começou a tornar-se violento, chegando a ameaça-la de morte, um comportamento exacerbado pelo seu alcoolismo, sendo as crianças vítimas de negligência e violência emocional, até ao ponto em que, pressionada pela assistência social que ameaçava retirar-lhe os filhos, Margarida se separou do companheiro, dando prioridade ao bem-estar das crianças.

Ele passados três anos de casados começou a beber, armava-se e atirava-me com botas, com sandálias, estava com o vinho. As minhas irmãs, os meus cunhados iam a minha casa e viam aquilo: ‘Ó Quim, isto não pode ser assim!’. Era *o coisa* do álcool. Eu trabalhava, na altura o patrão não pagava, estava muito em baixo. Ele também trabalhava. Só tinha um menino. Puxou-me pelos cabelos, levou-me ao café... Disse que era o vinho que estava a fazer-lhe mal. ‘É do vinho? Então, escupa lá, bebe menos’. A minha mãe começou a ver as coisas, começou a ficar aborrecida com ele. Agora ele disse: ‘Eu sei que muita coisa fiz mal e não podia fazer’. Bebe, fica alterado, fica avariado. Já andou em tratamento, a Dra. Célia arranjou-lhe. Ele disse que quem precisava era a Dra.! Andou lá, num Dr. do Porto, fui com ele na altura e ele disse que não tinha nada. Fez também um tratamento, não sei se tinha a SIDA ou lá ou quê, para fazer o tratamento ao álcool e ver-se disso. Foi lá fazer, não tinha nada disso, não tinha álcool no sangue. Só que ele a beber ficava alterado, eu tinha que arranjar tudo, tinha que fazer de mulher e de homem. Cheguei a um ponto disse: ‘Isso não pode ser assim, não dá’. Pelos meus filhos... O mais novo apanhou um trauma muito grande, que o menino via tudo. Andei a ser seguida com ele no Porto. Ouvia a conversa, o menino calava-se. Tirei-lhe as fraldas aos 20 mesinhos de dia e de noite, muito limpinho até aos quatro

aninhos. Depois ouvia coisas, ouvia barulho [discussões entre o casal] e o menino ficou com o trauma. Começou a fazer chichi até aos dez aninhos, na cama, de noite. O menino é todo pela mãe. O pai às vezes é assim: ‘É o filho da mamã’. O médico disse: ‘Não se pode andar com ele sempre a berrar’. Ele não, ele fala à beira dos filhos e tudo! A Dra. disse: ‘Ele tem um ódio ao pai!’.

A Dra. disse-me que tirava os meus filhos se eu não saísse dele. Os meus filhos, para mim, é tudo. Eu tiro à minha boca para lhes dar, para não faltar nada aos meninos. Eles comem bem, eu trato bem deles, andam limpinhos, aflige-me com eles. A Dra. também disse que não queria tirar os filhos, só que ele tinha que mudar ou fazer o tratamento ao álcool. Ele disse que não tinha, que não era viciado. Quem não é viciado sou eu! Tinha que fazer um rumo, os meus filhos não iam pagar, não ia ficar sem eles, nem os meus filhos sem mim. Ele era só o meu homem, eu tenho mais amor aos meus filhos. Eles para mim é tudo. No querer dele era só ameaçar e beber. E depois não aceita que ele bebia, mesmo quando está bêbedo não aceita. Eu guardava tudo, guardava, guardava.... Muitas vezes ele estava a chegar a casa, eu já estava a chorar. Sem ele fazer nada, já estava com o trauma, desesperada da cabeça. Eu berrava com os meninos sem motivo nenhum, eles viam mesmo que eu não estava bem. Ele disse que se eu *cansei-se* dele, ele matava-me. Apanhei esgotamentos. Já estava pálida, só de chorar. O médico disse: ‘Você não anda bem. Para você andar bem vai ter que sair dele’. O do Porto de ajuda das crianças também disse o mesmo. Eu não tinha coragem, tinha medo. Depois fui chamada à Dra. Célia, com os menores [CPCJ], falei com uma senhora muito boa, a Dra. Margarida...

Tanto Margarida como o seu filho mais velho mostram características de responsabilidade, iniciativa, esforço e perseverança que contrastam com o hedonismo e a irresponsabilidade do marido/pai. A mudança da situação conjugal trouxe a Margarida a paz que tanto ansiava, em contraste com o quadro ansioso e depressivo em que vivia. No entanto, a falta de recursos materiais e as dívidas que o ex-companheiro contraiu, e que Margarida ficou com a responsabilidade de pagar, continuam a preocupar-la e a provocar-lhe problemas do foro mental:

Fui eu que arranjei a casa para ele sair, senão ele não fazia nada. Fui eu que arranjei o trabalho para ele ir, senão não ia trabalhar. Já estive em casa semanas, o meu Pedro [dizia]:

‘Ó pai deixe de beber, você só bebe!’

‘Não, mas não vou para cafés.’

‘Não vai para cafés, é em casa. Você compra os pacotes de vinho, bebe em casa. Não é só beber e fumar, pai. Não leva vida nenhuma! Você tem que mudar muito. Tem que poupar muito. Como é que você vive? Não consegue!’

Agora estou melhor do que o que estava. Estou melhor com os meus filhos. Desde que estou sozinha, é mais sossegado. Quando eles eram pequeninos aquilo era um consolo (agora eles grandes também). Só que tinha o pai, era beber vinho, era beber, beber... Não tinha sossego, não tinha gosto, não tinha nada. Eu já saí dele, estive fora dele cinco meses. Depois ele disse que ia fazer tratamento ao álcool, não fez. Deixou de beber a ver se eu ia para ele, mas é para me comprar. Vim para ele, não sei como, mudei para aqui e começou a fazer outra vez o mesmo. E cá para mim: ‘Não há sossego. O meu sossego é sair dele.’ Ele não tinha noção do que fazia, já estava queimado, variava, não dizia coisa com coisa.

Já apanhei *pressões* da cabeça. Tomei calmantes por estar perdida da cabeça. Uns que eu estava a tomar engordava e inchava, engordei uns dez quilos. Depois deixei aquele remédio, mudou para outro. Agora o médico disse: ‘Para ir abaixo tem que ser aos bocados’. Quando estou mesmo em baixo, vem dinheiro, pago aquilo e o dinheiro não chega. Afeta-me a cabeça, claro, a pensar que o dinheiro não chega a nada, ando a ser seguida em Psiquiatria.

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‘A GENTE TEM QUE FAZER TUDO O QUE AS DOUTORAS MANDAM, SENÃO...’

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No âmbito do RSI foi-lhe proposto fazer formação financiada para lhe dar equivalência ao 4º ano de escolaridade que, contudo, não chegou a concluir. Todas as propostas de formação por parte da assistente social tinham sido aceites, até porque tinha consciência

que se recusar poderia ter penalizações no subsídio e, nesse sentido, demonstrava conformismo e dependência relativamente às normas impostas pela Segurança Social, não tendo podido, por exemplo, escolher o curso que gostaria de frequentar.

Guardava boas recordações da formação, quer da aprendizagem, quer das relações com os formadores e as colegas, tendo aumentando as redes de sociabilidade:

Já estive a servir em muitos lados, depois fui para fábricas. Fui fazer o curso para aprender alguma coisa. Foi a Dra. Célia que arranjou, telefonou-me, fui à entrevista e depois fui às aulas. Só que não era para fazer a 4.<sup>a</sup> classe, era para fazer só o *resumo*. Andei na escola, segunda vez, dois meio anos à tarde...

Não fui obrigada a fazer as formações, tinha vontade. A Dra. disse:

‘Quando tiver formação, você está disposta?’

‘Estou sim senhora.’

Fui sempre, nunca recusei nada. Neste que eu *estive*, foi meio ano de escola, das duas até às cinco. Foi duas vezes, meio ano. E depois teve um tempo, a Dra. chamou-me, tinha outros cursos para fazer e eu fui. Este era a ganhar, os outros não eram. A gente se não for, perdia. E fazia bem à cabeça!

A primeira vez que eu andei, eram todas *porreiras*, até ficámos muitas amigas. Uma que estava a acabar o 4.<sup>o</sup> ano, ajudava-me. Quem sabe não custa nada ajudar e ela também tinha vontade. Ainda hoje somos bem amigas. Foi a Dra. Célia que arranjou, telefonou-me, fui à entrevista e depois fui às aulas. Andei lá sete *mês*, aprendi muitas coisas. Tinha muitas disciplinas: era Português, contas, jogos, Ginástica... Cada professor era três horas. Quando acabasse aquelas horas vinha outro. Foi fixe.

Depois também tirámos o diploma, o curso do jardim. O professor em Sto. Tirso, *porreirão*, tinha 72 anos. Já estava reformado, só que gostava muito de dar formação. O professor que estava à frente daquilo também era uma joia, fomos para uma quinta, perto de Paços de Ferreira. Foi o professor que escolheu o curso... Eu até disse: ‘Ou confeção de máquinas, ou revista... Ou para cozinha’. Disse ele: ‘Nós temos aqui é para jardim’. A senhora arranjou a quinta, fomos para

lá e tirámos o curso. Fomos meter couves, era salada. Era para dar o *resumo* só que eu não fiz o 4.º ano. Tinha outras colegas minhas que já sabiam muito. Fizeram o 4.º, eu ainda não *fez*. Fiquei com diploma de jardim. Gostava de todos os formadores. Aprendíamos para jardim, para a horta, para meter repolho, alface, cenoura. O professor dava atenção, paciência com tudo. Muitas não gostavam dele, não estavam para o ouvir.

Os cursos frequentados permitiram-lhe uma maior disponibilidade para cuidar dos filhos, podendo, por exemplo, acompanhá-los a consultas médicas. Ao mesmo tempo, possibilitaram uma estruturação dos horários familiares, o desenvolvimento de rotinas e o planeamento do dia-a-dia. No entanto, era visível no discurso da entrevistada um conformismo aliado à obrigatoriedade da formação e imposição do curso por parte das assistentes sociais:

A gente tinha que ir mesmo, senão cortavam-nos o RSI. É como quando a gente é chamada ao fundo de desemprego, se não aparecer é cortado. A gente tem que fazer tudo o que as doutoras mandam, senão... A Dra. sabe bem se a gente vai ou não vai. Se não tivesse o rendimento mínimo, se andasse a trabalhar, não podia fazer o curso. Não podia ir ao médico com os meus filhos, tinha que faltar. Assim não falto.

À escola gostava de ir. Tinha aquele ritmo... Começava às nove, eu punha-me sempre a pé às sete horas para fazer o lanche para os meninos. Preparava-me, fazia as camas, ou estendia a roupa. Oito e meia, nove menos um quarto, saía de casa e ia toda contente. Vinha ao meio dia... E gostava, é como andasse a trabalhar, aquele ritmo. Aprendi muita coisa. A gente está muito tempo parada, há muita coisa que esquece, então vai aprender. Gostei dos cursos, de conhecer pessoas novas. Havia sempre essas coisas que a gente não sabe, aprende. Adorei...

A Dra. disse que quando tiver mais cursos para fazer, a gente é chamada para ir. Até gostava, quando acabasse este ia para outro. Aquilo que tiver, a gente não pode escolher muito.

O desemprego foi o motivo principal de requerimento da prestação. Desde então admitia que tinha uma boa relação com a sua assistente social ‘fazendo tudo o que ela manda’, expressão exemplificativa da subordinação e dependência vivida por Margarida face aos serviços de ação social e a sua aparente falta de poder, dada a escassez de oportunidades de emprego, em plena crise dos anos da austeridade em Portugal. Para além das ajudas materiais as assistentes sociais desempenhavam um papel fundamental no acompanhamento da situação social, educativa e de saúde dos filhos de Margarida.

Já estou há bastante tempo desempregada. A minha menina ia fazer sete anos, agora tem doze. Procurei trabalho, mas não arranjei. Se arranjasse antes queria ir trabalhar, porque o fundo de desemprego estava a receber pouquinho, na altura, 213 euros. Como a patroa meteu-me poucos descontos... E eu trabalhava na fábrica de noite! A Dra. disse: ‘Você pede mais ajuda’, era muito pouquinho, eu tinha os três filhos e quem tivesse o fundo de desemprego dava mais 100 euros.

Já estive pelo fundo para aí três ou quatro vezes, de fábricas. A gente vai trabalhar, a fábrica faz *contarto*. Quando o fundo de desemprego acabou em setembro, estava a ver se arranjava trabalho. Não consegui arranjar nada, meti o rendimento mínimo há 6 anos. As doutoras vieram a minha casa, foi a Dra. Célia, a primeira. Os meus filhos estavam na escola. Viu a casa e ficou a ser a minha Dra. Gosto dela, faço tudo o que ela manda, tem que ser. Quando é chamada para o fundo de desemprego eu vou.

Agora estou à procura. Tudo o que tiver, para revista, para embalagem, para o ferro ou para limpeza, tenho jeito para tudo. Revistar, eu adoro. Na fábrica de lãs, eu gostava. Ou tomar conta de crianças... Quando eu pedi para fábricas ou para limpeza, muita gente: ‘Não posso!’. Mesmo as patroas, a dona, é que faz limpeza! Já andei a pedir, para a confeção e tudo... Às vezes eles botavam a culpa: ‘Você não sabe ler’... É um trabalho que eu sei fazer, não era preciso... Muitas pessoas não sabem ler e fazem trabalho igual. Só que agora é preciso cursos para tudo!

A *doutor* leu-me o contrato de inserção. Em setembro fui lá assinar, já é assim há dois anos. A Dra. também lê ao meu filho, ele já assina. Aquilo dizia que podiam vir

a casa ver como estava as crianças. *Podia* vir a Marta e a Júlia. São duas meninas que vêm ver se está tudo bem, se tem higiene... Se pode vir? Pode. Se a gente não estiver um dia, elas vêm em outro dia. Caso eu não estiver, elas às vezes telefonam: ‘Ó Margarida, está tudo bem?’. Até a Dra. Célia um dia disse: ‘Ó Margarida, você anda a trabalhar?’, eu disse: ‘Não senhora! Eu preciso ir ao posto médico, não sei se elas vêm de manhã ou vêm de tarde’. Às vezes vou buscar pão, ou às compras, vêm as meninas e venho logo. É essas coisas assim: levar as crianças ao médico, que estou sempre em dia, e se quando houver trabalho eu estava *acesso* para ir trabalhar (claro que estou) e andar a procurar. Disse que eu tinha de ir a consultas com o Pedro, que é verdade, tenho o papel...

Nunca tive problemas com assistentes sociais. Da primeira vez estive muito à rasca. Quando saí a primeira vez do Quim fui lá pedir ajuda e eles mandaram-me ir àqueles que dão arroz, para ter ajuda. Passou um papel e eu fui. Foi há nove anos mais ou menos. Fui bem tratada, não estive muito tempo à espera. Depois também pedi aqui à Cruz Vermelha, já morava aqui, os ganhos era poucos. Até hoje nada!

Ainda estou a receber o RSI. Já *foi* muitas vezes chamada ao centro de emprego, apareci lá, senão eles cortavam-me. A gente quando é chamada tem que aparecer, senão eles cortam logo. Está muito mau isto. Fábricas a fechar, não sei onde é que isto vai parar. Disseram que ia fechar pelo menos duas ou três de móveis.

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#### ‘A VIDA NÃO É FÁCIL’

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Na sequência do que foi dito anteriormente, as questões financeiras prejudicavam a saúde mental de Margarida, nomeadamente a preocupação em pagar as dívidas contraídas pelo seu ex-marido ao banco (cartão de crédito, empréstimo do carro), as dívidas das rendas em atraso e as dívidas à mercearia. Tal situação é tanto mais preocupante quanto por vezes Margarida não dispunha de recursos para assegurar a alimentação dos filhos. No entanto, as próprias crianças tinham por vezes vergonha de pedir o lanche (gratuito) na escola, preferindo passar sem comer.

O que está pior é o *coiso* do dinheiro. Às vezes ando triste, falta-me dinheiro. Muito. A gente se não tem dinheiro não pode comprar. Ataca-me muito à cabeça, fico

muitas vezes deprimida. Ando a fazer tratamento, já apanhei umas poucas de *pessões* [depressões].

*Recebe* abono dos filhos. Não tenho ajuda nos alimentos. Recebi dois meses 210 euros, não chegava para a renda, pago 175, fora a luz. Já estou a dever três meses à minha senhoria, mais 900 euros, que ele quando estava comigo, esteve um tempo sem trabalhar. Na altura, não chegava a 300 euros o que estava a receber, muito pouquinho. Depois a Dra. Célia meteu mais um bocado dele, porque ele estava em casa. Agora ele arranhou trabalho, cortaram-me esses 150 euros. Só fiquei com 300. Depois foi para 210 euros. Não chegava para a renda e para comer! E barato, e barato!

Eu sei que a vida não é fácil. A gente com 50 euros não faz nada, é preciso ter as coisas para comerem. É demais! Não consigo fazer as compras com 200 euros! Fui à loja buscar uma coisa de óleo, pão de milho, iogurtes, leite *chocolatado*. Trago nada e fica dez euros, nem um bocado de carne nem nada. Todos os dias eles levam lanchinho. Já pedi ajuda na escola, a professora disse que ia lá falar se pode-me ajudar no lanche dos meninos. Primeiro falei com eles, a menina podia não querer... E a menina: 'Ó mãe, vou' e o mais novo também vai. Quando o Pedro faltava dois anos para acabar, e eu disse-lhe: 'Queres que eu *pede* o lanche?', ele não quis, teve vergonha: 'Ó mãe, antes não quero levar lanche'.

Para pagar as dívidas contraídas pelo ex-marido, recorreu quer a outro empréstimo bancário, quer à DECO, para aconselhamento, e estava a considerar ir a Tribunal para declarar insolvência. À irresponsabilidade e carácter hedonista das escolhas do ex-marido, Margarida, apesar da escassez de habilitações literárias, e revelando espírito de iniciativa, pôs em marcha uma série de estratégias para conseguir resolver o grave problema causado por aquele. Neste processo também têm sido fundamentais a solidariedade da senhoria, que lhe tem perdoado as rendas em atraso, bem como a ajuda das assistentes sociais e das professoras dos filhos. Tais ajudas, no entanto, aumentam a sua dependência face a apoios sociais e à solidariedade de outras pessoas.

Tenho um crédito para pagar que já está 5.000 e tal euros a passar. Quando estava com o Quim, ele andava com o cartão *Visa*. Disse ao Banco que não queria, eles mandaram. Ele andava com os cartões e quando dei por ela estava em 3.000 euros

na conta. Andava a pagar a letra do carro, quase 150 euros. E quando eu ia pagar a letra ao Banco, a conta estava descoberta. Eu não sabia o que era, perguntei ao senhor: ‘*Você explique-me o que é isso*’, diz ele: ‘Conta descoberta é... Você levantou o dinheiro’, - ‘Não, eu não levantei dinheiro nenhum, que eu não tenho acesso aos cartões’, a conta está no meu nome e ele ficava com os cartões. Diz ele: ‘Então foi o seu marido’. Voltou ao balcão, fui pedir 3.000 para pagar aquilo. Fui pagar menos na altura, não chegava a 100 euros. E também andava a pagar a letra do carro. Ele trabalhava, porque senão era muita coisa, era 400, 500, todos os meses a letra. Eu pedi um empréstimo para pagar, cheguei a uma altura não consegui.

Depois meio ano tenho que pagar os juros, é 80 e tal euros. Paguei juros, não sei quantas letras... Paguei mais letras que não sei quantas! Eu disse à senhora: ‘Não consigo pagar’, mandou-me para a DECO. Na DECO, no Porto, e a senhora foi *porreiraca*, diz ela que se a letra estivesse no nome dele, como ele estava em casa já não pagava. Mas estava no meu nome. Ele levantou o dinheiro, quem tinha que pagar era eu. Eu disse: ‘Não consigo pagar’. O que é que eu vou fazer? Estive a fazer as contas, não dá, fora o que já devo! Já devia 5 meses de renda e de luz à minha senhoria. Falei com a minha senhoria: ‘Não consigo pagar a renda. Ou é para a renda ou é para comer. Vou dar fome aos meus filhos? Não consigo pagar o carro nem nada’. Faltava três meses, três letras só para pagar, faltava 700 e tal euros, eles disseram que queriam o carro, que queriam o dinheiro. Como eu era sempre certinha a pagar as letras, eu disse: ‘Eu não consigo. Ou é para comer, ou para os meus filhos’. E ele depois ficou em casa, nem dava para dar umas horas nem nada, ele não tinha, não conseguia! Eu disse: ‘Não consigo viver’, que eu fiquei duma maneira! Não tinha ganhos mais nenhuns. Era para comer e ficava a dever na loja. E depois a DECO também disse: ‘Você não tem saída, não tem saída’. Ninguém me ajudava. Pedi ajuda à Dra. Célia... Como não arranjava trabalho, meteu ele também na folha. Fui à escola ver se pedia ajuda, a professora da menina mandou-me ir lá buscar umas coisinhas depois.

Já estive melhor do que o que estou [situação económica], agora estou mesmo à rasca. As letras que eu ando a pagar é o carro dele e a outra está com a DECO, ainda não foi resolvida. Agora tenho que ir lá, como estou separada não vou conseguir pagar a letra. A advogada disse para eu fazer uns papéis, meter aquilo

pelo Tribunal para não pagar nada. Cinco anos não pagava nada e o abono dos meninos e o meu, eles não mexiam em nada. Eu disse: ‘O Banco disse que eles tiravam o fogão de casa’, mas a advogada disse: ‘Eles não tiram nada. Você tem que fazer os papéis, só que durante 5 anos não pode comprar isto ou aquilo’. Às tantas vou fazer isso. É o que eu disse à advogada: foi ele que fez a dívida. Só que estava no meu nome, ele levantava dinheiro. Ele nem para pagar, nem para ajudar os meninos. Neste momento está a trabalhar, disse o patrão, está com o salário mínimo. Não *consegue-me* dar nenhum, está a pagar a renda de uma casa, 200 euros.

Sobreviver era a principal preocupação de Margarida, consumindo-lhe bastante energia. Com efeito, ela sacrificava-se pelos filhos (por vezes passando fome) e geria a economia doméstica, fazendo um investimento pedagógico nas crianças, cozinhando, limpando, antecipando e priorizando as suas necessidades e interesses.

Tenho muitas preocupações! A vida diariamente... Para comer, o lanche para eles, tudo. Ataca-me a cabeça quando estou a fazer o comer. ‘O que é que eu vou fazer para logo ou para amanhã?’... Ou para pagar isto ou aquilo. Fico a mil. Tenho muito medo da vida. Isto está a ficar muito ruim. Não bebo, nem fumo. É o comer e água. E às vezes nem bebo.

Eu vejo o telejornal, gosto de ver, e tenho muito medo mesmo, que isto vai parar... Não é por mim, a gente com um bocado de sopa... Mas faço sopa e os meninos não ficam bem, vão ter que comer mais alguma coisa. A gente faz um *panelinbo* de sopa e também não fica tão barato. Eles estão bons, não estão habituadinhos só a comer sopa. Tem que ter sempre as coisinhas, para chegar a casa e comer.

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#### “TER VERGONHA É ROUBAR”

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Margarida está consciente das críticas feitas aos beneficiários de RSI e do estigma associado a ser beneficiária. No entanto, justifica a sua necessidade com a situação de desemprego e o facto de ser honesta e de cuidar bem dos filhos. É a sua responsabilidade para com os filhos, nomeadamente os cuidados de saúde com estes, que mais a preocupam, especialmente com o filho mais velho, que sofre de distrofia muscular, e o facto de os recursos serem escassos para pagar consultas, óculos e medicamentos.

Há pessoas que têm carros bons, vivem bem e estão a receber bastante. Eu tenho direito. Ajuda, só que é muito pouquinho. Antes queria ir trabalhar... A gente está a receber, estão a tirar outras coisas a outras pessoas. A gente também não consegue arranjar trabalho, o que é que a gente vai fazer? Quando as Dras. diz que é preciso fazer isto ou aquilo, a gente tem que fazer.

Há pessoas que são *maldizentas*: ‘Estás com o rendimento mínimo? É porque não precisas’. A gente tem é porque precisa! Se eu não precisasse é porque tinha as minhas coisas todas em dia. A renda em dia, muita coisa em dia. Há pessoas a quem a gente não pode falar se está ou não está, parece que ficam mais com raiva. Isso é uma ajuda que o Estado dá. E há pessoas, parece que ainda gozam. Essas pessoas que falam não precisam... Ter vergonha é roubar. Eu sou honesta, trato bem os meus filhos, não tenho vergonha. Vergonha é andar a meter nojo. Se arranjasse um trabalho dispensava!

Gostava de tratar dos meus dentes. Só que para pôr eu tenho que pagá-los. É o mal... Vou falar com a minha médica se passa um P1<sup>34</sup> para tratar os dentes. O Pedro também tem muitos problemas. Por mês, às vezes são quatro vezes que vou ao Porto com ele. Tem uma doença dos músculos todos, as pernas, é tudo. Não podia correr nem nada, que ia parar numa cama. Já anda a tomar medicação para andar bem, que queria andar não conseguia. Andam a ver os olhos, que de repente pode ficar cego. A médica marcou uma consulta para a boca. O médico disse que até hoje está tudo bem. Anda a ser seguido no Hospital de Sto. António. É uma doença muito estranha, tenho lá o papel em casa. A médica disse:

‘O quê? O Pedro anda a estudar?’

’Anda, Sra. Dra., está no 11.º’

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<sup>34</sup> Requisição passada pela/o médica/o do Centro de Saúde para realização de consultas nos hospitais públicos ou exames.

‘O que é que ele está a tirar?’

‘Está a tirar Informática, de computadores’

‘Então ele vai ter que arranjar um trabalho para aquilo mesmo, porque ele não pode fazer muito... Nem correr nem nada’.

Ele agora já anda bem, está a ser controlado, senão não conseguia andar. Botava a mão às paredes e tudo para se pôr a pé de manhã! O meu Francisco, o mais novo, já se queixa, dos calcanhares dos pés. Às vezes dá-me impressão que vai ser igual que o Pedro e tem que se marcar consulta mais cedo do que mais tarde. A menina tem o coiso dos olhos, é preciso mudar as lentes e estou à rasca. Foi quase 200 euros só para as lentes e agora tem que mudar outra vez. A Dra. diz que já não dão ajuda. O médico onde eu vou, não levam dinheiro da consulta e compra lá os óculos. Tinha que comprar lá aos bocados. Devo lá vinte euros, que eu não podia, não tenho conseguido. Às vezes tenho muita dificuldade em comprar medicamentos. Vou à farmácia a ver se eles... E depois quando viesse dinheiro eu pago.

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‘O NOSSO AMOR MESMO É OS FILHOS’

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Estando a cuidar dos filhos e filha sozinha, Margarida sofria de isolamento e depressão aumentados pelas dificuldades relacionadas com o facto de ter de viver de subsídios. Para além das desigualdades económicas e afetivas teve de lidar com a violência do ex-marido. Margarida vivia condicionada pela sua assistente social e outros profissionais, e pelas dívidas que o ex-marido contraiu, estando excluída de processos de tomada de decisão, tendo pouco controlo sobre a sua vida e ninguém que se preocupasse com ela e a acarinhasse. No entanto, cuidar dos sus filhos e filha era a sua maior responsabilidade, à qual dedicava grande parte da sua energia.

A filha, no 1º ano, foi vítima de violência na escola por parte da professora, que a castigava, abusando do seu poder. Atenta à situação e demonstrando iniciativa e responsabilidade, Margarida enfrentou esse conflito, recusando a dominação da professora, fazendo questão de assinalar à assistente social e à CPCJ que proporcionava boas condições de saúde e educação aos filhos (estando aqui subjacente o medo de os perder).

Este investimento pedagógico e preocupação com o futuro dos seus descendentes consubstanciavam-se numa ordem moral doméstica onde a autoridade se baseava na atenção aos comportamentos e à sua modificação através de persuasão. Esta forma de educar resultou na autorrestricção, responsabilidade, orientação para o futuro, organização, cálculo racional e moral de esforço e de trabalho do filho mais velho. Com efeito, o rapaz evidenciava responsabilidade, ascetismo e perseverança, era bom aluno e desejava prosseguir os estudos a nível superior. Margarida afirmava que a filha também possuía as mesmas características, mas que o filho mais novo, que vivenciou de forma diferente o drama da violência doméstica, tendo ficado traumatizado, não demonstrava tanto interesse em estudar, nem tinha um comportamento adequado na escola. No entanto, Margarida tinha o cuidado de o incentivar e perguntar pelos estudos e pelos trabalhos de casa.

Não consigo ler histórias aos meus filhos, eles sabem ler. A menina pequenina, quando foi para o 1.º ano, a professora queria um filho, não conseguia, teve um aborto. Ficava em casa, vinha outra professora, não puxava pelas crianças e metia medo. A minha menina apanhou um trauma, vomitava. Chegava às sete e meia: ‘Eu vou vomitar... Dói-me isto ou dói-me aquilo’. Muitas vezes eu ia com ela para Paços de Ferreira para o médico, doía o peito... Não doía nada! Eram os nervos e a culpa era da professora. A menina era muito *bicheira* a comer, tinha que andar sempre a comer, a professora disse: ‘Não sabes isso para ler, então não comes’ e disse que a culpa era minha. Fui à escola falar com ela: ‘Sra. Professora, é a última vez que você diz que a culpa é minha!’. Mexi-me, falei com a assistente social, falei com as de menores [CPCJ]. A Dra. que estava à frente disse: ‘A culpa não é da mãe, a culpa é da Sra. Professora’. Ela chamou-me, pediu-me desculpa. Muitas vezes posso precisar, mas com os meus filhos está tudo bem, tiro à minha boca para dar aos meus filhos! Tenho sempre as coisinhas, leitinho para eles há sempre. Agora tenho que carregar o passe deles, estou à rasca. Não sei a donde é que vou buscar o dinheiro. E aflige-me muito com eles.

O Pedro é bom aluno. Arranjou uma namorada nova e só vai vê-la ao domingo. Quarta-feira de tarde está livre. Às vezes sabe que tem teste, não vai, estuda. Sai da escola, vem a casa comer, na carreira. Ele gosta daquilo que faz. Do 10.º, é ele e outro: ‘Ó mãe, tem lá um que é muito certinho também, é demais, com o estojo à beira e tudo. Eu também sou, só que arrumo quando acabo de estudar’. Ele tem

muita coisa a que é bom. É muito arrumado, muito *canseira*. Se eu falasse: ‘Quando eu lavar a louça, limpas e pões no sítio?’, põe! E faz a caminha dele, arruma o quarto. ‘Ó Pedro, ajeitas a cama?’, ele ajeita. Não há problema que ele também sabe. Para o ano acaba o 12.º. Disse que ainda queria seguir mais três anos ou quatro. Só que depois tem que pagar propinas, tem que pagar muita coisa e eles estão a cortar muito... O dinheiro da bolsa já dava para a ajuda do quarto. Só se depois arranjar um trabalho e vá com aquele dinheirinho que poupar, é muito poupado. Ele vontade tinha: ‘Querida ter um trabalho bom’. A menina é muito *canseira* também. O mais novo já não é assim. Aprende bem, só que tenho que andar sempre em cima dele: ‘Anda estudar Francisco’. O ano passado tirou-me duas negas, a Português e a outra, e portou-se mal. Passou para o 6.º ano, porque aquilo de contas ele é o máximo! Entende muito bem as questões. Eu disse: ‘Anda lá Francisco, não quero ver mais negas, a mãe põe-te de castigo’. Este ano já está melhor.

Para Margarida a valorização da escolarização dos filhos, em contraponto à falta de valor atribuído pelos seus próprios pais à educação dela, materializa-se na participação em reuniões, no incentivo a um comportamento adequado e sobretudo no planeamento de condições materiais que permitam um bom desempenho escolar. Com efeito, as suas principais preocupações com o futuro ligam-se fundamentalmente aos filhos e ao seu futuro escolar e profissional.

Agora é que dou valor à escola. O mais velho com o 9.º ano já podia arranjar trabalho. A menina e o mais novo é preciso fazer mesmo o 12.º, e o Pedro quer, porque a doença que ele tem também não pode ir carregar massa. Vai muito bem. Posso estar à rasca... Aflige-me muito com eles, quero que tenham uma vidinha... Para eles arranjarem um trabalho bom, é importante os meus filhos continuarem. Quando há reuniões, estou sempre pronta, a gente aparece logo, para ver como eles vão. Se fosse com a minha mãe, já tinha tirado os meus filhos da escola. Quero que um dia mais tarde digam: ‘A minha mãe não me tirou da escola como a mãe dela’.

O sonho que eu tenho: o meu filho mais velho acabar o curso, o 12.º, se arranjasse um trabalhinho, que me ajudasse. A menina tem que estudar ainda, fazer o 12.º. O Francisco também. Para mim, é arranjar um trabalho. Ganhar mais, ter um trabalho bom, que goste... Limpeza, ou café, num restaurante ou fazer revista. Ou se tivesse cursos eu já arranjava um trabalho melhor.

Numa nota final Margarida refletiu sobre a relação abusiva em que se manteve com o pai dos filhos, com quem esteve mais de vinte anos, e sobre o fim do seu amor por ele:

Com casa, é muito bom ter os filhos... O nosso amor mesmo é os filhos. O amor é... Não vou dizer que não é... Que a gente namora fica contente. Uma vez a culpa é da mulher, outras vezes é do homem. A gente dá-se bem, um ajuda aquele, outro ajuda aqui... O Quim, eu saía muitas vezes com ele, não ia ao café sem me levar. Só que o vício do álcool. Não mudou. Ele agora disse que gosta de mim, só que não mudou o coisa do álcool. E não muda! Nem o álcool, nem o tabaco. A vida cada vez está ruim. Cada vez tudo a subir, vai subir mais. Agora em 2013 vai estar pior. O que é que a gente vai fazer? Tenho os meus filhos, é um amor para mim. O meu marido, fiz 21 anos de casada. Gosto mais dos meus filhos que dele. Às coisas que eu passei e tudo...! Já gostei dele, gostei muito. Eu estava a arrumar a cozinha, solteira, e ouvia a mota, não havia carros. Já vinha ele. A mota vinha coisa, eu já conhecia. Já passei muitas. A gente chega a uma altura que perde o amor. Perde o amor.

## 6.7. CRISTINA: 'THERE IS NOTHING LEFT FOR ME TO DREAM IN THIS MISERY I AM LIVING IN'

*I held the first interview with Cristina at the attendance office of the Parish Council. She was a young woman dressed in a trendy way but her teeth were damaged. Early on she confesses that, despite being 30 years old, she has never worked. She had four brothers who were arrested for drug-related offences and another one who was a beggar. Her eight-year-old daughter studied and was a victim of bullying at school. Her colleagues said she had lice and that her mother was a whore. We talked about the many problems she had related to her daughter's school. The child was held back in the 2nd grade, but she was in the same room as the 3rd graders and was discriminated against by the teacher. Cristina also reveals that she left school because her classmates called her 'Marco Paulo' due to her curly hair and so, amongst other reasons, she did not like going to school.*

*The second interview was held at a cafe near her house. Using slang, she told me stories of her violence and aggressiveness in order to solve conflicts. She became emotional and also brought me to tears when talking about the Christmases spent with the family and how she missed her brothers, who are in jail, and her father, who passed away.*

*In the third interview, she was ill and had no money to buy medicine. She brought a Social Security letter about child alimony and because she was very worried and anxious, I drove her to the social worker office so the latter could explain the meaning of it. Then we went to a pharmacy and finally, I left her home. Cristina and her mother waved at me and smiled while I drove away...*

Cristina lived in a rented house in an urban municipality at Aveiro's region. She shared it with her mother and daughter, but the child did not have a room for herself. She was 30 years old (born in 1982), she was separated from her husband and had a boyfriend. She completed an adult education and training course in hotel cleaning services which gave her equivalence to the 6th grade but found herself unemployed, having only worked for a week in her entire life.

Cristina's father was a construction worker and was the only member of the household who maintained a professional occupation throughout his life. Her mother worked for nine years in a chocolate factory and was not entitled to welfare benefits. She had five brothers. Four of them are imprisoned because of drug trafficking and the other is a beggar.

Her daughter was repeating the second year of elementary education.

Cristina’s mother was poor and a victim of physical abuse and neglect by her own mother. She was also deprived of love and care in primary relations:

My mother didn’t tell me about her childhood. She told me that, when she was seventeen, she got her period and she didn’t know what it was! It was my father who offered her a watch, taught her to keep track of time, gave her her first shoes, and bought her socks. My mother worked and had to give all the money she earned to my grandmother, who, in turn, gave her nothing. Once, when she was already married to my father, she beat her! My father took my mother away and said, ‘You will never touch my wife again!’. My daughter has a better childhood because she is not living the way my mother lived, being mistreated. I give everything to her unless I can’t.

Cristina's childhood was different from her mother's, at least as far as love and care are concerned. Due to a lack of financial resources, she and her siblings did not go to kindergarten or preschool. They were educated by their mother until they went to elementary school. Their father worked and supported the house. Cristina points out that, from an early age, she did not like school and preferred to be at home with her mother:

I was always with my mother, I didn’t let her go. I remember that once, when I was a little girl, I ran away from school to go to her and she said, ‘Oh baby girl, you have to go to school’. ‘I don’t want to go! I want to be with you!’

By then *us lot* were already six. My poor father was the only one who worked. My mother always took care of us. Day-care was never an option. *Us lot* were all raised together, and afterwards, we all went to school.

She remembered pleasant childhood moments she spent with her family and does not remember feeling economic deprivation at the time, compared to today. The turnaround or crisis moments were her brothers’ drug addiction and their violence against their father and, later, the death of the latter with cancer.

We are six children. When I was a child there is a lot to remember. When my brothers and I were young my grandmother went to visit us, my father's mother. She was a bit mean, and my brothers would shout, ‘Grandma beat us. Run! Run!’

The witch is coming!’ and I laughed, I was the youngest. When *us lot* spent Christmas *us lot* had a full table, we were not counting pennies. We were happy. We laughed, played... I think that's all that *us lot* could have.

Cristina's schooling was characterised by low levels of family literacy and by the juvenile delinquency of her brothers at school:

My brother Zé has the 8th or 7th grade, the others I don't know. Unfortunately, my mother doesn't know how to read or write and I don't know if my father had the 3rd grade, I know that he could read and write. My parents valued school. My mother tells me she was always being called to school because my brothers were very bad-behaved, they went into the teacher's bag, took her tobacco and went for a smoke.

One of the expressions of her family's lack of resources is the poor housing conditions in which they lived until Cristina was sixteen years old. Until then, they lived in a house without conditions, with no bathroom, no room for her brothers and infested with cockroaches.

The only house that didn't have a bathroom was the one where I was born, raised and lived in for sixteen years. The bathroom was in the yard. *Us lot* used to do it in a bucket and dump it in the yard. It was all inside the *ilba*<sup>35</sup>. My father made a shack where my brothers slept because the house was very small... First, they slept in bunks in the kitchen in *which* my mother put a curtain up. But then there were lots of cockroaches, my father had to take a torch and kill them because there were thousands and thousands of cockroaches!

She left school at the age of fourteen without completing her fifth year of education, therefore, her school capital is very limited. Being a victim of bullying has made the school experience even more painful. The lack of awareness of the value of education is still

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<sup>35</sup> A group of houses joined by a one entrance patio between them, which was a common configuration for low income housing in certain parts of Portugal

visible in her speech:

When I was fourteen years old there was a guy at school who was a little twisted and who'd say to me, 'Marco Paulo<sup>36</sup> has arrived'. My hair is curly and at the time it was smallish. That bothered me and I felt bad. Sometimes I didn't even want to go to school, 'Oh mother, why was I born with curly hair?'. At that time I was still a kid. That affected me deeply and I didn't want to go to school. Whenever he passed by I tried to avoid him and his friends. He never treated me badly but it gets into the head, I was always thinking about it. I once treated him badly, Marco Paulo, 'screw you!'. I think this is discrimination, he was torturing me. It's bullying, it already existed but I didn't know the word. At age fourteen I left school with the fifth grade incomplete because being there with no interest was not worth it. Now I regret it and I don't.

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'I HARDLY EVER WORKED'

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Regarding the family working habits, her father worked in the construction industry throughout his life and her mother was employed at a chocolate factory for nine years. Due to drug addiction problems, her brothers eventually quit work. Cristina worked for only a week in a plastic factory, having given up because she was harassed by a colleague. When she spoke about work she frequently used expressions that exhibit a lack of motivation and initiative, rationalizing different reasons for refusing certain jobs. She also lacked the ability to project herself in the future and to plan a strategy for employment, and displayed a dependency with respect to her father's earnings, her first husband's work and, later, the *ISA*:

My father was a mason. He knew how to do a bit of everything (put the canvas on roofs, paint), he was very resourceful... Then we got to a point when we had no

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<sup>36</sup> A curly haired Portuguese pop singer who was very successful in the decades of 1980 and 1990

money at all... My brothers left work due to drugs and he even had to beg in order to get food for us. My mother worked in a chocolate factory, and then never worked again. She has nine years of deductions but they the Social Security say she has no right to a pension...

Truth be told, I hardly ever worked, because I had my father, I had my brothers. I had everything, I didn't have to work. But now that my father has passed away and unfortunately my brothers have been arrested because of the drugs, I really had to learn how to do things, how to govern a house. I have an eight-year-old girl and my mother with me, I learned what life is. I'm not working, I'm unemployed and benefiting from ISA. I only worked for a week in a plastic factory, at the machine, taking out the burrs, packing. But I was being harassed by a colleague. I couldn't take that much pressure, I left. And since then I never worked again.

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'I HAVE NOTHING TO FORGIVE YOU FOR'

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Then when my father passed away it was all over. My brothers were always angry because of the drugs. They often verbally assaulted my father. When he was at the hospital they were in jail and asked to visit him, they said that their father was dying and they visited him in handcuffs. Then they asked my father for forgiveness, 'Dad forgive us for what we did'. He answered, 'I have nothing to forgive you for.' They also attended the funeral handcuffed. I think that was bad, they were not going to run away! They could at least take them out so they could hug the family.

My brothers used drugs. They were caught with a lot of drugs, both *powder* heroin and *white* cocaine. When they were caught with a big quantity and lots of money they end up in jail. After that, they were accused of theft, four are in jail right now. They used to smoke pot marijuana. Many years ago there was a huge shortage of marijuana and a colleague came along and said, 'Try this, it's cool'. They didn't know what it was, they tried it... It was heroin and cocaine. Some don't like it and stop, others like it... and they liked it. From what one of them says, *white* costs €5, but they used to go to Porto and buy it because it was cheaper there. Unfortunately, they got into it.

Another moment of deep tension and violence, lived with great anguish by Cristina, was

the police raid to the family home following the arrest of the brothers. In her description, we recognise the tense relationship with authority, which is also revealed in other moments, as well as the stigma that affected the family. It also meant a moment of rupture with the neighbours that characterised the progressive social isolation of the family:

When the police searched my house, I lived with my ex-husband, my mother and my daughter and this brother who is a beggar, plus the girl. My other brothers were arrested in the meanwhile, but *us lot* didn't know. It was 7 in the morning, *pum-pum, pum-pum*, I panicked. Those masked ones from the police came in, they were ninjas. They beat my brother, they wanted him to tell them where the other brothers were. One cop grabbed me by the arm, 'Tell me where they are!' I answered crying, 'I don't know! I don't know!'. I freaked out... That had never happened to me before. There were two female agents, one was a *motherfucker* and the other one was kind of cool. I went to the bathroom and the other one came with me. I had a diamond ring that my former husband gave me when I was 23 years old as a birthday gift, it was full of little diamonds around it. But I couldn't find the receipt, so they took the ring! When they took that, I felt so bad! Because I knew it was mine. They were messing with my private things. The hooded ones were playing with my daughter with their pinkies and she was laughing, poor baby girl, she was little and I was very afraid! It was the worst thing that could have happened to me. Afterwards, I was afraid, whenever I heard a noise I went to the window and peeked to see if they were coming back. It was my greatest fear. They searched the whole house. Since then, the neighbours turned their faces away.

Her mother, daughter and herself were vowed to marginalisation by the neighbours, leading to changes in places of residence and conflicts:

I've lived in so many houses! It was all due to the neighbours, things would get tense and *us lot* would start to feel bad and would have to move. It was not because of my brothers, they weren't always involved in drugs. There was a house that we had to get out of because, from what *us lot* came to know, they made a little mess close by and it didn't work out. They were threatened. But everything else that happened was because of the neighbours.

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'BECAUSE OF MY DAUGHTER'S FATHER I STOPPED EATING, I REALLY WANTED TO DIE'

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Following an episode of domestic violence in which she was brutally assaulted by her ex-husband and several episodes of emotional neglect, Cristina evicted her husband from home and began to live with her mother and daughter. At the time she had a boyfriend who gave her emotional support, but she confessed that she didn't want to live with him because sometimes they argued and she also anticipated her brothers' future return home:

When we were together he assaulted me once. Once he left and I asked, 'Where are you going?'. He said, 'I'm going out and I'm coming soon'. I called him on his phone about 20 times! He didn't answer. I sent him a message saying, 'Come back home, the girl is sick', but he never answered! I began to have enough. It was like that every day! He'd come in the morning, at 7 am or 8 am, and I'd ask, 'Where have you been?'. He would say, 'We'll talk later, I won't talk now', and he would go to bed. And it went on like this for a week. One day, a colleague of mine invited me to go to the disco and I did. At midday, he was at home. He called me, 'Where are you? Come on home now!'. I came home and he said:

'Where have you been?'

'I went with Joana to the club. Why? Where have you been all these days?'

'I want to know about you!'

'You don't tell me anything, I'm telling you the truth and you're still suspicious?!'

'You were with a guy!'

'If I wanted to be with a guy, I'd have been a long time ago, I wouldn't have been married to you for twelve years'

'Tell me the truth!'

I was telling him the truth, but at one point he put his hands around my neck and bruised me. He threw me against the dresser, I hurt my back. He pushed me and pulled me by the legs, and I almost got hit in the middle of the legs with a piece of furniture. My little three-year-old daughter saw everything. Then he picked up a baseball bat and threw it at me. I went crazy and grabbed the baseball bat if he hadn't got down, I'd have killed him, I was so mad! My mother lived with us and tried to separate us, 'Have you seen what you did?! Are you crazy?'. I told him, 'Get

out'. He clung to me, kneeling, 'Forgive me. I was blind, forgive me!' crying, asking for forgiveness and I said, 'Get out'. I cried too, but whatever. I kicked him out of the house. That was the end.

Then I met a boy who gave me support and I felt close to him. We started dating, he was a punk and I was already starting to get into the style - I used my normal clothes and he put a hoop on me. He made me a necklace with spoons and I felt good. I once did the hair with rollers and we went to a concert. I was happy and liked him a lot. But then he began to test me... 'Test for what? It either works or it doesn't. If you test me, you've got to go! Then he was freaking out and I still suffered for him for three years.

I already knew my boyfriend, but I didn't like him. I could not stand him! And he didn't like me either. One time I was feeling so low that he invited me to get some coffee. I thought, 'I don't dig this guy! Why the hell am I going to have coffee with him?', but I did. He gave me lots of support and I started to go out with him. We've been together for almost three years. He works and often helps me. Sometimes he sleeps over but I don't want us to live together. He wanted to, but my brothers are in jail and one of them might get out this year. I don't want gatherings. I like him very much and he likes me very much, but I've broken up with him twice already because he drives me crazy. If I go blind angry I may suffer, but I'll end up destroying the other person. Because of my daughter's father, I stopped eating, I really wanted to die.

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'I WANT MONEY, NOT DIPLOMAS'

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Cristina had been receiving *ISA* for several years, and the dependence and passivity regarding her financial situation were clear. The need for money was obvious, her life was driven by immediacy and by a lack of persistence to achieve medium- and long-term goals. This strong demotivation was nevertheless coupled with the extreme misery in which she lived. In fact, there was often a shortage of food in the household, as well as a shortage of money to buy medicine and to go to hospitals for medical appointments:

I don't even know how many years I've been on *ISA*! The first time I got it, I was still living with my daughter's father. She was about two years old at the time of the

interview she was eight. He didn't work, I didn't either, we had the girl, *us lot* had to ask for some kind of support. My father couldn't work either, but my parents helped. Her daughter's father looked for a job, but he wasn't really interested in working! He has the seventh grade and was a pastry chef. He worked as a baker for lots of years, before getting together with me and marrying. As he was working, I didn't benefit from *ISA*. Then I applied for the benefit for me and my daughter. I'm unemployed, there is no work, I have nothing to feed her daughter and I have to eat too. Now they tell me I have to join vocational training courses, but what will I gain from that? I want money, not diplomas. Studying doesn't interest me. What I need is work, not to worry myself with studying, I don't have the mind for it anymore or the patience...

I know I signed the *ISA* papers but I don't know why. I didn't read it. I don't think they are going to *screw me*. They only said that I'd receive X for each person and that I was entitled to *ISA*. I was in distress and needed the money to buy things, I didn't think that maybe I was harming myself or that maybe I was entitled to other things. They told me afterwards that I would have to go to activities if I'm called or to the jobcentre And I said yes. What was I going to say? I joined a course once, but if they call me again I'll say straight away that I don't want to go. I'll even ask the doctor for a sick leave if I have to, because I won't study. If they would pay me something I would even make an effort and go because I need money in order to raise my daughter. I need the money now, not later. I'm tired of walking around from one thing to the other...

When talking about people who take advantage of welfare, like other interviewees, she criticized the fact that 'other' recipients spend all of their money at cafes and buying pastries.

I have eyes. Some people complain they have no money, but they go to the cafes to buy cakes and drink coffee, or go to the market... I know one example, a woman whose husband is working in Spain, she benefits from *ISA* and she doesn't declare that her husband works. I think it's wrong. They cut it to those who really need! I think it should be for those who need it...

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'IT' S MORE LIKE A HOBBY'

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Regarding education, she showed no motivation for training and her concerns were mainly financial since she was forced to attend the course in order to receive her *ISA*. Even though she accepted this obligation, she was annoyed about it:

When I was taking the course, sixth grade, hotel cleaning services vocational training course, I was having lots of problems. First of all, I need glasses and there is no financial support for that. I was trying hard to look at the board, I could hardly see, my colleague had to tell me what was written on the board or I copied it. When I was trying to get the subsidy for the glasses the government cut it. There were also some subjects I couldn't understand, not even if I racked my brain. I don't understand Maths. If I hadn't cheated on my Maths test, I'd have flunked.

I didn't like the course, I was forced to attend it because of *ISA*. They gave me a food allowance and paid for transport. I was receiving €280 at the time. It was a little help... I wasn't interested but I tried to do my best. I went there mainly for the money, I've always said it. It was handy to buy things for my daughter. My goal was that. Of course, I learned a few things but I have always said that I joined this course because I needed the money. Otherwise, I wouldn't come. I told the teachers, I told everyone. Now they cut me €80 like they did everyone else, maybe more in some cases and less in others...

Still, she reported episodes of stigma and discrimination by the cleaning lady at the training institution. Although she said that the teachers were 'excellent', she is very critical of the course, namely of the number of hours assigned to certain subjects, which fell short of the learning needs. She also complained about some of the trainers. Her total unavailability to continue her studies and her lack of motivation towards the course were very clear:

I was out of my mind with the course, for being forced to be there for a whole year! I didn't think about giving up, but there was a lot of tension... Whenever I skipped school it was because I needed it, otherwise, I always went to classes. Sometimes I didn't feel like it but I had to go. The cleaning lady was always *mouthing* when I passed by, 'These pigs come here...?'. She was very rude!

The trainers were excellent. The Citizenship one was a little *picky*... I hated Citizenship! *Us lot* tried to do our best, but nothing was good enough for her. She said *us lot* could try harder. How could I try harder if I was doing the best I could?! We had Portuguese, Math... Almost at the end, we had French, English (the English

teacher was great). It doesn't mean that I learned how to speak English because it was only 50 hours. And French was 25 hours. The teacher was like, 'blah, blah, blah'. Everyone cheated on the test and he saw it. How were *us lot* going to learn enough French in 25 hours to pass the test?! He knew we couldn't do it. *Us lot* also had other subjects that weren't Math, Portuguese or English, things having more to do with Tourism, how to make beds and to clean. I now know a little more Portuguese. Of course, in a year I learned something! For example to distinguish 'to boil' *cozer*, in Portuguese from 'to sew' *coser*, in Portuguese... The 'z' is one thing, the 's' is another. I learned these things. *Us lot* never had practical classes, only theoretical. I had to continue, but no way!! I didn't want to! Working in this area is not something that fascinates me.

Continuing in the same tone, Cristina often voiced a devaluation of education and studying, although there was some ambivalence in her discourse regarding parental training:

*ISA* is good, *us lot* try to survive a little bit even if it's a small amount. But they send you for things that I think weren't needed. Learn what? *Us lot* aren't learning anything. We're learning what we already knew! It's helpful on how to raise a child...

She did not find the training courses provided by the welfare services in her area of residence advantageous, although she recognized the fun side of some of them. She also confessed that she would like to have a volunteer activity helping the poorer:

If I could get into a course, I'd like one to be a masseuse. My social worker is also taking one, but she is paying for it and I have no money. At this moment I'm attending activities. On Tuesday I go to the NGO. They are talking about how to educate children, respect and talk to them, listen to them. If they mess up we must speak immediately, calmly. If they behave well in school, if they have a good grade *us lot* say 'Congratulations, you did well', and even when they do badly never say, 'You are stupid'. Things like how a healthy family should relate, talk, *us lot* must always have a bit of attention to the children. Truth be told, *us lot* already know what to do, it's more of a hobby. It's once a week and ends in December. I think there are no advantages. *Us lot* have to run to so many places and we have to go there to 'learn' things we already know. Before that, it was a First Aid course. There are also arts and crafts lessons, which I enjoy a bit. But when it's more theoretical,

those hard classes, it's no good. And I have to walk a lot! It comes to a point when a person gets all *squished*.

I'd like to be a volunteer and see what misery is really like out there. We talk about being in such a poor situation but there are people much worse. We see it on the news. I'd like to take food, provisions, and supplies to those people. I think I'd come home and have a lot to teach my daughter, to say that life is like this, to tell my mother...

An important part of Cristina's narrative was the reference to mental health issues she suffered from, namely depression, anxiety and obsessive disorder. These health problems were aggravated whenever she had no money to buy medication since her meagre resources were channelled towards the daughter. Her attitudes towards the child were the only apparent examples of self-discipline in Cristina's speech. The well-being of her daughter was her priority and therefore she displayed strategies, autonomy, effort and perseverance. Cristina explained how her relationship with the rules was tense, triggering situations of conflict, violence and aggression when she did not agree with them.

As I have a depression they said they had a psychologist I could go to and that I didn't have to pay. The *ISA* social worker asked if I wanted to, so I went to see Dr Paulo, but it's not mandatory. Sometimes I feel a bit down. I used to like putting on make-up, I liked to paint my eyes, I had big nails, everybody asked me if it was gel and I said no, they were mine. I liked to be well-dressed, but it seems that over the years and after so many wounds, a person just doesn't feel like it anymore.

When I felt depressed, when I was down, without medication, I didn't even know the problem I had, sometimes I felt alone and had a void inside me... I don't know where that came from. I just didn't even know what I had. Now I have the prescription and I'm taking the medicine. I'm not so nervous anymore - I was very edgy. I can't think about the future because I don't know how tomorrow will be, much less the future. I have to restart the medication. I had the prescription, but I didn't have the money to buy it. Then I spoke to the social worker. The money is not enough, what am I going to do? Am I supposed to spend it with me and not with my daughter? No, screw me, my daughter comes first. The problem is the lack of money. I have to take *Victan* Medication for anxiety symptoms and disorders and the antidepressant, but it finished. I talked to the social worker saying I had no

money for the medication both for me and my mother (she has bronchitis and diabetes, she always has to take the medication).

I have a depression and an obsessive-compulsive disorder, sometimes things go through my head. Dr Paulo says I can control it, which is already very good. I can control it but... It's not easy. My mother says, 'You need to take it easy'. My temper is not very easy. If I have to be humble I am, but if someone steps on me and treats me like a fool, I turn into an animal. I think all my brothers are just like me. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree...

With regards to the social professionals who worked with her, she admitted to having a good relationship with her psychologist and confessed to having some conflicts with her social worker, whose academic title she apparently devalued. Conflicts were essentially related to the perception of inequalities in the allocation of aid. She also revealed feeling the stigma and was ashamed of asking for food at the Red Cross NGO:

I like Dr Paulo as a psychologist and as a person, he's very nice but his office is very far away. My boyfriend takes me there when he's with me, if he's not, I have to walk. I have to leave the house at 8 am. Twenty minutes on foot... I get along with the social worker, but sometimes a person has to flip out a bit because some of us have rights while others don't. I have never disrespected her but it's not because she is a social worker that I will shut up! She is a woman like me. It's not because she has this 'doctor' *thing*... She is her own doctor! But I don't confront her. She's at the Parish Council every fifteen days. When I need to I go there but it's very rare, only if it's something I can't solve. When my daughter caught the lice the social worker went with me to the medical centre. For food and clothing for the girl, I went to the Red Cross. They said they had nothing for me! At first, I was ashamed to ask for help. I never needed it while my late father was alive, while my brothers weren't in jail. When my father passed away and my brothers were arrested, it seemed that a house fell on my head: *boom*. When I went to the Red Cross I saw people passing by and looking at me... I never thought I'd get to that point but it is better asking for help than stealing. And I have to. For my daughter's sake, I would even beg door to door. It's better than to steal.

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'I AM ALREADY LIVING IN MISERY'

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With some resignation, she mentioned her own poverty, merely wishing for a few dozen euro increase to her ISA:

The money is scarce. I was with €280. It was not enough but it helped a little bit. It was enough to buy boots for the girl. I didn't have to beg. Now the money is short, the father doesn't pay alimony, what am I going to do, steal? I have to ask the social worker for money! Now they give me €208, they cut €80 off, it's even worse. My mother has no right to *ISA* because she has a widow's pension of €117. I don't understand why that is why I freak out. So I get 208, if I pay 150, they'll still cut me off? Is everyone going crazy?? I don't know what I'll do with my life if they cut me off more money. I have the girl, I have my mother who is diabetic and also has bronchitis. My teeth are a little messed up and I don't even have any money to go to the dentist, I had to reschedule and maybe only in half a year or so will I be called again. My mother already missed the Pulmonology appointment because we didn't have the money to go.

I don't think I'm poor, I think I'm living in misery. If I had a bit more I'd already not ask for much, but if I had more €100 or €150, I could be better than what I am now.

Regarding the prospect of finding a job, Cristina also showed very low levels of motivation, coupled with pessimistic views and a sense of self-devaluation:

I try to search for a job but it's not easy. If there is no work there is nothing... I'm already registered at the jobcentre but nobody tells me anything. Why should I go there? They said they'd get in touch and I'm always waiting. I've been searching. I ask people if they need someone but they say now is a bad time. I'm always waiting for an answer...

I want to get a job but not too far. Not in coffee shops, I'm not good with bills. I'm a *zero* at Math. To be in a coffee shop you have to deal with money and I risk making a mistake... Anything, even in a factory, packing boxes or whatever, I wouldn't care. But if I need to go far away and have to get into trains I start to panic, I become very distressed... I already told them I won't go to a job far away. But if I got some work nearby, I'd take it. If they gave me the minimum wage I wouldn't think twice.

I've never done anything. I don't know what I'm hoping for... I was hoping for a better, more stable life. So I could give my daughter what's necessary, to not go hungry at times, to not get in trouble... And to have a little more joy. A job that could help me put my life in order and not having to depend on this. I'd like to be a masseuse but I have to pay... What's the use of that? I don't have the money.

Cristina was often isolated at home and this isolation was amplified by the absence of leisure equipment where she lived. In her discourse, she often created obstacles regarding her professional insertion, as if she had adapted to her situation:

What do I do every day? In the morning I go where I need to go, in the afternoon I sort out the house, everything is tidy, I lie on the sofa to watch a little bit of telly, I fall asleep, the cell phone wakes me up and I go and get the girl. The girl comes, she doesn't bring homework. What am I supposed to do?!

Here where I live there is nothing, but considering what I've been through, I'm better off now. I mind my own business. If I were to move from here I'd have to spend money on transport, I'd have to pay a higher rent and the landlady could be even worse than the one I have...

Her words showed apathy, and a belief in luck (or the lack of it) related to a possibility of social housing which did not materialize. She was currently living with her mother and daughter in a rented house. The girl did not have a room for her and slept with her mother or, during the visits of Cristina's boyfriend, with her grandmother:

But besides the house I've lived in until I was sixteen years old, all the other houses we've lived in, had a bathroom, a kitchen and good conditions. When *us lot* was going to be entitled to social housing, we were living in another municipality, so we lost the opportunity. After 30 years waiting! It's shameful that we had to wait for so many years for a council flat. I'm not lucky at all. If I had known I'd never have left. Here I'm paying €150. My daughter sleeps with me in the bedroom and when my boyfriend sleeps over, she sleeps with my mother.

Cristina is providing and caring for her daughter only with her mother's help. She often had conflicts with her daughter's father who had not paid child alimony to this date. Because of that, she was required by Social Security to make a complaint against him in court. It was difficult for her to be a welfare recipient without the help of the child's father:

The girl's father doesn't pay alimony. I had to take him to court. I think I only did that because the social workers threatened to cut my welfare payments. He is working, but in three and a half years he has only paid alimony on four occasions. My mother and I are practically raising the girl alone. He is working but he is also supporting a woman... It upsets me that he is supporting this woman's daughter and that he doesn't give anything to his own child. The social worker asked me if the father was giving the child's alimony and I said no. Then she said, 'Take care of it, otherwise I'll cut off ISA'. They waited a little bit and it's already taken care of.

He says I've got to pay a debt. He has been playing around with his friends, bought cars, wasted everything, and I'm the one who has the debts!? My conscience is clean. He threatens me:

'I can give you €75 for the girl, but you have to give me 150 to cover the debts'.

'You're completely nuts! Do you think that they'll take away the little money that I have to pay your debts?! You have been going around spending the money and I'm the one who will pay your debts!? You suck as a father!'

In all our interviews Cristina told me about the deep financial problems she had to deal with every day. The love and care that she gave and received from her mother, daughter and boyfriend helped her to carry on. With the exception of this more restricted core, Cristina isolated herself from the neighbourhood and other relationships, showing a low level of social capital. She admitted being suspicious and disliking the neighbours. On the other hand, she disclosed that she was harassed by the father of a friend who kissed her, separating her from one of the only friends she had:

I always try to think positive but sometimes it's not easy. The girl asks me to buy her a yoghurt and *us lot* don't have any. When it's our child, it hurts. It's complicated to have the girl asking for things and not having them, or having the girl eat pasta with pasta, rice with rice. When there is no money, there are no pills, there's nothing. If it *weren't* for my boyfriend, my daughter and my mother, I don't think I would have the strength to carry on. My boyfriend gives me a lot of support. He says, '*better days will come.*' I may be feeling down one day but the next day I feel a huge strength. My father is with me too, in spirit. It seems like I'm able to get up and solve everything. But I won't say that I have friends because I don't. I only have

people that will *fuck me over*, excusing the term.

I don't like my neighbours. I have a friend that has never tried to screw me over, but I've not called her for some time. I didn't want to go to her house because her father had a coffee shop and he told me he liked me, he wanted to kiss me. Once I was coming out of the bathroom, he grabbed me and kissed me when I wasn't expecting it. Afterwards, I was very upset and my friend asked me why but I never told her. Because I think it was going to be heart-breaking for her, or maybe she was going to think that I was the one who did it. Then my daughter's father caught some messages, he wanted to kill the guy, he even went there with the baseball bat, the guy said, 'I'm sorry, I was confused.' I honestly have more people who *screw me over* than who help me.

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JULIA HAS LICE'

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While her ex-partner was almost absent from their daughter's education, Cristina provided and cared for the child, supporting and listening to her, meeting the teachers, being available to help with homework, giving advice, managing bullying situations at school, as well as the teachers' neglect:

I'm being a mother and a father at the same time and it's not easy, especially with this misery that they give me. She had to repeat the school year due to truancy. In the winter she gets very sick, coughing, her little body hurts. I wasn't going to send my daughter to school like that, only if I didn't have a heart... But now that I've been called by the Child Protection Services, no matter how hard it is for me, I try to send her with medication, because otherwise, if she fails again, I have them at my back. Nowadays if the girl has an unjustified absence *us lot* have to pay! And if they mess up in the canteen they force the kids to clean up and *us lot* have to pay too!

At school, Cristina's daughter is rendered invisible or negatively stereotyped. The child's needs were neglected, and she was treated by teachers and some colleagues as irrelevant or inferior, due to the selection made based on prior attainment. Cristina's claims concerning the low quality of education her daughter was devalued and teachers didn't seem to respect her. At the same time, the family had no money for books and no access to other

educational resources. Nevertheless, Cristina tried to fight the school's carelessness and her daughter's marginalisation by being aggressive with the teachers as well as the principal of the school and making complaints to senior decision-makers:

Because she is repeating the year, the City Council didn't give her the school books. The girl uses the same books but I had to erase all that was written on them, five huge books! The teacher said, 'The girl needs new books' but I answered, 'Do you want me to steal!? The father doesn't give any money, I can't afford it.'. She said, 'The girl doesn't learn because she can see what she wrote'. She wanted me to make photocopies of all the books! If I had the money, I'd rather buy the books instead of making photocopies. I have no money, I will not steal or harm someone, and I can't make miracles. I also had problems with the other teacher who had a problem with me and really gave me a hard time. She even told me, 'I care more about your daughter than you'. I was about to push her down the stairs! She is repeating the second grade because of that teacher who was mean. I told my social worker and Dr Paulo. I think I'm an excellent mother, within my possibilities. The girl had to miss school for many days. I was called to the Local Safeguarding Children Boards because someone had sent a letter saying that I went out at night and took my daughter with me. That is a total lie! I even cried I was so nervous! I said it and say it again, it was the teacher who wrote that letter. And this year's teacher, she's not any better. The other one gave her so much homework that the girl, poor thing, sometimes had to study until 9 pm. This one doesn't give any homework. I ask my daughter, 'Does the teacher ask you to read?', - 'She does mum, but sometimes she makes some activities with the others but not with me.'. I freak out. I don't think the teacher is competent. The girl is in the same room as her colleagues from last year, but they have moved on to the 3rd grade and she failed. I don't think it's logical and she's not learning. Acting like this, the teacher is marginalising her. It doesn't make sense for my daughter to be in the middle of fifteen or sixteen kids and being the only one in the 2nd grade. I think the best thing would be for her to be in the 2nd grade and have the same books. The principal says, 'The teacher knows best'. But she is the principal! If the girl is capable, why doesn't she learn? I get her to read but she has a lot of difficulties. There are loads of complaints about this school and instead of getting new teachers, they only get old ones. I'm going to figure this out. I think I have to give a push to see if they move before it's too late.

Being a victim of stigmatization, humiliation and verbal violence at school by her colleagues (just like her mother was) and neglect by the teachers, Cristina's daughter began to develop the same anti-school disposition of the mother, saying, as Cristina announced in the past to her own mother, that she did not want to go to school:

Her colleagues are very cruel, 'Pedro pinched me here', the girl comes home and complaints. I complain to the mother, the mother talks to the son, but the next day it's the same thing all over again! Am I going to smack the mom around?! Bullying continues to exist. Unfortunately, my baby girl got lice. I talked to the social worker and told her I had no money to buy the *things* at the pharmacy. Once I bought the medicine, it was €30, it was too expensive for me. She told me to go to the doctor's office. They gave me what was needed, but just a bottle isn't enough. I had to put it again. The girl got home and said, 'I don't want to go to school anymore', she began to cry. 'They say I have lice, they say I'm a pig', – 'Oh baby, don't listen to them!'. They are very cruel. I don't know if that is affecting her, because they say, 'Julia has lice'. There was a kid in her class who told her: 'You are a whore, a dirty whore'. 'Pedro told me something, can I tell you? It's swearing!'. She doesn't swear at all:

'Say it, but then don't repeat it.'

'Pedro said I am a dirty whore.'

'And did you tell the teacher?'

'Yes, but the teacher didn't care'.

I freaked out, went to the principal and complained about the teacher. The principal registered everything, I signed. From that day on my daughter never complained again. And the teacher, they say she retired, but I think she left because of all the complaints against her. The girl tried to talk to her and she wouldn't even let her express herself. Not long ago she told me, 'Do you know what they say? Can I say? Your mother is a pig, your mother is a whore', and I told her, 'Baby don't listen. You know very well that I am not that'. 'Oh, but I'll tear him apart! I don't admit that they say this about my mother!'. 'Oh baby, just tell him, that's your mother'. She took a little toy to school to play on the playground and said, 'If they ask me to play with my doll, I will tell them that they can't because it has lice and nits'. I

thought that was so funny, 'That's it, baby. You show them'.

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'SOMETIMES I DON'T MISS MONEY ANYMORE'

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Cristina described how she tried to support her brothers who are incarcerated. Not being able to visit them in prison, due to a lack of resources, she developed emotional care work by listening and supporting them. At the same time, she worried about their future and wanted them to stay away from drugs:

They said that sometimes they did things because of the drugs. I never saw it. I didn't even hang out with them, so I don't know anything. A lot they're being charged with, they swear it was not them. Now they try to screw them over as hard as they can. Maybe they'll grow better judgment, they'll come back better. If they're going to make mistakes it's better to be in prison than *us lot* receiving the news, 'Your brother was killed'. My brother is spending Christmas with us, we are already a little happier, at least he's here with us. I wish they all were, but it's not possible... He's not with an electronic bracelet, he's already in an open regime, he's had three early releases. And the other brother is also trying. It would be good if he succeeded, poor thing, he's asked three times, he was denied, he discourages. I try to pull him up, 'Take it easy, it will go well', but it's complicated. They don't do drugs in prison. I hope that when they get out they get smarter, because it's not the first or the second time they got arrested. One is the third and the other is the second. One is with a three years sentence, the other is also three years - but he is still waiting for another trial...

My other brother is a beggar, he's the one who's with the girl. Sometimes he helps my mother, he brings groceries because he has lots. Sometimes if he hadn't given us pasta and rice, we wouldn't have the money to buy it. Meanwhile, I buy sausages, eggs and a little bit of pork, or chicken wings, those cheaper ones. If I had to buy pasta, rice, beans, the money would not be enough.

Cristina admitted that the long lack of economic resources led her to limit her dreams. She was present-oriented and there was no mention of her planning or organising her future. Her only concerns and ambitions were those regarding her daughter, as she seemed to have accepted her condition, even though, as we've seen, there were still some visible aggressive

outbursts every now and again:

Now I'm not worried, because I live one day at a time. I don't even think about the future. I have to think about whether I have food for my daughter every day. Before I wanted to live everything, I wanted to think about everything.. I was always worrying and thinking ahead, but I got to a point when I said, 'No, I can't go on like this. I have to live one day at a time, think one day at a time. Today is today, tomorrow we'll see'.

I see my future a bit dark. I see the problems I have now, I don't know if the future will be even worse. Many people can think about the future because they have a steady life and they can say, 'In the future, I dream of being this and of having that'. I can't dream anything, in the misery I'm in, what am I going to dream about? Nothing. I have to think one day at a time and while God gives me this little bit, it's better than nothing.

I don't know if I'll continue to need *ISA*. I don't know how tomorrow will be. Maybe if there is no work I'll have to depend on it.

A perfect life would be to find a job that would give me a nice salary to support my daughter, my mother and I. And to be happy. I wouldn't ask for a lot of money, just that little money at the end of the month, so I could pay for the little things and always have some... Whenever I get the money, I pay what I have to pay, electricity, water and gas, I buy some little things for the girl and other things to have at home. When I get to day six, seven, eight, I already have nothing and I spend the whole month without money. Sometimes I don't miss money anymore. Of course, I miss something I need, like medication for the girl.

What I want is for her to have a nice future! I hope that she will go to the college, she will have a profession, she will be happy and finds a good man, who'll be her friend.

For me, a successful woman is someone who overcomes all obstacles or who gets into a college... For example, if she wants to be a doctor, she has to study hard. She also has to have money to spend, she has to be responsible. A successful woman is someone who has everything she has always dreamed of. I think I said it well. Unless it's the other way around.



## 7. EXPECTED AND UNEXPECTED (IDIOSYNCRATIC) SOCIAL PATHS

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Inspired on Lahire's work (1995), Costa, Lopes and Caetano (2014) and Bóia and Lopes (2012) have made social research that differentiates between expected (typical) and unexpected (countertrend, idiosyncratic) social paths. The first are based on the social background of a person's family and its socioeconomic and educational resources (inspired in social reproduction theories), also known as social regularities. However, I have suggested that, despite numerous inequalities and disadvantages, poor women's autonomy is conditioned but not determined by economic and gender constraints since poor women, in particular, have strategies to try to negotiate their resources' limitations (Lahire, 2004). In my research, I have tried to be particularly attentive to the second type of paths, defined as 'spaces/cases of resistance' (Costa, Lopes & Caetano, 2014). Those unexpected paths can be explained by the heterogeneous, sometimes even contradictory, stock of individual dispositions (Lahire, 2002). I have reconstructed the processes of internalisation and updating of dispositions related to socioeconomic status, gender, motherhood and also 'race' (in Salomé's portrait) and the way they intersected in the different dimensions of the interviewed women's lives. I have also tried to understand which the key moments of biographical ruptures or crossroads were and lastly, I have attempted to highlight women's agency.

In this chapter I will present both types of paths, starting with the unexpected or idiosyncratic. Lurdes, Mariana and Estela have had an upward mobility path and were struggling for socio-professional inclusion, despite a problematic childhood. I have considered Salomé within this group because, even though she was not working at the time of the interviews, she had come a long way from being a poor orphan in S. Tome and Principe to being a mother of three and a stepmother who provides alone for the four children and cares for them, and who has concerns about their health and education, while having to deal with racism, stereotyping and depreciation.

In the second group, the expected paths, I have positioned Elvira, Margarida and Cristina highlighting the long-term effects of economic inequalities and the intergenerational reproduction of poverty that affect these women's children.

I must emphasize, nevertheless, that even though these women were categorised within two

groups, all of their paths have common features and, more importantly, these women all show an idiosyncratic way of dealing with their lives' hardship.

## 7.1. UNEXPECTED OR IDIOSYNCRATIC PATHS, MARIANA, LURDES, ESTELA AND SALOMÉ: UPWARD MOBILITY PATH. STRUGGLING FOR SOCIO-PROFESSIONAL INCLUSION, DESPITE A PROBLEMATIC CHILDHOOD

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### 7.1.1. MARIANA

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In Mariana's portrait, the intersecting systems are the effective and the economic, strongly related with her father's neglect, her hate towards him and how the lack of resources affected the family, as well as power issues that relate with education (namely violence and carelessness in school) and welfare. Furthermore, her professional and educational paths, as well as her care work towards her daughters, illustrate her initiative and strategy within the framework of the social constraints in which she lives.

Her sociological portrait is organised around a childhood marked by an absent father, the school's violence and carelessness, her commitment and investment in the education of the children, her refusal of rules that she considers unjust and an overall strategical management of her path.

#### A CHILDHOOD MARKED BY AN ABSENT FATHER

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In Mariana's sociological portrait stands out her parent's divorce and her father's physical and affective absence, when Mariana was eighteen months, that debilitated her emotionally and was the cause of financial instability (Lynch & Baker, 2005). As a consequence, there was a drastic change of housing conditions as the mother and children had to move to shacks. Due to the lack of material resources her mother was forced to work double shifts, since Mariana's father stopped contributing financially to support his children, neglecting his parental responsibility (Kershaw, Pulkingham & Fuller, 2008). As the sole carer, living on a low-income, Mariana's mother lacked the time to care for her children and her job didn't allow her the autonomy and flexibility required for a better handling of the children's needs (Lynch & Lyons, 2009). In fact, the children's education always depended on the severe financial difficulties faced by this poor lone mother, who experienced deprivation to

make ends meet and was trapped in the moral imperative of taking care of the children alone (Lynch & Lyons, 2009; O'Brien, 2009; Matos & Costa, 2012), though she managed to organize her children's everyday life in an effective and rational way, thanks to the support of the community and with no help from the State, highlighting the lack of public investment in care (Daly & Leonard, 2002; Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004; Kershaw, Pulkingham & Fuller, 2008; Sayer, 2008; Lynch & Lyons, 2009; Dale, 2010; Caragata & Cumming, 2011; Feeley, 2014). The domestic universe, namely its financial and moral order (Lahire, 1995), was thus structured and managed remotely, but the care and affection deficits which resulted from the simple physical absence of the mother were obvious, and they rendered the process of learning painful for the children. In fact, the literacy and education levels of Mariana and her siblings suffered heavily from these circumstances, especially during their first years in school. At home, there was no educational care work (Lynch, 2007; Lynch & Walsh, 2009; Lynch & Lyons, 2009; O'Brien, 2009), such as listening to the children, guiding them, helping them to make choices or helping them with their homework. The children spent several days without seeing their mother, as she arrived home when they were already asleep and left for work early in the morning. Despite the poor living conditions, Mariana has good memories of those times, namely of being part of a community and of people helping each other, which can perhaps explain her future participation in public life.

#### VIOLENCE AND CARELESSNESS IN SCHOOL

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Mariana formed an early attachment to books, writing and reading and she attended pre-school. However, this early contact was not enough to help her through elementary school, where she failed her first year. She dropped out of school at age eleven, after completing four years of education. As above-mentioned, Mariana's first years of school coincided with significant changes in her family and household though she never relates those changes and her 'hate' towards her father with her aggressiveness issues at school. In fact, her relationship with the school, in the first years, was very problematic and characterised by conflict and violence, teachers' aggressions towards Mariana and of her own acts of violence towards her colleagues, having been labelled as a 'bad girl'. Being aggressive in school was the opposite of Mariana's behaviour at home as she considered herself to be 'very sweet'. In fact, according to Reay (2010), children from low-income families, that present low levels of material, cultural and psychological resources, often feel fear and

anxiety in their interaction with school, especially if they have to deal with a negative school's environment of carelessness, where they feel, as Mariana did culturally marginal and are negatively stereotyped (Lynch & Baker, 2005; Reay, 2010; Feeley, 2014). Her mother never intervened even though she was aware of the corporal punishment that the teacher inflicted on her daughter (which was frequent in elementary schools in Portugal, at that time), showing the powerlessness and lack of voice of poor women (Young, 2000a; 2000b; 2002; 2006; Hancock, 2003). In school, the emotional dimension of education was lacking and practices of denial and depreciation occurred (Lynch, Lyons & Cantillon, 2007; Fraser, 2010; Feeley, 2014). All these factors – the lack of economic resources combined with the school's carelessness culture, the teacher's abuses of power, the violence and fear in the classroom - blocked Mariana's learning process, contributing to her poor results, demotivation, disengagement and ultimately to her dropout in 5th grade in 1985, without completing compulsory education (Lahire, 1995; Stoer & Araújo, 2000; Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004; Baker & Lynch, 2005; Young, 2006; Dale, 2010; Reay, 2010; Feeley, 2014).

In sum, her path in school can be divided into two distinct periods. The first, until she dropped out, was characterised by disciplinary problems and bad behaviour. Mariana still made an attempt at secondary education after finishing the 4th grade, but she eventually quit. The main reason was the fear of being bullied by her 'much bigger' colleagues. When she was fourteen years old (in 1988) she began to work in a factory. Later, at sixteen, she returned to school and completed the fifth grade, moving on to take a course in Childcare which was followed by an internship. Finally, some years later, she completed an adult education and training course in Childcare (9th-grade equivalent) and did a two-year internship in the same area.

#### A FAMILY'S COMMITMENT AND INVESTMENT IN THE EDUCATION OF THE CHILDREN

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Mariana and her husband attached great value to their daughters' care and education that they managed strategically. There was a strict household moral and the appreciation of the academic work is a part of the family's commitment and investment in education (Lahire, 1995). Mariana encouraged their good behaviour in school, supervised and helped with homework, managed their school path and their future career. This involved the consideration of and choice between attending high school or vocational education and

training, the choice of a field of study, and even a possible migration of the eldest daughter with the aim of pursuing higher education. In addition, the couple participated in school meetings and they have also been members of parents' associations. Mariana describes her practices of care work and love labour (Lynch, 2007; Lynch & Walsh, 2009), providing several examples of perseverance, strategy and initiative, often in combination with reports of moments of conflict and even of aggression (Lahire, 2004). She gives the example of a violent episode in which a kindergarten teacher used violence against her eldest daughter, causing the child a psychological trauma which made her undergo group therapy at a public psychiatric hospital for four years. Mariana filed a complaint against the teacher and the latter was fired. Furthermore, the council estate in which they live is contiguous to luxury condominiums located in a privileged area of the city. This has some implications in the neighbourhood's public schools, where there is a profound social heterogeneity as well as social discrimination from the school board and teachers regarding students who come from low-income backgrounds. Such discrimination practices range from a class-based admission system to the attribution of lower grades to those students (Baker & Lynch, 2005; Reay, 2010) and fears that her daughters might in future become victims of discrimination at school. Mariana is alert to this scenario and she has already prepared some strategies to deal with it.

In sum, care responsibility and the well-being of the children were seen as more relevant than the mother's education, which was ultimately sacrificed (O'Brien, 2009; Lynch & Lyons, 2009). Even the husband's unemployment was strategically managed by the couple during the first two years, in which he stayed at home taking care of their children, while Mariana went to work.

#### A STRATEGICAL MANAGEMENT OF THE PROFESSIONAL PATH

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Mariana's professional career was marked by a series of low-paid, precarious jobs (Young, 2004; Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004). She dropped out of school at eleven and she started working at fourteen (in 1988) as a factory helper, working without a contract or with fixed-term contracts. The main reason behind her frequent job changes had to do with situations of precariousness.

Mariana's father, mother and stepfather's examples have always reinforced her work ethics (Lahire, 2004). Her initiative (Lahire, 2004) led her to always look for a new job when she

was unemployed, because she considered that she would have a 'better quality of life' even if it meant 'cleaning up others' crap' (unlike her colleagues and neighbours who would rather live on welfare), demonstrating a strategy for her professional path (Lahire, 2004). It also led her to look for courses, thus managing to complete 6th grade (contrary to her mother's will) and later the 9th grade.

At the time of the interviews, she worked for a couple of doctors as a housekeeper and childminder, had autonomy, was paid above minimum wage and her employers also paid social security contributions on her behalf. Her husband was an electrician working as 'independent worker', and earning less than the minimum wage. She was no longer an ISA recipient.

#### THE HUMILIATION OF HAVING TO DEPEND ON WELFARE

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Mariana first applied for ISA in 2002, after giving birth to her youngest daughter (following an unplanned pregnancy). She was fired two weeks after having given birth, with no claim on unemployment benefits. Her first contact with social services was stained by an experience in which Mariana felt powerless and humiliated due to prejudice and stereotyping (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004; Power, 2005) since the evaluation by the social worker of her lack of resources was made based on the clothes the baby was wearing during their brief meeting. In this sense, she was marginalised and disrespected (Reay, 1998; Young, 2002; 2004; Hancock, 2003). Mariana had to resort informally to another social worker, an acquaintance of hers, to get the ISA to which she was entitled. Furthermore, she reports feeling ashamed every time she had to go to the mailbox to pick up her check that reflects an internalization of the social stigma and control faced by the recipients of social benefits (Reay, 1998; Young, 2002; Hancock, 2003; Paugam, 2003).

As previously seen, Mariana attended several state-sponsored professional training courses which she had the initiative to seek out (Lahire, 2004). The courses she attended corresponded to her learning interests (in fact, she has applied the knowledge and skills that she acquired to her current job) and the fact that the total amount she received in training was the equivalent to the national minimum wage were strong incentives. At one point, she took the decision to take courses instead of working because 'we earn as if we were working and it was a much more relaxed life', so she evaluated the incentives and disincentives to taking up employment (Daly & Leonard, 2002). At another time, in

contrast, she asked social workers to give her more work taking care of the elderly, because it was more rewarding financially when compared to ISA, while at the same time she could manage her own schedule, thus taking better care of her younger daughter who suffered from chronic illness.

Concerning Paugam's typology in relation to welfare, Mariana never left the frailty stage, since for her unemployment was always considered humiliating and a loss of dignity, and understood the ISA as transitional aid (Paugam, 2003).

Mariana moved on from ninth grade and then tried to graduate from school through the 'New Opportunities' program. However, a health issue combined with the fact that she was simultaneously working and taking care of her younger daughter who suffered from a chronic illness made her postpone her decision.

#### STRATEGIES FOR ACTION

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There is no other interviewee such as Mariana that reflects Young's statement (2000) about a person's identity being her own, despite her/his social position, Lahire's dispositionalist and contextualist sociology (2004) or Giddens' idea of the duality of structure. In this sense, her path is perhaps the most idiosyncratic and heterogeneous.

As stated above, she often shows her opposition to the rules and sometimes even refuses those she considers unjust (Lahire, 2004). She is very critical towards welfare services and schools (including the educational establishments where she has done her traineeships). Her path is filled with moments of conflict, confrontation and aggression (Lahire, 2004): beating up her peers in elementary school or self-declaring the 'most revolutionary' of her siblings as a child (which contrasts with the fact she considers herself as 'sweet' and 'getting along with everyone' out of school. She also confessed 'hating' her father, and 'getting into fights' with her sister because of him. These conflicts (Lahire, 2004) have continued during her daughters' educational path during which Mariana has clashed with caretakers, educators and teachers, including physical threats and a formal complaint to the Northern Regional Education Board.

In addition to education, health and social care are other dimensions where she has had the initiative and persistence to solve problems, overcoming obstacles and going around established rules (Lahire, 2004) whether by enrolling her daughter in a better public school

by giving a different address or forcing the social workers to enrol her daughter in a Preschool 'for well-off people' while refusing a dubious Social Security caretaker. In fact, the lack of affordable and good quality early childhood education and care (Daly & Leonard, 2002; Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004; Kershaw, Pulkingham & Fuller, 2008; Sayer, 2008; Lynch & Lyons, 2009; Dale, 2010; Caragata & Cumming, 2011; Feeley, 2014) would have forced her to remain dependent on welfare, as she would otherwise have no means to afford private childcare. She is aware of a certain class-based discrimination in the admission to daycare and schools and is very critical of welfare services (Daly & Leonard, 2002). In what concerns her housing conditions, she battled for five years to get a council estate and while she waited she asked the social workers to give her more domestic support services so she could rent a house with better conditions. The fact that she has struggled to get out of welfare, that she has social support networks and her good relationship with her bosses (a couple of doctors) has improved her strategy for social mobility, through the contact with people from a different socioeconomic status, thus creating a heterogeneous social network (Briggs, 1998; Dominguez & Watkins, 2003).

Furthermore, Mariana shows a disposition for participation in the community and in public life (Lahire, 2004), substantiated in the participation in several associations. As far as cultural and leisure practices are concerned, in addition to consumer practices (shopping malls, Ikea visits) and watching TV, the most important is going to her husband's concerts (popular dance music), Saturday nights' outings with daughters and husband (usually to fast food restaurants), friends' and family's birthday parties, picnics in the park and camping holidays (she was the only interviewee who declared to have a vacation away from home).

Finally, concerning her relationship with her husband, Mariana's path also shows that a loving and caring intimate relationship in which both partners participate in caring and educating children can act as a protective factor from economic and affective inequality (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004; Lynch & Lyons, 2009).

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#### 7.1.2. LURDES

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There are several systems intersecting in this portrait. Firstly, the affective, her father's violence, the lack of care and affection in her childhood and youth, her conflictual first marriage and the difficult relationship with her first son as well as, by contrast, the loving

and caring relationship she had with her second husband, their children and her mother in law. Secondly, the economic: in a path crossed by financial hardship, Lurdes has managed to maintain her work ethic, saving, planning, organising and defining priorities, refusing to accept the stigma attached to welfare recipients and investing in her own and her children's education (the third system), that she deeply values.

This sociological portrait is organised around the extreme domestic violence that characterised her childhood, the work ethic that her mother passed on to her children, the refusal of welfare dependency, the strong investment in her children's care and education and the strategy for social mobility supported by a loving relationship with her husband.

#### A CHILDHOOD BRANDED BY AFFECTIVE INEQUALITY

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Lurdes's childhood was branded by her father's brutal abuse towards herself, her mother and siblings. He was a violent man who deprived Lurdes of love and care. The cruellest examples of domestic violence include him threatening his wife right after she had given birth, or physically punishing her if she didn't get pregnant. He kept his wife and children in a state of subordination, exercising power through verbal and physical abuse, showing no respect for his wife and children; instead, he oppressed them and disregarded their rights and individuality. He did not recognize the burden of performing household chores or bringing up their sons and daughters (Young, 2004; Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004; Lynch & Baker, 2005; Lynch, 2007; Lynch, Baker & Lyons, 2009; Lynch & Lyons, 2009; Lynch & Walsh, 2009). They had six children, but two of Lurdes's brothers died at a young age, one drowned when he was still a baby and the other was run over by a truck when he was fifteen.

After years of abuse, Lurdes' mother left him and found work outside the household. However, as a working-class single mother with a low income, and even though she had to work for long hours, she had to rely on her children's help (Lynch & Lyons, 2009, Matos & Costa, 2012). The economic difficulties she faced were mainly caused by inequalities related to her divorce, as she got no material compensation for all the years she had spent taking care of their children and working at home and in the fields, due to the misrecognition and devaluation of her work (Kershaw, Pulkingham & Fuller, 2008; Sayer, 2008; Lynch & Lyons, 2009; Feeley, 2014).

Years later, when her other son died, Lurdes's mother never fully recovered. At home,

Lurdes and her brothers and sisters had no freedom. The mother manipulated them through emotional blackmail. Lurdes was desperate to get out of the house and she married at seventeen, following an unplanned pregnancy. After four years she ended the marriage, as it was marked by conflict and financial hardship. Although Lurdes's first husband did not display her father's violent behaviour, the two men were similar in terms of their 'live for the moment' attitude, hedonism, irresponsibility (Lahire, 2004) and neglect towards their children. Lurdes also had a troubled relationship with her first son and the boy expressed the wish to move in with his father at the age of ten (when the interviews were held he lived in Brazil). In her second marriage, Lurdes found stability and a close partnership. In fact, her relationship with her new husband had a high level of emotional significance, since it is based on love, union and mutual understanding. Her mother-in-law also played an important role, as she was an affectionate person who gave Lurdes significant support. The couple has two children and she confesses that she decided to have the second child because she felt lonely, at a time when she was unemployed.

After being a victim of domestic violence for so many years, Lurdes's mother showed a tendency to maintain relationships with the most problematic men in the family, as well as to accommodate and justify their irresponsible and hedonist behaviour (Lahire, 2004): her husband, an extremely violent man; her grandson, a big spender; and her son, a drug addict, as though used to being oppressed she excused men for their behaviour or she felt 'naturally inferior' (Freire, 1985) to men.

#### A STRONG WORK ETHIC

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Lurdes's mother was a farmer and a door-to-door saleswoman; her father had finished elementary school and had a job in a rope factory. In terms of work ethic and household budget management, her parent's dispositions were the opposite: her father's hedonism, irresponsibility, inconstancy and tendency to live for the moment contrasted with his wife's strong work ethic, effort and responsibility (Lahire, 2004).

Despite her debts, Lurdes's mother used the effort, perseverance and organization (Lahire, 2004) skills to build a new life for herself and her children after the divorce. This strong work ethic and ascetic spirit (Lahire, 2004) was passed on to her children, in what Lurdes calls 'the struggle'. This was the genesis of dispositions toward asceticism, saving, planning and organization (Lahire, 2004) which so often emerge in Lurdes's discourse and which she learned from her mother during childhood and youth. The children participated directly in

the activities, selling bread door-to-door or working in the fields. Such a disposition for hard work was, therefore, built early and internalized, becoming deeply rooted in Lurdes's character and playing a constant role in her life. In fact, her ascetic disposition has emerged in situations of financial hardship and is evident in her attitude towards work, school, household management and children's education (Lahire, 2004).

Lurdes started to work in the fields and as door-to-door bread seller when she was only eight years old. She worked and studied at the same time. It is obvious the lack of State investment in care support and children's welfare, education and health (Kershaw, Pulkingham & Fuller, 2008; Sayer, 2008; Kröger, 2009; Lynch & Lyons, 2009). There was a strong labour market appeal, since Lurdes and her siblings wanted to help their mother and financially contribute to the household (Pinto, 1998; Stoer & Araújo, 2000; Lisboa & Malta, 2009; Dale, 2010). At twelve she left school, after finishing 6<sup>th</sup> grade. She started to work when she was thirteen and, in the following twenty years, she was a factory worker in several low-skilled and low-paid jobs (Young, 2004; Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004).

When she became unemployed for the first time, she joined a union (Lahire, 2004) in order to reclaim her work rights and to claim entitlement to unemployment benefits. The only time she terminated a contract was when she was working for a company where she was being bullied by a male co-worker). When she was interviewed, she was unemployed. In her last job, she had worked as a seamstress. Her husband had taken an early retirement.

#### THE REFUSAL OF NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES AND WELFARE DEPENDENCY

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Following a situation where the couple was laid off with wage arrears and had to wait six months for their unemployment benefits, Lurdes strategically requested a loan from the bank, calculating the amount that her family would need to survive (Lahire, 2004). With additional help from her mother and mother-in-law, she managed to survive through that period 'without owing a cent to anyone' a fact of which she is proud.

In 2009, being unemployed and no longer entitled to unemployment benefit, she decided to apply for ISA. A certain opposition, on her part, to imposed rules has characterized her interactions with social workers whenever she considers them unfair (Lahire, 2004). In fact, she felt humiliated by the contempt, disrespect, condemnation and negative stereotyping (Reay, 1998; Young, 2002; Hancock, 2003; Young, 2004; Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh,

2004; Power, 2005) shown by people, in general, towards the unemployed and by jobcentre employers in particular, and she felt powerless to change the situation. Furthermore, she felt humiliated and ashamed of having to ask for food. For the abovementioned reasons, she was at the frailty stage of the process of social disqualification (Paugam, 2003), in the internalized autonomy category (Duvoux, 2009) or the unsettled group of recipients (Rodrigues, 2010) since her unemployment was lived as a humiliating situation and that she refused to keep on depending on welfare, preserving a distance from social workers and actively searching for a job that she had not given up the hope to find. Lurdes admits that ISA is a useful tool to help those who are in difficult situations, however, she also points out that it will not solve every problem by itself and may have negative effects on the recipient's motivation and self-esteem (Duvoux, 2009).

The total amount of the family income was, at the time, €538 for the survival of the couple and their two children. During our conversations, she revealed how she managed the household budget and came up with ingenious ways to spend as little as possible, such as producing her own coffee machine capsules, making chicken rice for four people with only one drumstick or following a 20-cent-per-day saving target to be able to afford books for her son. Additionally, she made rissoles to sell and had worked as a cleaning lady.

In her daily life, besides working in the fields and selling rissoles, she cares for her children, her father-in-law and her mother. She regrets that care work is unpaid and unrecognised by the State (Lynch & Baker, 2005) since it contributes to the wellbeing of dependants and would have to be paid to strangers if her husband and she were not available.

Despite being forced to 'live one day at a time' due to her current economic conditions, she still makes a strategic assessment of her possibilities, organising her daily life, deferring consumption desires and saving (Lahire, 2004).

She points out health problems (back pain), lack of public transport as well as the limited number of jobs available as reasons for her unemployment. She has nevertheless shown initiative and perseverance (Lahire, 2004), always harbouring the desire to be independent of welfare benefits.

As abovementioned, her decision to leave school was rooted in the absence of a father figure and of financial stability, as well as on a feeling of moral obligation to support her family. As for her siblings, the lack of emotional support they faced in their personal lives prevented them from doing well in school, hence demonstrating the emotional dimension of education (Lynch & Baker, 2005; Lynch, Lyons & Cantillon, 2007; Feeley, 2014). She stated that she liked school, she learned the subjects easily and was her siblings' 'teacher'. At home, the existing moral order provided a framework for day-to-day activities and guided the organisation of study and leisure time (Lahire, 2004). Nevertheless, due to the family's lack of economic resources, Lurdes left school when she was twelve years old, after completing compulsory schooling (six years of education). She had to work to help support her siblings, since her mother's efforts, on their own, were not enough.

In 2012 she returned to school and completed the 9<sup>th</sup> grade in an Adult Education and Training Course [EFA]. Returning to school was a dream came true, a reactivation of her disposition to study that had been interrupted for financial reasons (Lahire, 2004). She accepted the course suggested by the social worker.

At school, she displayed autonomy in learning and she clearly fulfilled the role of the good, well-behaved student while condemning those 'who behave badly', criticising the **attitude** of some of her classmates, comparing them to 'small animals' arguing that they often behaved in a disrespectful, even aggressive way, in contrast with her own behaviour and dedication to learn (Lahire, 2004).

Returning to school also posed new challenges to Lurdes. The time she had to care for her daughter was reduced, so she decided to send her to pre-school. She complained that Social Services were not cooperative at first, due to rigid and bureaucratic rules regarding affordable, accessible and good quality childcare (Daly & Leonard, 2002; Caragata & Cumming, 2011) but in the end, she managed to achieve her goal.

Her ambition to graduate from school is not yet set aside, but it appears a remote possibility. In her suppressed desire to become an accountant or a mathematics teacher, there is a mismatch between the job she aspires and the one that she can have, as a factory

worker. In fact, given her lack of financial resources and the need to take care of her family she has no opportunity that to complete her education (Lahire, 2004).

The notions of saving, planning and effort (Lahire, 2004) were already being passed on to her children. Within love labouring (Lynch, 2007; Lynch & Walsh, 2009), her care for her children involves the mental work of anticipating and prioritising their needs and interests. She was in charge of housekeeping and organised the domestic moral order, investing in her children's education to ensure that they did not lack the 'essential' things such as books, school supplies and clothes. Her way of exercising authority is to pressure her son to study; as a way of pedagogical investment, she developed a saving strategy to be able to put her son through college, while cultivating such desire in the boy (Lahire, 1995). Her care work consists of encouraging her children, providing them with economic and cultural resources, being attentive to their needs and planning their educational options, and trying to provide them with the best. She also guides them through decision-making, helps them with homework and provides for educational and cultural activities outside school hours (Lynch, 2007; Lynch & Walsh, 2009).

#### A STRATEGY FOR SOCIAL MOBILITY

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Lurdes refuses been labelled as 'poor', a strategy for social distinction (Paugam, 2003) in order to differentiate vis-à-vis others, escaping the levelling of the social workers by criticizing her colleagues from the adult education and training course. She follows the prevailing attitude, devaluing and condemning other recipients who face similar circumstances, in order to distance herself from their situation. She has also shown power to resist to social injustice, either by joining a union when she was laid-off in order to claim her rights or by confronting her social workers, when she felt she was being a victim of misrecognition and devaluation.

In conclusion, despite her difficulties, she had a clear strategy for social mobility (Briggs, 1998; Dominguez & Watkins, 2003), especially orientated towards her children and supported by her family. In fact, her agency was primarily related to her children's care, prioritising their educational needs and academic attainment (Lahire, 2004; Power, 2005; O'Brien, 2009). To achieve her goals, planning and self-restraint (Lahire, 2004) were always present, especially when she had to make decisions regarding practices of leisure and consumption. The pedagogical investment she made by enrolling her son at the Music

Academy, therefore nurturing a taste for more elitist forms of culture, contrasts with her choice of not going to the cinema, the theatre or even coffee shops to save money (Lahire, 1995).

Last, but not least, she attaches great importance to her loving relationship with her husband, characterised by mutual and strong emotional support, that has given her hope in a better future despite the hardship.

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### 7.1.3. ESTELA

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In this portrait, the key system intersecting with all others is the affective, namely the affective inequality that is present throughout Estela's childhood and youth, based on the abuse and neglect she was subjected to by her family and that has had serious emotional, health and educational implications and, indirectly, economic ones. The Municipality's investment and the social worker's care have played a very important role in Estela's and her son's survival. Education has also had an important role in her path, especially because of her good memories of love and care in her first grades provided by her best friend's mother and her teacher, thus reinforcing the importance of the affective dimension in education. Lastly, she has participated in several NGOs and projects so she has had the possibility of making her voice heard.

Her portrait is essentially organised around four ideas: childhood abuse and its long-term consequences of mental illness, the importance of the emotional dimension of education that enabled her to finish 12<sup>th</sup> grade, in spite of all the challenges she has had to face, her son's illness and the difficulties she had in managing care and finding and keeping a job, due to discrimination, which has led her to welfare dependency and, lastly, her participation in the community and the importance of social networks in her life.

#### A LEGACY OF MENTAL ILLNESS AND ABUSE

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Estela's childhood was branded by extreme violence and affective inequality that has influenced all her path (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004; Lynch & Baker, 2005; Lynch, 2007; Lynch, Baker & Lyons, 2009; Lynch & Lyons, 2009; Lynch & Walsh, 2009). Her mother was described as a very anxious and disturbed woman, who frequently had discussions with her ex-husband and children. Furthermore, Estela and her brothers and sister were victims of corporal punishment, neglect and lack of care in their childhood.

This abuse damaged Estela, who nowadays has mental health issues herself. Her mother's abuse, the powerlessness and humiliation she was subjected to in childhood turned her into an adult who struggles with trauma, feelings of worthlessness and lack of self-esteem (Feeley, 2014).

When Estela was five years old her mother tried to kill her with a knife. A few years later she and her siblings were definitely taken away from her care by court order and went to live with their paternal grandparents. The housing conditions there were not adequate and the children were also neglected and suffered corporal punishment from their grandmother, but not to the same extent as before. Her father got married again and neglected the children from the first marriage (Kershaw, Pulkingham & Fuller, 2008).

Her relationships with men have been characterised by co-dependency and impulsivity that contrast with her organization, effort and responsibility regarding her child, work and studies (Lahire, 2004). Nevertheless, she was also able to get away from toxic relationships when she feels that they are damaging her, with the help of her doctor and her social worker. She became a mother at 27, and when the child was nine months old she decided to leave the child's father because he was too possessive. Nevertheless, he also cared for the child and did not neglect his paternal obligations.

Estela was diagnosed with borderline personality disorder, characterised by impulsive behaviour, frequent dangerous behaviour and fear of abandonment, often caused by a history of childhood trauma. She needed medical follow-ups and permanent medication. Her emotional balance was delicate, sometimes going through periods of instability and others of depression. On those occasions, she tended to doubt her abilities as a mother. She also reported that in a moment of crisis, she was violent towards her son and humiliated him, thus activating and transferring her aggressive disposition (Lahire, 2004) and reproducing the violence she had been a victim as a child while reliving the frustration she had with Mathematics.

With her son, Estela displayed a deep engagement and had a strong attachment. Her love labour towards the child had a high level of emotional significance (Lynch, 2007; Lynch & Walsh, 2009). She was emotionally engaged in caring for him, she nurtured him and knew how to deal with his diabetes, managing his health situation, anticipating and prioritising medical needs. In fact, she demonstrated responsibility and strategy (Lahire, 2004) by contacting the Portuguese Diabetes Association and obtaining information about

affordable health resources to better help him. Additionally, she took the time to listen to him, guided him, made choices about schools/subjects and had meetings with teachers, even arranging for them to give him insulin, so she could work or study without being called to the school frequently. As for the ways of pedagogical investment (Lahire, 1995), she managed the home economy, she valued education, wanted her son to have a college degree, planning to invest in English and Computer courses thus strategically choosing the subjects that may later give him a competitive advantage (Lahire, 1995). Additionally, the municipality's social intervention office had professionals who helped the children with their homework. Her ways of exercising authority were based on autonomy, self-restriction and the embodiment of behavioural norms (Lahire, 1995).

#### THE EMOTIONAL DIMENSION OF EDUCATION

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Although her family did not value education, Estela grew up in contexts characterized by a strong work ethic (Lahire, 2004). She attended nursery school, pre-school education and remembers feeling responsible for her younger brother, who she protected from other children, sometimes resorting to conflict and aggression (Lahire, 2004).

Her interest in school intensified through her relationship with her best childhood friend (who is nowadays an attorney) and the positive influence of her elementary teacher, whom she remembers with much tenderness. In fact, this teacher and her best friend's mother gave her the affection and attention she did not have at home. The emotional dependence on this teacher was such that Estela failed the year she left the school, which confirms the importance of care in education (Lynch & Baker, 2005; Feeley, 2014). By contrast, she developed a trauma related to Mathematics, as her mother had a violent behaviour whenever Estela could not understand this subject's homework (Lynch & Baker, 2005).

Her paternal grandparents forced her to leave school at the age of twelve (in 1988), after completing the 6th grade, against the recommendation of the school's principal. When our interviews were held she was concluding a vocational education and training course (12<sup>th</sup>-grade equivalent) with an internship. She evaluated her return to school as important in advancing her qualifications. She enjoyed the classes, the teachers, her peers and the subjects, although she would have preferred a cooking course, which was not available at the time, which confirms the tendency to make disadvantaged publics attend courses regardless of their motivation (Lima, 2010). For geographical and financial reasons, and also to care for her son, she ended up 'choosing' the course closer to her home. Estela liked

the classmates and the teachers and this emotional dimension was important to her attainment. In addition, she considered this course a good basis for her professional future, unlike her RVCC<sup>37</sup> (9<sup>th</sup>-grade equivalent), where she says she learned nothing new (Queiroz & Gros, 2012).

Despite being pleased with her course, Estela fell into a depressive state in the sequence of a co-dependent intimate relationship with a man addicted to gambling. Following some anxiety-provoking episodes, she collapsed and was admitted to a mental hospital, where she stayed for fourteen days, after trying to attack her sister with a knife (like her mother attacked her when she was a child). Following her hospitalisation, she was highly medicated with antidepressants and anxiolytics and she had to deal with great difficulties concentrating in her studies, which ultimately led to a decrease in school performance. That caused her sadness and anger and she even considered giving up the course. However, the drive to achieve her dream and finish her education has been decisive. Although she did not rule out the possibility of taking more courses in the future, she admitted that reconciling her studies with childcare is very difficult and she prioritised her son's needs (Lynch & Lyons, 2009; Power, 2005).

#### THE AFFECTIVE DEPENDENCY ON THE SOCIAL WORKER

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Estela began to work at the age of twelve, sometimes having two jobs to earn more money. Her professional life suffered a setback when her son had a diabetes crisis and had to be admitted to the hospital for three months. She was fired at that time and was discriminated against when she was looking for a job. She feels that she has been discriminated against due to her son's illness since she has lost three jobs and a scholarship due to absenteeism, as the kindergarten refused to give him his insulin. As many other unskilled workers with low autonomy (Young, 2004; Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004), Estela's job did not allow her the kind of flexibility and adaptability she needed to take care of her sick son (Lynch & Lyons, 2009). She largely depended on her social worker to care for her and her

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<sup>37</sup> Recognition, Validation and Certification of Skills

son in these moments of crisis that had a strong emotional impact and exhaustion and led to an increase of Estela's vulnerability (Lynch & Lyons, 2009; Matos & Costa, 2012).

Estela admitted that her professional path was not affected by ISA because she always took the initiative to look for a job and for courses. She also expressed an autonomy desire regarding ISA. According to Paugam's typology of people's relationship with welfare, she was at the dependency stage, especially due to her son diabetes and her mental health issues. Notwithstanding these important constraints, I would consider she was in the deferred assistance stage, characterised by a strong motivation to work and a dependency towards social services, although she does not entirely fit the profile because her relationship with her social worker is very strong. In fact, she considered the latter as 'a mother, friend and confidante', the sister she had never had, who took care of Estela's son when she was ill or when she had to go to work. At the same time, there was also a strong dependency and compliance regarding the social worker's and the doctor's recommendations (Lahire, 2004) and she even recognized feeling jealous when the first was not working at her office or unavailable to attend her.

Estela had internalised the negative identity and social stigma of being an ISA recipient and living in a council estate (Paugam, 2003). She was ashamed to admit it to her schoolmates, friends and boyfriends, due to stereotyping and prejudice associated with this type of benefit and housing (Paugam, 2003; Young, 2004; Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004). Correspondingly, aware of the contempt and disrespect towards ISA recipients, she felt she had to justify her need and criticised 'other recipients', trying to relocate the discredit to 'other' poor and trying to distinguish from them. She disliked her neighbourhood and preferred to isolate inside the house, protecting her son from playing alone in the street (Paugam, 2003).

#### MAKING HER VOICE HEARD

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As abovementioned, she tried to distinguish herself from the stigma of being an ISA beneficiary, although she reproduced it in relation to 'others', in a clear social distinction strategy, avoiding the 'other' poor and isolating from her neighbours (Paugam, 2003).

At that time, when she was not depressed, she spent 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. Unlike most of the interviewed women, Estela was given the opportunity (namely through her social worker and the municipality where the latter

works) to be included in several forums of participation where she can make her voice heard (Young, 2000a; Young, 2004). She showed a disposition to participate in public or collective activities (Lahire, 2004), that started in her youth, specifically with her participation in church groups. Thus, she was a member of the Portuguese Diabetes Association and of the National Advisory Council of EAPN Portugal and she volunteered at the municipality's social intervention office in her neighbourhood. She also participated in a European Project, which included a trip to Romania, visits and cultural exchange activities. The Municipality, namely through its Social Inclusion Department invested in care support and welfare and the social worker and the social intervention office act as an institutionally-based social support network (Briggs, 1998; Dominguez & Watkins, 2003). If, on the one hand, I recognise some dangers of an excessive dependence on this kind of supports, namely at an emotional level, on the other hand, Estela's heterogeneous social network, that included teachers, social workers, doctors and the community in general, can help to promote some kind of upward mobility, through information about job opportunities. Estela was the only one of our interviewees that was about to finish 12th grade. Furthermore, she and still considered taking another course (in hotel and restaurant catering) and dreamt about becoming a cook.

When she was interviewed, Estela's agency was also extremely linked to her son's care, health and education, prioritising his needs (Lahire, 1995; Daly & Leonard, 2002; Power, 2005; Dodson, 2007; O'Brien, 2009).

Lastly, Estela's pathway raises the issue of rectification i.e., if family and State failed to provide her with love and care in childhood, which has branded her for life, should she be entitled to some form of compensation and what should this compensation be (Lynch & Baker, 2009; Feeley, 2014)?

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#### 7.1.4. SALOMÉ

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Salomé was 40 years old at the time of the interviews and was a long-time ISA recipient. She was born in Sao Tome and Principe and lived in Porto district, in an urban area. In her portrait, key systems intersect and generate inequality, namely the economic, through unemployment, and the fact that Salomé is subjected to domination and exploitation (Young, 2004) by her employers, as well as condemned to a lower standard of living and

deprived of an opportunity for satisfying work; the affective, being deprived of love as a child from her father and family and later from her partner and, finally, as a lone mother, caring alone for her children; the cultural and political, concerning “race”/ethnicity discrimination, as her customs are seen as inferior and marginal and she is often discriminated when applying for jobs. Indeed, the stigma of being black has economic implications and intersects with powerlessness combined with disrespect and misrecognition of cultural differences (Young, 2004), as well as difficulties in getting a job due to stereotyping and depreciation (Feeley, 2014). The lack of educational resources worsens her situation of social exclusion; nevertheless, education opens new possibilities for her children (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004; Lynch, 2006; Lynch & Baker, 2005).

This sociological portrait is organised around two main ideas: on the one hand, the intersectionality of economic, gender and racial oppression that tend to intensify one another, demonstrated by bullying, symbolical and physical violence in school and in the neighbourhood, and even lack of self-determination. On the other hand, Salomé’s was determined to give her children a better future, through education, and she sets in motion strategies in order to achieve it, namely through perseverance, but also with initiative and sometimes even confrontation and aggressiveness.

#### IN THE NAME OF THE CHILDREN. A DIFFERENT CHILDHOOD FROM HER OWN

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Salomé’s mother died when she was six years old. At that age, she started working in the fields. She was affectively and financially neglected by her father, who was absent from her education in the first years of her life, and she was a victim of war at Angola, where she lived with him for a few years. Even though she mentions pleasant moments spent with her brothers, aunts and other kin, Salomé’s childhood and youth were characterised by consecutive moments of crisis and rupture (Lahire, 2004 2002). In fact, she dealt with severe deprivation of resources and episodes of lack of love and care, abuse and neglect from primary caretakers (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004; Lynch & Baker, 2005; Lynch, 2007; Lynch, Baker & Lyons, 2009; Lynch & Lyons, 2009; Lynch & Walsh, 2009). She also reports episodes of sexual violence against young women in S. Tome and Principe, who were raped by police officers and remembers she kept these episodes to herself from fear of what might happen to her. These episodes are examples of the powerlessness and subordination of poor black girls (Young, 2004; Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004).

She got pregnant the first time she had sexual intercourse. Since she was not married she was expelled from her brother's house. In her pathway, Salomé describes some episodes of unexpected pregnancies and from her words, it is gathered that throughout her life her sexuality has been lived with discomfort. She believes that sex only pleasures men and confesses that she does not like to kiss a man on the mouth or to show her naked body.

The interviewee states that she does not like to be alone and that she has friendly relations with neighbours and even with some vendors at the municipal market, but other times Salomé feels lonely, she misses her home country and recognizes the cultural differences between her cultural habits and her neighbours'. Loneliness is also present due to the lack of love and care, and verbal abuse from her partner and their separation. In fact, as a consequence of his unemployment and his feelings of insecurity and identity-loss as the breadwinner, her partner started to drink and being rude, and Salomé became afraid that her children would be taken away by social services. This situation led to a separation from him to protect the family and she now has three children and one stepdaughter under her care. From the examples that she mentions it is inferred that, in relation to the children and the stepdaughter, Salomé has a love labour, consubstantiated in the emotional work of having concerns with the children's health and education, listening to and supporting them as well as the mental work of looking out for them, and the cognitive and physical work of taking care of their needs (food, clothes) (Lynch, 2007; Lynch, Baker & Lyons, 2009; Lynch & Walsh, 2009).

Salomé describes the strategies she sets in motion to survive, rationally organizing the scarce resources available to her and taking into account the various supports existing in the community (Lahire, 1995; 2004 2002). She values education and, above all, manages the home economy so that the children do not lack food and other resources. At the same time she values and encourages initiative, effort and responsibility (Lahire, 1995; 2002; 2004), and she helps the children to study. She organizes the domestic moral order and it is interesting to observe how her children promptly obey her, given her explanation of rules of conduct and non-violent forms of punishment, demanding respect.

Nevertheless, showing a structural insufficiency of State concerns regarding child poverty, it is flagrant the lack of public resources for the purchase of medicine and glasses. This situation does not contribute to an adequate educational or professional inclusion. Salomé, like other lone mothers, finds herself obliged to disregard her needs according to the needs

of her children, sacrificing herself and her own health care needs (Daly & Leonard, 2002; Power, 2005; Lynch & Lyons, 2009; O'Brien, 2009; Caragata & Cumming, 2011; Matos & Costa, 2012).

#### EXPLOITATION AND DISCRIMINATION

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In Portugal, Salomé was a victim of violence, racism and discrimination by her employer (Young, 2004), who treated her as a commodity and not as a human being entitled to self-determination. She and her daughter lived in a windowless room at this employer's house, where Salomé worked long hours. Afterwards, without Salomé knowing, she caused her an abortion, by switching her pills. She also tried to stop her from reuniting with her husband. This violence and exploitation (Young, 2004) were also financially damaging when she finally decided to leave that job since she was denied of her work rights and payments. In short, Salomé's human and labour rights were not recognized or respected. In her description of her relationship with her boss, Salomé hesitates between calling her a friend and confronting her. On the one hand, that woman provided her with work as well as lodging and food for herself and her daughter when they did not have the money or anywhere else to stay. On the other hand, that woman used Salomé's vulnerability to exercise power and to exploit her. Salomé reports other situations of discrimination: racism while job searching, at the medical centre, on buses. Such discrimination has economic implications since stereotyping and depreciation make job search very difficult. Furthermore, Salomé shows a contradictory way of dealing with being black: sometimes she confronts the people who discriminate against her, but in other occasions she internalizes the stigma and depreciation and is unable to confront those who offend and humiliate her, questioning her own skin colour instead, what Freire (1987) defines as the negative self-image of the oppressed. Additionally, "race"/ethnicity issues intersect with other discriminations, namely the stigma associated with living in a social council estate. In fact, poor and violent neighbourhoods can be an example of careless communities, she describes drug dealing practices, she often has conflicts with her neighbours based on cultural differences regarding the volume of music, making her feel culturally marginal. Additionally, her youngest son is a victim of racism, discrimination and practices of depreciation in the neighbourhood (Lynch & Baker, 2005). As a result, Salomé strategically keeps him inside the house (Lahire, 2002; 2004).

As an ISA recipient, Salomé, like other interviewees, refers to feeling ashamed for

requesting the benefit in order to survive. This shame is exacerbated by situations of humiliation and abuses of power (that she has suffered at the Post Office, for example). Such situations have been portrayed by Hancock (2003) referring to the stigma suffered by black single mothers and the identity of the 'welfare queen', or by Reay (1998), Adair (2002; 2003; 2005; 2007), Skeggs (2011) or Caragata and Cumming (2011), about the negative public discourse of lone mothers that are welfare recipients. The humiliation works as a form of domination and social control of the poorest, who feel ashamed of their need, and who end up internalizing the stigma regarding dependence. However, Salomé also expresses an awareness of her citizenship rights, such as ISA, and defends the right to a minimum income scheme. In fact, at the moment of the interviews, Salomé's depended on social workers on a regular basis (and considered them almost like family), through welfare payments, in a 'settled assistance' characterised by low motivation to work given health issues and other rationalisations; inadequate training and prioritisation of children's education (Paugam, 2003).

#### EDUCATION AS A WAY OUT?

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Whereas her childhood in S. Tome was characterized by child labour and a lack of resources for education, the vocational and educational training she got in Portugal enabled her to improve her self-esteem, to develop social networks and to increase skills in the Portuguese language. The training took place in an atmosphere of recognition and respect for the differences of the trainees, with an emotional and security dimension. During the course she proved her perseverance and strategy to learn, opting to study with the trainers during breaks (Lahire, 2002; 2004). The trainers and her colleagues were important for her self-development that made integration easier. Although it was a positive experience, Salomé, the sole caretaker of her daughter, was forced to interrupt her studies to take care of the child when she had a heart surgery (Lynch & Lyons, 2009), following the pattern of other mothers for whom care responsibility and the well-being of the children is more important than their education. Even with her improved skills and training, Salomé's professional future seems to be linked to occasionally cleaning houses or other low-pay and precarious jobs.

Her eldest daughter graduated from high school and was one of the best students of her school. During the course of our interviews, the young woman left for England where she started living and working to pay her college tuition fees, with her mother's financial help

(Lahire, 2002; 2004). Her son was a fifth-grader and her other daughter was attending a vocational course. Finally, Salomé is trying to enrol her stepdaughter, who lives with her, in vocational and educational training; she finished 6th grade, but ‘badly’.

In school, her daughter was rescued by Salomé from an attempted rape by two boys at the toilets and her son is a victim of bullying, based on “race” discrimination by his peers, who call him a ‘negro’. Such practices in a careless school environment inhibit the child from making friends and from being fully included in society. In this sense, school fails to prevent and to manage violent situations between students and replicates patterns of power in wider society, lack of respect and contempt, stigma and unacceptance of difference (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004; Lynch & Baker, 2005; Young, 2006; Reay, 2010; Caragata & Cumming, 2011; Feeley, 2014).

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#### POSSIBILITIES FOR ACTION

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Salomé manages her social networks with other people from Sao Tome who live in Europe in order to find jobs for her and even for her daughter in England, and in this sense, they act as social support networks (Briggs, 1998; Dominguez & Watkins, 2003). Also, her neighbours have helped her to find social and financial help from social services that ultimately led to an improvement on her skills and education and she lives in a council estate where she pays a low rent.

Like other interviewees, and as a social distinction strategy (Paugam, 2003) Salomé mentions ‘other’ beneficiaries’ misuse of benefits and who don’t make an effort and stresses the case of drug dealers in her neighbourhood or how Roma people don’t have to obey the rules at the Health Care Centre.

She has a close and affectionate relationship with her children who have a better childhood than she did and encourages children to go to school, chooses their friends and playmates, and is concerned about their schooling, health and protection. As a poor lone mother, her agency is strongly related to her children’s care (Power, 2005; O’Brien, 2009), and she reveals initiative, autonomy, perseverance and even confrontation, aggressiveness (Lahire, 2002; 2004) to provide and to care for them. As seen in her portrait some of these strategies went as far as to talking to the President of the Republic and threatening to report situations that she considers unjust to the media.

Finally, she reveals a personal aspiration for independence and freedom: having a driver’s

licence and becoming a 'proud' a woman behind the wheel!

## 7.2. EXPECTED PATHS ELVIRA, MARGARIDA AND CRISTINA: LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES AND INTERGENERATIONAL REPRODUCTION OF POVERTY

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### 7.2.1. ELVIRA

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In Elvira's portrait economic and affective inequalities combine to reproduce a cycle of intergenerational social exclusion that already includes her young daughter. In fact, lack of love and care and violence afflict Elvira throughout her life, from childhood to the present time, including revealing themselves through several dimensions: family, school and work. Furthermore, as a poor child neglected by her parents and later as a poor single mother (with a cognitive impairment), her life has been regulated by the State and by other people (Young, 2002; Hancock, 2003; Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004; Young, 2006), and in most situations she has been excluded from decision-making. In fact, her pathway is characterised by powerlessness and lack of respect and recognition.

Her sociological portrait is organised around five main ideas, affective inequality throughout her life, powerlessness, intergenerational reproduction of neglect and poverty, a vulnerability that has culminated in a suicide attempt and the school as a space of misrecognition and depreciation that replicates the patterns of power in wider society.

#### A PATHWAY BRANDED BY ABUSE AND NEGLECT

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Elvira's childhood was characterized by affective inequality, lack of care, physical abuse and neglect (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004; Lynch & Walsh, 2009; Lynch & Baker, 2005; Lynch, 2007; Lynch, Baker & Lyons, 2009; Lynch & Lyons, 2009; Feeley, 2014), that can be attributed both to her primary caretakers as well as to public institutions, namely a careless State (Lynch & Lyons, 2009).

If, On the one hand, she experienced violence and neglect in her relationship with her parents (her mother encouraged her to drink alcohol; both parents forced her into child labour), and the family's way of exercising authority was often through corporal punishment (Lahire, 1995). On the other hand, public institutions also failed to provide her with appropriate protection and care (Lynch & Lyons, 2009; Feeley, 2014).

In school, she was subjected to physical violence by her teacher and felt very lonely. At the age of ten, she was committed to a foster care institution, following an alcohol detoxification at the hospital. Her loneliness deepened and there were no adequate resources to address her emotional and cognitive problems. Later in her life, she suffered physical abuse from her employer. However, violence is not the only aspect of her powerlessness. In fact, she also expressed the wish to find a job where she does as she is told; she showed subordination to social workers and believed that people help her out of charity, not because it is their obligation (Lahire, 2004).

As a result of a repeated pattern of violence and neglect, she has internalised the abuse, and became a woman with low self-esteem and a sense of worthlessness (Feeley, 2014), culminating in a suicide attempt. When our interviews were held she was undergoing psychiatric treatment and she was not employed. In fact, her mental health issues prevented her from holding a job. Additionally, Elvira's daughter had been taken away by social services. In fact, disregarding the advice of social workers and psychologists, Elvira kept meeting a man, knowing that he was sexually interested in her young daughter. This was one of the rare occasions when Elvira openly defied the rules and decided on a more hedonistic and irresponsible behaviour (Lahire, 2004). As a result, the child went to live with her aunt, who was a Jehovah's Witness and therefore had different rules, habits and practices in her new home. Nowadays, Elvira shows feelings of guilt and remorse and emphasizes the importance of the child in her life.

In sum, the life paths of both mother and daughter are characterised by the reproduction of affective and economic inequalities, and by a vicious cycle of lack of care and affection, as they were both removed from their parents by social services due to neglect, they have experienced hunger and poverty and they had mental health issues (Young, 2004; Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004).

#### INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY

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Poverty, hunger, substandard housing conditions, child labour and severe mental health issues associated with alcoholism branded Elvira's childhood. As a consequence of alcoholism and malnutrition, she developed a cognitive impairment of 5% which prevents her from learning and from holding an intellectually demanding job. This, in turn, has trapped her in a situation of profound dependence on welfare payments.

After leaving foster care, Elvira has held a series of low-skilled and precarious jobs. Initially,

she faced dire conditions such as violent behaviour by her employer, for whom she worked as a housemaid without any contract or a fixed schedule and where she was exploited and experienced marginalisation and powerlessness (Young, 2004), practices of stereotyping and depreciation (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004). However, she was able to limit the negative effects of her personal and professional context by defying the rules (Lahire, 2004) and ultimately leaving this oppressive situation and rejecting the near slavery into which she had been forced into.

Notwithstanding, later on, as a result of an unplanned pregnancy, with a man who had also a slight cognitive impairment and lived with his family, Elvira became a poor single mother, aggravating her social vulnerability (Fineman, 2008; Lynch, Baker & Lyons, 2009; Sayer, 2011; Matos & Costa, 2012). At that moment she turned to social services and applied for a council flat that was awarded to her.

As above-mentioned, Elvira's poverty is of an intergenerational and persistent nature. Her social worker helped with health issues and gave her money for medication and treatments but Elvira was wary of ISA cuts if she didn't comply with the contractual obligations defined by social services. In this sense, at least in her discourse, there is an agreement with their rules (Lahire, 2004). This is, nevertheless, more than a utilitarian relationship. In the afternoons, she attended social activities at the local social support office and she considered the social worker there as a friend. According to Paugam's typology of people's relationship with welfare during the process of social disqualification (2003), she is at the dependency stage, moreover in a settled assistance, characterised by a strong dependency towards welfare, in which she rationalizes the need for those services with her mental health issues and has a familiar and friendly relationship with her social worker.

#### SCHOOL AS A SPACE OF MISRECOGNITION AND DEPRECIATION

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Elvira's parents had low levels of cultural capital, they did not value education and Elvira had no access to reading materials. School replicated the pattern of power in wider society (Feeley, 2014), as she was physically abused by her teacher, suffered from loneliness and had to deal with her own failure to learn, therefore perpetuating, in this context, the lack of love and affection she already suffered at home. She was considered culturally marginal and was negatively stereotyped and marginalised (Lynch & Baker, 2005; Reay, 2010). The way in which she tries to justify her teacher's aggression is another evidence of her lack of self-worth, powerlessness and compliance with the rules (Lahire, 2004). The teacher's

pedagogical practices of denial and depreciation (Fraser, 2010; Feeley, 2014) sustained inequalities of respect and recognition, displaying a profound disregard for Elvira's social, economic and affective background, and thus failing to give her the emotional support which would have been essential for her to learn (Lynch & Baker, 2005). At seventeen (in 1994), when she left foster care, she dropped out of school, after completing the 6th grade. When she became an ISA recipient, she took some courses on the house and personal hygiene, parental education, computers, job search techniques and first aid, but she would have liked to try different courses from the ones she was forced to. Being an ISA recipient, and the return to education enabled Elvira to improve her self-esteem and her social networks. She highlights the good personal relationships she developed with teachers and other trainees, and the opportunity to build additional knowledge - namely when related to computers, a topic that she had especially enjoyed. However, she criticised the contrasting levels of background knowledge among trainees; she reported having had more difficulties than her colleagues in learning, which at the time led her to consider quitting. She also mentioned her mental and cognitive impairment as an obstacle to continuing her education. As Elvira's example shows, the placement of some people in vocational education and training is merely palliative, as some people are unemployable. Furthermore, it was clear from her words that the courses are mandatory in order to receive welfare benefits, an activity to occupy time, regardless of her learning interests (Correia, 2005; Lima, 2010; Queiroz & Gros, 2012). The only activity Elvira seemed to enjoy, sewing and embroidery, is the one where she felt welcomed and valued by the teacher, which reinforces the importance of the emotional dimensions of education (Feeley, 2014; Baker & Lynch, 2005).

Unlike her parents, Elvira declared to attribute great meaning to her daughter's education, claiming that she wanted a better life for the child. She verbalized strong concerns with her well-being and health (Skeggs, 2011). In order to care for her daughter, she asked teachers, social workers, psychologists and doctors for advice and she gave her daughter medication for hyperactivity disorder [ADHD]. The care shown by social workers and psychologists for the child's well-being was obvious (the monitoring takes place at the same council housing neighbourhood where Elvira lived). Given her lack of cultural and economic resources, these were, in fact, the means of pedagogic investment (Lahire, 1995) or care work (Lynch, 2007; Lynch & Walsh, 2009) that she had at her disposal.

She was very critical of the conditions in which her siblings lived and of their behaviour, criticising their alcoholism and lack of hygiene. She compared them to 'black people', adding that 'at least the black, they shower!', in a clear strategy to deal with her own negative identity through social distinction from others, including her siblings. Elvira seeks to differentiate herself, escape the levelling and deviate the discredit, in this case, to 'black people' and 'alcoholics' (Paugam, 2003).

Despite her powerlessness and the violence she was subjected to, there were some moments of autonomy in her pathway: when she was eight and she defied her mother, who did not want her to go to school, saying that she would rather be given away than to be a maid. She also managed to break away from an employer who exploited and spanked her. As seen above, she also defied social workers who advised her against seeing the man who was interested in her daughter

The Municipality's investment in social services and council housing (she lived in a council flat where she paid a low rent), the role of social services preventing a situation of sexual abuse, providing for food and health treatments, and Elvira's friendship with social workers at the local social intervention office managed by the Municipality are examples of institutional-based social support networks (Briggs, 1998; Dominguez & Watkins, 2003). These networks helped Elvira 'get by', offering instrumental help and emotional support. However, such support also involved strong social control and over-dependence on these services. This may entail the danger of more vulnerability to welfare cuts as well as the danger of considering that gratitude and loyalty are forms of reciprocating, thus not creating opportunities outside the neighbourhood and isolating her even more (Dominguez & Watkins, 2003).

Finally, Elvira's pathway raises the issue of rectification, i.e., if family and the State failed to provide Elvira with the love and care in her childhood, that and if this has harmed her deeply, should she be entitled to some form of compensation (Lynch & Baker, 2009; Feeley, 2014)? And what should this compensation be?

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#### 7.2.2. MARGARIDA

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The key inequalities that intersect in Margarida's path are economic and affective. In fact,

her childhood was very poor and at the time of the interviews, Margarida lived a life strongly influenced by her social workers, where she seldom got to make decisions about her own life, and by the debts incurred by her ex-husband and that she struggled with, having little control over her own life. Besides the economic difficulties, she has also had to face her parent's and her ex-husband's lack of love and care and abuse. In this sense, she also suffered from a lack of power, respect and recognition. Nevertheless, caring for her children is at this point her greatest responsibility. In fact, she dedicates much of her energy to her children's education as her biggest achievement.

Margarida's sociological portrait is organised around her child labour and school drop-out when she was eight, her history of domestic violence for almost two decades, from which she managed to break the cycle of abuse. Her portrait also reflects the love and care she had for her children and the investment in her children's education. Furthermore, it is noticeable the work precariousness, the low quality of adult education courses and her dependence on welfare.

#### A CHILDHOOD BRANDED BY CHILD LABOUR

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Margarida was born into a family with serious financial difficulties that resulted in malnutrition, lack of health care, the absence of school material and substandard living conditions. Margarida, her sisters and a brother were forced into child labour to help their parents, who were illiterate and had little time to dedicate to their children. Margarida ended up leaving school, also illiterate, at the age of eight. She then started to work as a cleaner at a 'lady's house', already having a strong sense of effort and savings (Lahire, 1995). Child labour was very frequent in Portugal in the 1980s, when it began to be inspected and fined by the State, which for decades neglected its children (Pinto, 1998; Stoer & Araújo, 2000; Pestana, 2008; Dale, 2010).

Margarida's portrait is an example of labour exploitation, through child labour - when she was denied of opportunity to study and the possibility to have a fulfilling work in the future - and through low-skilled precarious jobs, low-paid and/or temporary (Young, 2004; Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004). Margarida stated that she lost her last job as a factory worker due to the crisis in the textile industry, which was based on unskilled labour, that led many companies in that area to close.

As a child, she was subordinated to the power and violence of adults, who showed little respect for children and their rights (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004). Her mother worked very hard to provide for the family, but she neglected love and care issues (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004; Lynch & Baker, 2005; Lynch, 2007; Lynch, Baker & Lyons, 2009; Lynch & Lyons, 2009; Lynch & Walsh, 2009). Her parents frequently argued, and the mother was aggressive towards her children. Additionally, the lack of State investment in care support, children's welfare, education, health and social justice was very problematic (Kershaw, Pulkingham & Fuller, 2008; Sayer, 2008; Lynch & Lyons, 2009; Feeley, 2014). In short, Margarida grew up without love and care, which precipitated a marriage as a strategy to leave her parent's home. However, her husband mistreated her, physically and emotionally. In fact, she was a victim of domestic violence and for almost two decades she felt powerless to change her situation (Young, 2004; Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004).

The house where she moved after her marriage also had substandard living conditions. Showing strategy and initiative (Lahire, 2004), Margarida applied for the Young Rent Program and for the first time in her life she got a comfortable accommodation. Furthermore, when she got pregnant she anticipated the needs of her unborn child and saved money so that her husband could have a driving licence and the child could be transported with greater comfort. Like other interviewees, Margarida also had unplanned pregnancies which forced her to find a more suitable house.

When I interviewed her, she was separated from her husband, whom she had been married to for 21 years, and had three children. After a few years of marriage, the husband became violent, threatening her to death, a behaviour exacerbated by his alcoholism. At the same time, the children were victims of neglect and emotional violence (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004; Lynch & Baker, 2005; Lynch, 2007; Lynch, Baker & Lyons, 2009; Lynch & Lyons, 2009; Lynch & Walsh, 2009). Pressured by Social Services, who threatened to remove the children from her care, Margarida separated from him, giving priority to the children's well-being. The change in the marital status brought Margarida the peace she longed for, in contrast to the anxious and depressing situation in which she lived. However, the lack of material resources and the debts that the former companion had contracted,

and which Margarida was responsible for paying, continued to worry her and causing anxiety and depression, since severe deprivation led to emotional deprivation (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004; O'Brien, 2009; Caragata & Cumming, 2011). Surviving had been Margarida's main concern, consuming a lot of her energy. In fact, as a lone mother, she often sacrificed herself for the sake of her children (Daly & Leonard, 2002; Power, 2005; Lynch & Lyons, 2009; O'Brien, 2009; Matos & Costa, 2012), sometimes she even went hungry in order to spare money for them. Additionally, she made a pedagogical investment in the children and she managed the household, making a pedagogical investment in the children, by cooking, cleaning, anticipating and prioritising their needs and interests (Lahire, 1995; Lynch, 2007; Lynch & Walsh, 2009). At the same time, it is blatant, in Margarida's portrait, that social policies have not hold men accountable for their negligence towards their children or violence against their ex-wives (Kershaw, Pulkingham & Fuller, 2008).

#### LOW-QUALITY ADULT EDUCATION TRAINING AND THE INVESTMENT IN CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

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Under ISA she was offered the possibility to do a financed training course (4th-grade equivalent) that she did not conclude. All the training proposals made by the social worker had been accepted because she was aware that the benefits could be cut off if she refused to comply (Power, 2005; Kershaw, Pulkingham & Fuller, 2008). In this sense, she displayed a strong compliance and dependence (Lahire, 2004) towards the norms imposed by Social Services, that excluded poor women from participation and decision-making (Young, 2000a; 2000b; Hancock, 2003; Paugam, 2003; Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004). Furthermore, in Margarida's case, activation policies failed to acknowledge the long-term consequences of the abuse, the cognitive and emotional barriers to education and the time needed to heal, long after the abuse ended (Brush, 2003).

She kept good memories of her literacy course that has enabled her to extend her social networks. She enjoyed the classes, the teachers and the colleagues, but her speaking, reading and writing skills remained very limited (Lima, 2010; Queiroz & Gros, 2012). The attended courses have also enabled her greater flexibility to take care of the children, such as being able to accompany them to medical appointments and exams. Additionally, it has also enabled the structuration of family schedules, daily routines and planning (Lahire, 1995).

Her three children were reasonable students. Her daughter was a victim of teacher's

punishment and disrespect in her first grade (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004; Lynch & Baker, 2005; Young, 2006; Reay, 2010; Feeley, 2014), reflecting the practices of otherness and undeservedness that poor children were subjected to (Adair, 2002; 2005; Adair & Dahlberg, 2003). Notwithstanding, Margarida demonstrated initiative and responsibility and confronted the teacher (Lahire, 1995; 2004), making sure that the social worker and the Child Protective Services were aware that she took good care of her children. The pedagogical investment and concern with her children's future are embodied in a domestic moral order where authority is based on attention to behaviours and their modification through persuasion. Her eldest son showed self-restraint, responsibility, organization and work ethic, asceticism and perseverance (Lahire, 1995; 2004). The boy often criticised his father's behaviour, trying to convince him to be more responsible. He was a good student and wished to pursue higher education. Margarida stated that her daughter had the same characteristics, but the youngest son, who had experienced the drama of domestic violence at a younger age, was traumatized and did not show as much interest in studying nor had the same good behaviour in school (Feeley, 2014). However, Margarida encouraged him, asking about his studies and homework. She valued her children's schooling, in contrast to the lack of value attributed by her own parents to her education. She participated in school meetings, encouraged an appropriate behaviour in school, organised and planned the conditions that enable a good school performance (Lahire, 1995; Lynch, 2007; Lynch & Walsh, 2009). In fact, her main concerns about the future were essentially related to her children's education and their professional future.

#### SUBORDINATION AND DEPENDENCY ON SOCIAL SERVICES

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Unemployment was the main reason for requesting the benefit. Since then, Margarida admitted having a good relationship with her social worker and 'doing everything she says', an expression that showed her subordination and dependence on Social Services (Lahire, 2004) and her apparent powerlessness given the shortage of job opportunities, during the economic crisis in Portugal. In fact, she was at the dependency stage in Paugam's typology of people's relationship with welfare, namely in a settled assistance, characterised by a weak motivation for work (given her inadequate training, the priority given to the children's education and also the economic crisis). She also showed a strong dependency on welfare, rationalised the reasons why she needed it and had a seductive and good relationship with her social workers (Paugam, 2003). In addition to financial help, the latter played a key role in monitoring the social, educational and health status of Margarida's children. When I

interviewed her, she had been an ISA recipient for six years and got the children's allowance. However, the amount of the benefit, which was, at the time, €210, was not enough to pay the rent (€175) and survive. Additionally, her ex-husband had incurred in several debts in an amount that exceeded €5.000, that Margarida had no way to liquidate. These money issues, namely paying her ex-husband debts to the bank (credit card, car loan), rent arrears and grocery store's debts, affected Margarida's mental health, namely paying her ex-husband debts to the bank (credit card, car loan), rent arrears and grocery store's debts. To pay his debts, she applied for another bank loan, consulted the Portuguese Consumer Association<sup>38</sup> for advice, and was considering declaring insolvency.

Margarida was aware of the common criticisms made to ISA recipients and the associated stigma. However, she justified her need with the unemployment situation and the fact of being honest and taking good care of the children, proving her value against misrecognition through a performance of respectability (Skeggs, 2011). She was concerned with her children's care, especially the health of her eldest son, who suffered from muscular dystrophy, and the fact that resources were scarce for consultations, medicines, and glasses and dental treatments.

#### THE FUTURE OF THE NEXT GENERATION

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As for many of the interviewed women, Margarida's agency is intrinsically related with her children's care, concerns about their health, education and prioritization of their needs (Power, 2005; O'Brien, 2009). Her children are her main priority and the best part of her life (Daly & Leonard, 2002). Adult education courses did little for the increase of her literacy skills, but have enabled a planned organisation of her daily routine and of her children's.

Despite her illiteracy, the fact that Margarida set in motion a series of strategies to solve the serious financial problems her ex-husband created with his debts – namely asking for another bank loan, consulting the Consumer Association for advice or considering

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<sup>38</sup> DECO

declaring insolvency - showed determination, initiative and organisation. Her social support networks were fundamental in this process, namely her landlady's solidarity, who forgave her the rent arrears, and her social workers who gave her the strength she needed to get out of an abusive relationship. Such aids, however, increased her dependency on social supports and the solidarity of others (Briggs, 1998; Dominguez & Watkins, 2003).

Lastly, Margarida's life goals were related to her children and their well-being, as if, in her thirties, she did not consider worthy of having dreams of her own.

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### 7.2.3. CRISTINA

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In this portrait, several key systems intersect and generate inequality. These are the economic, through unemployment and poverty; the affective, since Cristina is a lone mother, caring alone for her child, the cultural and political, as her customs are seen as inferior and marginal and she is a victim of stereotyping and depreciation, feeling powerless and frustrated to deal with the obstacles that come in her way, either related to education, social services or health professionals, and the educational, as she is a school drop-out with low qualifications and a difficult relationship with the professional training programmes aimed at ISA recipients.

Her sociological portrait is organised around three main ideas: her powerlessness, frailty and exclusion in several systems, while at the same time there are examples of violence and resistance and the intergenerational reproduction of poverty across systems.

#### INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY AND WELFARE DEPENDENCY

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Cristina's pathway is branded by intergenerational poverty. Her father was the only member of the family who worked. Cristina's family lived in substandard housing conditions until she was sixteen, in a house with no bathroom and no room for her brothers, who had to sleep in the kitchen, infested with cockroaches, and later in a shack outside the house. Since her father's death, her family's lack of money is flagrant. In fact, there is often a shortage of food in the household, as well as a lack of money to buy medicine or go to medical appointments. She currently lives in a rented house with her mother and daughter. The girl does not have a room of her own and sleeps with her mother or, during the visits of Cristina's boyfriend, with her grandmother. One can say there is a vicious cycle of precarious housing conditions in this family.

According to Paugam's typology (2003), she is in the dependency stage, in claimed assistance, i.e., her situation is characterized by a lack of motivation to work and a very strong dependency vis-à-vis social services. Her brothers dangerously fall into the rupture stage (Paugam, 2003), given their drug addiction and the fact that four of them were imprisoned and the other one was begging on the streets. That characterization is somewhat disturbing given that most of the people that fit this category are generally older people that have been assisted for many years and don't have any hope of finding a job left. Nevertheless, she justifies and rationalizes the need for welfare and her refusal of some jobs either by pointing out her own mental health issues or her family's health issues, the lack of transport or the fact that there are no jobs available. Throughout her life, she has been dependent on her father's income (when he was alive) and on her first husband's (when they lived together) and now she depends on ISA, which she has been receiving for several years. The dependence and passivity regarding her financial situation are manifest. Despite being dissatisfied with ISA's value, which she considers inadequate, she still shows some resignation regarding her poverty situation and asks for an increase of a few tens of euro. Her powerlessness over welfare cuts is also manifest and her relationships with social workers are contradictory since she sometimes has a conflicting relationship based on claiming rights. Simultaneously, her dispositions are present-oriented (Lahire, 2004). She does not have a strategy to find a job, although she verbalizes a willingness to work, counterbalancing her refusal to study. In sum, her life is driven by immediacy (Lahire, 2004) and by a lack of persistence to achieve medium and long-term goals. This total demotivation is nevertheless coupled with the extreme misery in which he lives.

An important part of Cristina's narrative is the reference to mental health problems she suffers from, namely depression, anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder (Caragata & Cumming, 2011), as well as the chronic health problems of her mother and daughter. These problems are worsened whenever there is no money to buy medication, since the meagre resources that are available are channelled to expenses with the daughter and to buy food.

#### VIOLENCE AND ISOLATION FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD AND LOVE AND CARE FOR HER MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

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Her mother was poor and a victim of physical abuse and neglect by her own mother (Cristina's grandmother) and deprived of love and care in primary relations (Baker, Lynch,

Cantillon & Walsh, 2004; Lynch & Baker, 2005; Lynch, 2007; Lynch, Baker & Lyons, 2009; Lynch & Lyons, 2009; Lynch & Walsh, 2009).

Her youth was also branded by violence, powerlessness and subordination to the power of men (Young, 2004; Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004): she was a victim of bullying; her brothers were involved in criminal activities related to drugs and were imprisoned, and this was followed by a police raid at her house in the middle of the night. There was also an episode of extreme violence with her ex-husband that led to their separation and an incident of harassment perpetrated by one of her best friends' father.

Cristina's daily routine is characterised by isolation at home (Lahire, 2004), amplified by the absence of leisure equipment in her neighbourhood. The love and care that she gives and receives from her mother, daughter and boyfriend help her to carry on (Lynch & Baker, 2005). With the exception of this more restricted nucleus, Cristina isolates herself from the neighbours and other types of sociability and presents a low level of social capital (Bourdieu, 1980). She admits being suspicious and dislikes her neighbours. She and her mother and daughter are vowed to marginalization by the latter, partly because of her brothers' activities, and those conflicts have even led to changes in places of residence. There are clear signs of lack of respect and recognition by practices of stereotyping and depreciation (even when asking for food at the Red Cross) directed at Cristina and her family (Young, 2004; Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004; Feeley, 2014), since they are poor, her brothers were drug dealers and are in jail, and she is a lone mother. As such, she is treated as a 'welfare bum', lazy, irresponsible and even indecent (Adair, 2002; 2007; Power, 2005; Skeggs, 2011).

Notwithstanding, besides providing for material resources, Cristina's care work and love labour (Baker & Lynch, 2005; Feeley, 2014) towards her daughter are based on the emotional engagement of listening and supporting her, meeting the teachers, being available to help with homework, giving advice, managing bullying situations at school, as well as teachers neglect. She anticipates and prioritises her daughter's needs and interests and makes sacrifices (Lahire, 1995; Power, 2005; Lynch & Lyons, 2009). As a poor mother caring alone, Cristina experiences personal deprivation to make ends meet that lead to further anxiety, depression and worries about the future (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004; Dodson, 2007; Lynch & Lyons, 2009; O'Brien, 2009; Caragata & Cumming, 2011).

Her daughter's father neglects his affective and financial responsibilities and his debts are a cause of more concern, discussions and anxiety.

#### AN HISTORICAL LEGACY OF A BAD RELATIONSHIP WITH SCHOOL

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She and her brothers did not attend kindergarten or preschool and were raised by their mother at home until they were old enough to go to school. There was no money to buy books and no access to other educational resources. Her parents, brothers and her own school paths were characterized by low levels of literacy and by her brothers' juvenile delinquency. Her school capital is very limited since she dropped out of school at fourteen, without completing her fifth year of schooling<sup>i</sup>. She has bad recollections of her school days since she was marginalized and bullied, which has made schooling even more painful. It is clear from her words that she has internalized this abuse and has anxieties, learning difficulties, traumas and resistance to learning (Feeley, 2014).

She had concluded a hotel cleaning service vocational training course – equivalent to 6<sup>th</sup> grade. She showed no motivation for training, except for financial reasons, since it was mandatory to attend the course in order to receive her ISA. While she accepts this obligation, she shows her disapproval towards it, considering it a waste of time, and makes it very clear that she is not available to continue her education (Lima, 2010; Queiroz & Gros, 2012). Although she mentions that the teachers were 'excellent', Cristina was very critical of the training in general, criticising, for instance, the number of hours of certain subjects, which fell short of the learning needs. With regard to the training activities provided by social services, she attaches them no value, although she recognizes the playful side of some of them or the importance of some of the subjects regarding parental training.

From her words, it is gathered that the school replicates the power patterns of wider society, as children like herself and her daughter are considered culturally marginal and suffer from a lack of respect and recognition, from stigma (based on social class), and her needs are neglected. In school, the child experiences social isolation, bullying and humiliation from colleagues as well as invisibility and negative stereotyping from teachers due to external signs of poverty and lack of status, the otherness and undeservedness of poor children (Adair, 2002, 2005; Skeggs, 2011) and to a selection based on prior attainment (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004; Lynch & Baker, 2005; Young, 2006; Reay, 2010; Feeley, 2014; Caragata & Cumming, 2011).

Her speech and actions show a refusal of some norms and regulations that she considers unjust (Lahire, 2004). Cristina tries to fight the school's carelessness and her daughter's marginalisation by being aggressive with the teachers as well the school coordinator, other children's mothers and the social workers. Feeling powerless, aggression seems to be the only way for her voice to be heard, as she is offered scarce opportunities to express her points of view about her daughter's education, and these points are not recognised and respected as valid (Reay, 1998; Young, 2000a; 2000b; 2004; Hancock, 2003). Cristina's claims concerning the low quality of her daughter's education are devalued and teachers don't seem to respect her (Lynch & Baker, 2005; Reay, 2010). Furthermore, she also has to face complaints made by her daughter's teachers to the Child and Youth Protection Commission about her poor parenting skills and irresponsibility (Adair, 2002; Power, 2005; Caragata & Cumming, 2011). The emotional capital invested in daughter's education, but her scarce resources, poorer knowledge of the school system, increase her tendency to feel anxious, burdensome (O'Brien, 2009) and wronged.

As for the historical legacy of a bad relationship with school (Reay, 2010), the child was held back in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and was a victim of stigmatization, humiliation and verbal violence at school by her colleagues (like her mother in the past). Furthermore, she was being neglected by the teachers. Cristina's daughter is beginning to develop her mother's anti-school disposition, mentioning, as Cristina did in the past to her own mother, that she does not want to go to school anymore.

#### (IM)POSSIBILITIES FOR ACTION

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Using a strategy of social distinction (Paugam, 2003), Cristina, like other interviewees, mentions the abuses of 'others' (false poor or opportunists) that go to the cafés and squander their money, misusing their benefits.

Cristina has no social support or social leverage networks (Briggs, 1998; Dominguez & Watkins, 2003) and no effective strategy to find a job. She is also very demotivated regarding her education: she criticizes and evaluates the incentives for taking up training negatively, considering them a waste of time.

Given the close and affectionate relationship between mother and daughter, their strong attachment and its emotional significance (Lynch, 2007; Lynch & Walsh, 2009; Lynch, Baker & Lyons, 2009), the only examples of strategy, autonomy, effort and perseverance in

Cristina's speech are related with the well-being of her daughter (Lahire, 2004 2002), since, as seen, poor lone mother's agency is especially related to children's care (Power, 2005), and the child's needs are prioritized (Daly & Leonard, 2002; O'Brien, 2009).



## **8. OVERVIEW OF SOCIOLOGICAL PORTRAITS, BY INEQUALITY DIMENSIONS, DISADVANTAGES AND POSSIBILITIES FOR ACTION WITHIN AN INEQUALITY FRAMEWORK**

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As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, inspired on Lahire's work (1995) and the applications of Costa, Lopes and Caetano (2014) and Bóia and Lopes (2012), two types of paths have been presented, starting with the unexpected or idiosyncratic ones, of Mariana, Lurdes, Estela and Salomé that could be considered having an upward mobility path and were struggling for socio-professional inclusion, despite a problematic childhood. In the second group, the expected paths, Elvira, Margarida and Cristina are positioned highlighting the long-term effects of economic inequalities and the intergenerational reproduction of poverty that affect these women's children.

A synthesis of the seven sociological portraits will now be presented, divided into the dimensions that interact to facilitate or reduce inequalities, namely redistribution (resources), relationality (love, care and solidarity), education, representation (power) and respect and recognition (cultural representation). Firstly, the disadvantages that these women had to deal with will be addressed and lastly, their possibilities for action within an inequality framework will be presented.

### **8.1. DISADVANTAGES**

Regarding the economic system, namely work, all the interviewed women mentioned their parent's low qualification jobs and almost all of the interviewed women were victims of child labour, which has led to their lack of qualifications and precarious and low-skilled occupations. All seven women stated that they were or had been unemployed (some due to the economic crisis) and their (ex)-partners work-related problems. Five of the seven women mentioned problems related to care, health or lack of transport as obstacles to finding or keeping a job. Except for Estela, who still considered going to college (even though it was a remote possibility), the rest of the interviewees had limited career aspirations and had invested their hopes in their children's educational and professional future.

As for the dimension involving income, welfare and social care, all the women mentioned

that ISA was useful despite its low value. From the portrait's analysis, it can also be concluded that there was a clear intergenerational reproduction of poverty. The women's everyday life was a struggle to escape poverty, hunger, debts (many of which incurred by their ex-partners) and many depended on charity for food and clothes. It is also striking the lack of money for health treatments, medication, glasses or dental treatments. In this context, it makes sense that many of the interviewees mentioned that they tried not to think about the future and aim to live 'one day at a time'. Except for Cristina's case, unemployment was the cause of the ISA's dependency, but many agreed that this benefit was not a solution and that they would rather be employed. Five women lived in fear that ISA could be cut off if they did not comply with the obligations of the contract defined by social workers.

Concerning **Paugam's typology** of people's relationship with welfare during the process of social disqualification (2003), five of the interviewed women were welfare dependents; Lurdes was at the frailty stage (due to her unemployment) and Mariana was working for several years and was not an ISA recipient anymore. However, there were differences between those who depended on welfare. Elvira, Margarida and Salomé lived in a settled assistance, characterised by a weak motivation to work, a strong dependency on social services, several rationalisations concerning the reasons for the benefit (children, illnesses, economic crisis), a good relationship with social workers, inadequate training and care for their children was their priority. Estela lived in a deferred assistance, symbolised by a strong motivation to work and Cristina, by the contrary, lived in a claimed assistance, displayed in her lack of motivation to work and a demanding relationship with the social workers.

As for housing and neighbourhood, many of the women had lived in substandard housing conditions, but only two of them, Cristina and Margarida, lived in such conditions nowadays, related with the number of rooms that were clearly insufficient in relation to the number of residents. Whenever these families lived in council housing there were references to a bad neighbourhood, drug trafficking and delinquency. Four interviewees also had the habit of frequently moving, depending on their lives economical context.

Lastly, in what concerns family's health, all the women mentioned chronic health problems, and five of them claimed to have mental health issues (anxiety, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder and borderline personality disorder) and were undergoing psychological and/or psychiatric treatment. As for additions, alcoholism, drugs and

gambling affected the household (partners or brothers) of six of the women. Issues concerning sexual and reproductive health were also mentioned: five women revealed that they had unplanned pregnancies and two of them suffered abortions. Five interviewees also mentioned eyesight and or dental problems that, even though were not serious, caused great concern, as they hindered normal activities such as working or learning. Most women's lack of teeth or rotten teeth also blocked their access to the labour market as well as lowered their self-esteem.

**Table 4. Disadvantages related to redistribution**

REDISTRIBUTION (Resources)		INTERVIEWEES						
		Unexpected paths (idiosyncrasies)				Expected paths (regularities)		
		Lurdes	Mariana	Estela	Salomé	Cristina	Elvira	Margarida
Work	Obstacles to finding or keeping a job: health problems, pregnancy, lack of daycare facilities for children, lack of transport to get to work, inadequate work schedules	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
	Unemployment	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
	Unemployment due to economic crisis	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
	(Ex-)Partner's work-related problems	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
	Parents' low qualification jobs	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
	History of low qualified and precarious jobs - cleaning services, internships, elderly care services	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
	Child labour	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Limited career aspirations	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	
Income, welfare and social care (present time)	Living one day at a time	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
	Poverty	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
	Hunger	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
	Accumulated debts (including from ex-partner)	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
	Depending on charity for food and clothes	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
	Lack of money for health treatments, medication, glasses or dental treatments	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
	Unemployment as a cause of ISA	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
	ISA is useful although its value is very low	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
	ISA is not a solution; employment is	.	.	.	.	.	.	.

	Afraid of ISA cuts if don't comply with obligations of the contract defined by social workers	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
	Intergenerational reproduction of poverty	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
<b>Paugam's typology of people's relationship with welfare (social disqualification)</b>	Frailty	•						
	Dependency			•	•	•	•	•
<b>Paugam's typology of being a welfare recipient (psychological career)</b>	Deferred assistance			•				
	Settled assistance					•	•	•
	Claimed assistance					•		
<b>Housing and neighbourhood</b>	Substandard housing conditions (past)		•	•	•	•	•	•
	Substandard housing conditions (present)					•		•
	Council housing and bad neighbourhood		•	•	•			
	Frequent house moving				•	•	•	•
<b>Health (ego or close family member)</b>	Psychological/Psychiatric treatment		•	•		•	•	•
	Mental health issues (Anxiety/Depression/OCD/BPD)		•	•		•	•	•
	Chronic health problems	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
	Addictions: Alcoholism, drugs, gambling	•		•	•	•	•	•
	Suicide attempt or aggressive behaviour towards others		•	•		•	•	
	Abortions				•			•
	Unplanned pregnancies	•	•		•		•	•
	Eyesight and/or dental problems	•			•	•	•	•

As abovementioned, the affective system entails many disadvantages, especially for poor lone mothers. In what concerns the interviewees' family of origin the most mentioned disadvantage was domestic violence, parent's conflictual relationship and neglect. Five women mentioned family disruption, namely issues concerning drug addiction, alcoholism, imprisonment, begging or even death of family members. Also very frequently mentioned were absent father's issues or neglect and/or violence from primary caregivers (namely fathers, but also mothers or grandparents). Three of the women were raised by relatives and one was institutionalised by Court order and removed from parental custody.

Regarding the women’s own family, (ex)-partner and children, the most remarkable trait was the mention of feelings of loneliness by all the women. Six of the seven women revealed a history of failed intimate relationships and having to make sacrifices and deal with personal deprivation in order to make ends meet for children’s sake. At the moment of the interviews, five were lone mothers and four had problems with their ex-partners concerning child support or affective responsibilities. Four women mentioned being domestic violence victims and five mentioned their ex-partner’s irresponsible behaviour. Lastly, at least two women stated that their first marriage was triggered by unplanned pregnancies or to get away from their parent’s house.

**Table 5. Disadvantages related to relationality**

RELATIONALITY (Love, care and solidarity)		INTERVIEWEES						
		Unexpected paths (idiosyncrasies)				Expected paths (regularities)		
		Lurdes	Mariana	Estela	Salomé	Cristina	Elvira	Margari da
Family and institutions related to childhood and care - family of origin	Family disruption (drug addiction, alcoholism, imprisonment, begging, death)	•		•	•	•	•	
	Raised by relatives		•	•	•			
	Domestic violence, parents’ conflictual relationship, neglect	•	•	•	•		•	•
	Institutionalisation						•	
	Absent father issues or neglect/violence from primary caregivers (father, mother or grandparents)	•	•	•	•		•	•
Family and institutions related to childhood and care – partner and children	Marriage triggered by unexpected pregnancies or to get away from parent’s house	•						•
	History of failed intimate relationships	•		•	•	•	•	•
	(Ex)-Partner’s hedonism, irresponsibility	•		•	•	•		•
	Domestic violence, neglect, institutionalisation or intervention from social services				•	•	•	•
	Problems with ex-partner concerning child support and /or affective responsibilities	•		•		•	•	•
	Unplanned pregnancies	•	•	•			•	•
	Loneliness/Isolation	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
	Has an ex-husband/ex-partner	•		•	•	•	•	•
	Lone mother			•	•	•	•	•
	Makes sacrifices and experiments personal deprivation to make ends meet for children’s sake	•		•	•	•	•	•

Concerning education, namely its first years, all the interviewees had in common a history of school failure and/or school dropout and the fact that their parents and siblings had low educational levels. Another regularity is that most parents did not value education. In those first years, violence was relatively frequent in school carried out by teachers or peers (bullying). Most of the women had no access to books while growing up.

Regarding adult education, the most striking feature is the unlikelihood of women to continue their education, but only one, Cristina, actively refused to do it. Six women mentioned financial, health and children issues as obstacles to educational success and many had the perception of being forced to attend courses in order to avoid penalties and/or to continue to be a welfare recipient. As for the difficulties encountered during vocational education and training, five of the seven interviewed women mentioned problems with Mathematics and four stated that they had learning difficulties and/or a bad relationship and conflicts with some of the colleagues. It was also referred by some women the differences between the trainees' levels of knowledge and learning rhythms. Three of the women also mentioned that they were required to attend other courses such as parent training, hygiene, active job search, sewing and embroidery and first aid.

In what concerns children's education, six mothers mentioned that their children's health problems prevented school attendance and attainment and most women referred to violence in school environment (bullying by peers, teacher's violence and social discrimination). Most mothers mentioned their lack of money to buy books and school material. Four mothers stated that their children had already failed in school and two of the interviewees complained about the low-quality of their children's education.

**Table 6. Disadvantages related to education**

EDUCATION		INTERVIEWEES						
		Unexpected paths (idiosyncrasies)				Expected paths (regularities)		
		Lurdes	Mariana	Estela	Salomé	Cristina	Elvira	Margarida
First years of education	Parents did not value education	•	•	•	•		•	•
	Parents and siblings low education levels	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
	School failure or dropout	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
	Bullying (peers)		•			•		
	Victim of teachers violence		•				•	
	No access to books while growing up			•	•	•	•	•
Adult education	Obstacles to educational success: financial, health and childcare issues	•	•	•	•	•	•	
	Other mandatory courses: parent training, hygiene, active job search, sewing and embroidery, First Aid				•	•	•	
	Perception of being forced to attend to avoid penalties and/or to continue to receive benefits	•		•		•	•	•
	Difficulties during VET - learning difficulties and/or bad relationship and conflicts with some colleagues				•	•	•	•
	Problems with Mathematics			•	•	•	•	•
	Discrepancies in levels of knowledge of trainees				•		•	•
	Refusal to continue education					•		
	Unlikely to continue education	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Children's education	Health problems preventing normal school life and/ or good school results		•	•	•	•	•	•
	Violence in school environment: bullying, sexual attacks, teacher violence, social discrimination		•	•	•	•		•
	School failure	•				•	•	•
	Lack of money to buy books and school material			•	•	•	•	•
	Complaints about low-quality education		•			•		

In what concerns the **representation** (power) dimension, all sociological portraits show the lack of State investment in care support, children's welfare, education, health and social

justice.

Most of the interviewees were afraid that Child Protective Services might remove the children from their care, so they reinforced a performance of respectability (Skeggs, 2011). Violence and aggressiveness seemed to be some of these women response to their powerlessness, namely regarding social services and other public institutions' bureaucracies and regulations. It was also noticeable that the women or their children were victims of violence, namely in school (by teachers, educators or assistants) or by their employers, highlighting their marginalisation (Reay, 2010). One of Salomé's daughter was a victim of an attempted rape in school and an interviewed woman was a victim of sexual harassment.

**Table 7. Disadvantages related to representation**

REPRESENTATION (Power)	INTERVIEWEES						
	Unexpected paths (idiosyncrasies)				Expected paths (regularities)		
	Lurdes	Mariana	Estela	Salomé	Cristina	Elvira	Margarida
'Careless State' - lack of State investment in care support, children's welfare, education, health and social justice	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Afraid that Child Protective Services remove the children from her care	•		•	•	•	•	•
Powerlessness					•	•	•
Violence and aggressiveness towards others		•	•	•	•	•	
Sexual violence/harassment	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Ego or children victim of violence based on social class	•		•		•	•	•
Conflicts with social workers	•	•			•	•	

Concerning respect and recognition, the only black interviewee mentioned several situations where she and her children were victims of racism (at work, at public institutions - including school - and in their neighbourhood). If "race"/ethnicity was a factor for social exclusion, it can also be stated that social class, unemployment, being welfare recipients or living in council housing triggered lack of respect and recognition, stereotyping and depreciation. In fact, regarding the latter, the interviewees that lived in council flats declared their dislike towards the neighbourhood and mentioned drug trafficking,

delinquency and violence. Most of the interviewees also declared that ISA is often attributed to people who do not need it, in a clear strategy for social distinction (Paugam, 2003). Five of the women declared they were ashamed of being welfare recipients.

**Table 8. Disadvantages related to respect and recognition**

RESPECT and RECOGNITION (Cultural representation)	INTERVIEWEES						
	Unexpected paths (idiosyncrasies)				Expected paths (regularities)		
	Lurdes	Mariana	Estela	Salomé	Cristina	Elvira	Margarida
Racism				•			
Victim of stereotyping and depreciation based on social class or unemployment (ego or children)	•	•	•		•	•	•
Victim of marginalisation			•	•	•	•	•
Ashamed of being welfare recipients	•	•	•	•			•
Discrimination due to council housing		•	•	•			
Attribution of ISA to people who do not need it	•	•	•	•	•		

## 8.2. STRATEGIES TO COPE WITH POVERTY

As seen in chapter three, despite inequality, poor women have the agency to deal with their lives' constraints. It is precisely in their possibilities for action that their paths' idiosyncrasies can be observed. Within redistribution, some women's strong work ethic clearly differentiates them from the others. In what concerns income, welfare and social care, five of the women had a defined strategy for social mobility, especially concerning their children's future. The majority had also tried to save money despite their scarcity of resources. Concerning their relationship with social workers, most women had a good relationship, and six of them mentioned that the latter helped them to find a paid activity. In domestic violence or neglect cases, the social workers had always intervened. As for housing, three of the four women that I have considered within the unexpected paths lived in council flats and the other one had a mortgage. Notwithstanding, it is in what social networks, participation leisure and culture are concerned that the biggest difference between the two paths can be observed. In fact, women who have idiosyncratic paths are the only ones who participate in associations, have some kind of cultural practices, social

leverage networks and holidays. The most common activity was consumption, namely coffee shops.

**Table 9. Strategies related to redistribution**

REDISTRIBUTION (Resources)		INTERVIEWEES						
		Unexpected paths (idiosyncrasies)				Expected paths (regularities)		
		Lurdes	Mariana	Estela	Salomé	Cristina	Elvira	Margarida
<b>Work</b>	Strong work ethic	•	•		•			•
<b>Income, welfare and social care (present time)</b>	Strategy for social mobility (ego and /or children)	•	•	•	•			•
	Tried to save money	•	•	•	•			•
	Social workers helps to find paid care activities in services (care, cleaning, ...)		•	•	•			
	Social worker helps with health issues and/or gives money for medication and treatments		•	•	•	•	•	•
	Good relationship with social workers		•	•	•		•	•
	Social worker interferes in situations of domestic violence or neglect			•	•		•	•
<b>Housing</b>	Living in council housing and/or paying an affordable rent		•	•	•		•	
<b>Social networks, participation, leisure and culture</b>	Participation in associations	•	•	•	•			
	Some cultural practices	•	•	•	•			
	Internet use		•		•	•		
	Holidays	•	•		•			
	Some consumption activities (shopping, fast food restaurants, coffee shops)	•	•		•	•	•	
	Social support networks	•	•	•	•		•	•
	Social leverage networks		•	•	•			

Regarding relationality, all women mentioned having a close and affectionate relationship with their children and demonstrated big concerns about their health, nutrition and future job. They also declared that the latter had a better childhood than their own, with more suitable material conditions and without the level of abuse that they have endured. All the women declared loving and caring for their children and three revealed they also took care

of older family members. It was also a very positive note that all women were able to get away from abusive/careless relationships. However, only three declared having a good relationship with their present partner. Five women also mentioned their community's support.

**Table 10. Strategies related to relationality**

RELATIONALITY (Love, care and solidarity)		INTERVIEWEES						
		Unexpected paths (idiosyncrasies)				Expected paths (regularities)		
		Lurdes	Mariana	Estela	Salomé	Cristina	Elvira	Margarida
<b>Family and institutions related to childhood and care - family of origin</b>	Close relationship with family of origin/extended family	•	•			•		•
<b>Family and institutions related to childhood and care – partner and children</b>	Close and affectionate relationship between mother and child	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
	Big concerns with children's health and nutrition, and future job	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
	Good relationship with partner	•	•			•		
	Better childhood of her own children (no abuse, better material conditions)	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
	Love labour and care (children)	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
	Love labour and care (other family members)	•		•		•		
	Able to get away from an abusive/careless relationship	•		•	•	•	•	•
<b>Community's support</b>		•	•	•	•			•

About education, specifically, its first years, only some women within the unexpected paths had pre-school education, good childhood memories from first grades and good school results (see Table 11). Adult education was more consensual and all women stated that they had acquired more knowledge. All except for Cristina also had a positive opinion about learning or going to school, and had a good relationship with teachers and/or colleagues in vocational education and training and mentioned that there were improvements in their self-esteem. Five out of seven women mentioned that financed training was a solution for

unemployment and also that, in general, the courses enabled the development of social networks. Regarding children's education, all the women mentioned big concerns with the issue, as well as their endeavours to give everything possible to their children. All the mothers, except for Cristina, actively encouraged their children to value education and five women encouraged children to read and to pursue higher education courses. Almost all the interviewed women stated that they had concerns and conflicts with social workers, teachers and school boards about their children's education. Four mothers admitted choosing their children's friends and playmates, especially in council housing neighbourhoods. Lastly, four mothers stated that their children had good school results. As for the factors affecting school performance and behaviour (Lahire, 1995), to the exception of the habits of written culture, that only Lurdes and her family seemed to have, there was a clear distinction between the women with unexpected paths and the ones from expected paths (except for Margarida, who is especially attentive to her children's education). Overall, the women from the unexpected paths declared having a domestic moral order that enabled good school performance, namely submission to school authority, proper and docile behaviour and attentive listening. They also stated that their practices of family authority valued self-restraint and the embodiment of behavioural norms close to school's basic rules of conduct and also non-violent forms of punishment. Finally, all the women from the unexpected paths mentioned a very strong pedagogical investment, namely family organisation and sacrifices to manage the household economy.

**Table 11. Strategies related to education**

EDUCATION		INTERVIEWEES						
		Unexpected paths (idiosyncrasies)				Expected paths (regularities)		
		Lurdes	Mariana	Estela	Salomé	Cristina	Elvira	Margarida
First years of education	Good school results	•			•			
	Pre-school education		•		•			
	Good childhood memories from first grades	•			•			
Adult education	Positive opinion about learning or going to school	•	•	•	•		•	•
	Would like to continue her education	•	•		•			•
	Good relationship with teachers and/or colleagues in VET	•	•	•	•		•	•
	Financed training as a solution for unemployment	•	•	•	•			•
	Acquired more knowledge	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
	Improvements in self-esteem	•	•	•	•		•	•
	Development of social networks		•	•	•		•	•
Children's education	Selected children's friends and playmates, especially in council housing neighbourhoods		•	•	•	•		
	Big efforts to give everything possible to children	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
	Encouraged children to value education	•	•	•	•		•	•
	Concerns and conflicts with social workers, teachers and the school board about children's education	•	•	•	•	•		•
	Efforts to pursue higher education	•	•	•	•			•
	Big concerns with children's future education	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
	Good school results	•		•	•			•
	Encouraged children to read	•	•	•	•			•
Factors affecting school performance and behaviour	Habits of written culture	•						
	Domestic moral order	•	•	•	•			•
	Ways of exercising authority	•	•	•				•
	Ways of pedagogical investment	•	•	•	•		•	•

To finish, in what concerns representation, respect and recognition I would like to stress

the importance of the Municipality's investment in social services, that helped families in need, providing council housing, but also social, educational and psychological support. At another level, all women from the unexpected paths confronted and sometimes were even aggressive when something is considered unjust. They refused norms and rules for the same reason. All women from this group also showed strategy, initiative and persistence and were aware of their citizenship rights.

**Table 12. Strategies related to respect and recognition**

REPRESENTATION (Power) and RESPECT and RECOGNITION (Cultural representation)	INTERVIEWEES						
	Unexpected paths (idiosyncrasies)				Expected paths (regularities)		
	Lurdes	Mariana	Estela	Salomé	Cristina	Elvira	Margarida
Municipality's investment in social services		•	•	•		•	
Confrontation and aggressiveness when something is considered unjust	•	•	•	•	•		
Refusal of norms or rules considered unjust	•	•	•	•	•		
Strategy, initiative and persistence	•	•	•	•			•
Awareness of citizenship rights	•	•	•	•			•

## CONCLUSIONS

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As stated in the Introduction, the purpose of this PhD research that took place in Northern Portugal with women who are welfare recipients, during the austerity period, was to understand the idiosyncrasies of their life paths, by intersecting inequality of condition dimensions: redistribution, relationality, education, representation and respect and recognition, in order to highlight women's agency, i.e., their strategies to cope with poverty. The distinct contribution of this work to the body of knowledge is the articulation of three different theoretical approaches, grounded in diverse sociological traditions, Equality Studies, Lahire's contextualist and dispositionalist approach and Intersectionality, trying to find the ways in which they complemented each other. It is also uncommon to use sociological portraits as a methodology to do research about poor women. In fact, studies about poverty seldom reveal the idiosyncratic character of poor women's lives, which was precisely the main goal of this thesis. In order to accomplish it, this study proposed to reconstruct the genealogy of dispositions, related to socioeconomic status, gender, motherhood and 'race' and the way they intersect in the different dimensions of the life of women who are welfare recipients. It also intended to describe the contexts of poor women's socialisation, as well as to understand the key moments of biographical ruptures or crossroads and, lastly, to study their strategies to cope with poverty. In order to capture the idiosyncratic paths of those women and their relation with welfare and education, seven sociological portraits were created, following Lahire (2004), based on sixty in-depth interviews, with twenty women from northern Portugal. For the sociological portraits' interpretation, women's social paths were divided between expected and unexpected (idiosyncratic). In addition, the interpretation was based on the above-mentioned inequality dimensions, addressing the disadvantages that these women had to deal with and their strategies for action within an inequality framework.

The analysis supports the assumption, opposed to mainstream mass media and political representations, that poor women' life paths have common features but are also heterogeneous. In this sense, their autonomy is conditioned but not determined by economic and gender constraints since they have strategies to try to cope with poverty. That assumption challenges the stereotype and demonstrates how different social contexts can offer different ways of seeing the world and mobilizing resources. In fact, as mentioned before, a constructionist intersectional approach gives room for the possibility of change (Nogueira, 2013), although recognising the existence of inequalities,

subordination and oppression.

Above all, this research suggests a more empowered perspective of poor women, not as victims, but as agents who try to surmount their severe constraints, highlighting their strategies to cope with poverty and to offer a better future for their children within a context of inequality. However, it is emphasized that this desire to show the idiosyncrasies in women's paths does not deny the inequalities that condition their lives. This statement leads to the importance, recognised by intersectionality authors, as well as by equality studies, of a socially engaged research and a proposal for political intervention.

This chapter will continue with an overview and discussion of the main conclusions, their relationship to previous work in these areas, and will answer the research questions, concerning the life paths of poor women, defined at the beginning of the investigation and presented in the Introduction. The implications for policy and practice will follow. Afterwards, topics for future research will be addressed and, lastly, I will describe my personal journey, preconceived ideas and experiences during the investigation.

## 1. MAIN DISADVANTAGES IN EACH INEQUALITY DIMENSION THAT POOR WOMEN HAVE TO FACE

One of the major themes that emerged from the analysis is the intersection of disadvantages that poor women had to endure. Starting with education and redistribution, the findings show that there was a severe deprivation of resources. Early in their educational paths, the interviewed women were disadvantaged due to their parent's low levels of education. Additionally, many of them also did not attend preschool and some had a historical legacy of a bad relationship with school (Reay, 2010), sharing their family's anti-school disposition. Moreover, most women had to work during their childhood to help their families. As such, school dropout and/or child labour were the result of a severe deprivation of resources, hunger, substandard housing conditions and lack of healthcare. These findings are in line with previous research from Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Walsh (2004).

Furthermore, concerning their own children, most mothers mentioned they lacked the money to buy books and school material, to access other educational resources or extra-curricular activities, indicating an intergenerational reproduction of poverty. In support of this idea, the results show that school failure happens almost exclusively to children whose

mothers followed expected paths. The findings are also consistent with previous research about the lack of affordable and good quality early childhood education and care from Dale (2010) and Caragata and Cumming (2011).

In school the emotional dimension of education was lacking, often perpetuating the lack of love and affection these women already suffered at home (Lynch & Baker, 2005). All these factors – the lack of economic resources combined with the school's carelessness culture, namely bullying and humiliation from colleagues and verbal and physical violence from teachers and educators, teacher's abuses of power, violence and fear in the classroom, blocked some women's learning process, contributing to their poor results, demotivation, disengagement and ultimately to their dropout or early school leaving. For some teachers, the otherness and undeservedness of poor children (Adair, 2002; 2005; Skeggs, 2011), based on lack of status and lack of resources, makes the latter invisible or the target of practices of negative stereotyping and depreciation (Feeley, 2014). Such practices sustain inequalities of respect and recognition, displaying a profound disregard for the students' social, economic and affective background, and failing to give them the emotional support which would have been essential for learning (Lynch & Baker, 2005). Many women had internalised this abuse and had anxieties, learning difficulties, traumas and resistance to learning demonstrated in adult education (Feeley, 2014). In fact, women following expected paths had more often problems during vocational education or training or literacy courses, such as learning difficulties and/or bad relationship and conflicts with some colleagues. The results clearly show the low-quality vocational training aimed at ISA recipients and the latter lack of power to choose their course, as well as their lack of motivation. They were nevertheless forced to attend classes in order to receive the benefits.

In what concerns redistribution, the research shows that, for these women, the job market is branded by child labour and labour exploitation, characterised by low-skilled jobs, where the poor are denied opportunities to study and the possibility to have a rewarding work in the future (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004). Welfare benefits, in general, were considered useful, but its value was very low, enabling mere survival and making everyday life a struggle to escape poverty. It can also be concluded from the portrait's analysis that women had to deal with hunger, substandard housing conditions, or living in neighbourhoods characterised by drug trafficking and delinquency, lack of money for health treatments and debts (many of which incurred by their ex-partners). As aforementioned, in most cases, unemployment was the cause of ISA's dependency, but

many of the interviewees agreed that they would rather be employed than living on welfare, thus contradicting welfare dependency myths.

The findings also indicate that redistribution and relationality are deeply interconnected. In fact, economic disadvantages are often accentuated by separation/divorce. In this regard, when, after years, women managed to escape relationships tainted with domestic violence, abuse and neglect, men often stopped contributing financially to support their children, neglecting their parental responsibility (Kershaw, Pulkingham & Fuller, 2008). In fact, childhood and youth were frequent moments of crisis and rupture for the interviewees. In this context, as abovementioned, many of the interviewed women felt the need or were forced to work during their childhood. As a result, their lack of educational credentials and, in some cases, severe mental health issues due to abuse and neglect in early childhood often trapped them in welfare dependency in their future. One of the themes that emerged from the analysis was that for young women who grew up without love and care, pregnancies that precipitated marriages were sometimes used as a strategy to escape their family's home. Furthermore, unplanned pregnancies were also frequent, aggravating social vulnerability of poor women (Fineman, 2008; Lynch, Baker & Lyons, 2009; Sayer, 2011; Matos & Costa, 2012).

Regarding the present and the relationship with their children, the analysis is in harmony with O'Brien (2009), since the emotional capital invested in the latter's education and their scarce resources and poorer knowledge of the school system increase the mothers' tendency to feel anxious, burdensome and wronged, since they invested greater emotional capital in their children's education with lower results, compromising their well-being.

Concerning children's education and marginalisation in school, conflict and aggression seemed to be the only way for poor women's voices to be heard, as they lacked the opportunities to express their points of view about children's education or these points were not recognised and respected as valid. This finding is in line with research from Reay (1998), Young (2000; 2004) and Hancock (2003). Also, for most interviewed women, conflict and aggressiveness seemed the most effective response to their powerlessness, namely regarding social services and other public institutions' bureaucracies and regulations. Furthermore, only women from expected paths show evidence of their powerlessness, in the sense that women from unexpected paths persevered until a solution was given to their problems (even if they had to resort to violence, as abovementioned).

In what concerns the representation (power) dimension, the first conclusion at a macro

level is that all sociological portraits show the insufficiency or lack of State intervention/investment in care support, children's welfare, education, health and social justice.

Last, but not least, the participants mentioned feeling ashamed of being welfare recipients, reflecting the internalisation of a social stigma. Indeed, many revealed a negative identity, due to stereotyping and prejudice associated with this type of benefit and social housing (Paugam, 2003). There was clearly racial and social class discrimination. The only black interviewee mentioned several situations where she and her children were victims of racism (at work, at public institutions - including school - and in their neighbourhood). If "race"/ethnicity was a factor for social exclusion, it can also be stated that social class, unemployment, being a welfare recipient or living in council housing triggered lack of respect and recognition, stereotyping and depreciation. In fact, regarding the latter, the interviewees that lived in council flats declared their dislike towards the neighbourhood and mentioned drug trafficking, delinquency and violence. Most of the interviewees also declared that ISA is often attributed to people who do not need it, in a clear strategy of social distinction (Paugam, 2003).

With reference to relationality disadvantages, women who suffered from childhood abuse and neglect often had to face its long-term consequences, namely concerning mental health (Feeley, 2014). In fact, all the women mentioned chronic health problems, including mental health issues (anxiety, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder and borderline personality disorder) and were undergoing psychological and/or psychiatric treatment. Sexual and reproductive health issues were also revealed, such as unplanned pregnancies and abortions. As for additions, alcoholism, drugs and gambling affected almost all the families of the interviewed women. Loneliness was a common trait manifested by all the women, either by having been deprived of love as a child from her primary caretakers, due to their partners' violence or lack of care, or because some were lone mothers. Comparing the expected with the unexpected paths, domestic violence, neglect, institutionalisation or intervention from social services were more common in the first cases.

All interviewed women suffered from affective inequality. In fact, their life paths often reproduced vicious cycles of lack of love and care, since their own mothers had been victims of violence by their parents or husbands (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004). As children, they were subordinated to the power and violence of adults and their childhood was deprived of love and care in primary relations and characterized by neglect

and, in some cases, physical abuse (Feeley, 2014), that can be attributed both to her primary caretakers as well as to public institutions, namely a careless State. Affective inequality also intersected with power, respect and recognition issues, namely domestic violence and the theme of absent, neglectful and/or abusive fathers (Kershaw, Pulkingham & Fuller, 2008) whose debts were a cause of more concern, discussions and anxiety for women. When intersecting representation with relationality, one of the themes that emerged from the analysis was domestic violence against women, namely verbal and physical abuse and subordination to men. Most of the interviewees were afraid that Child Protective Services might remove the children from their care, so mothers reinforced a performance of respectability (Skeggs, 2011). Children were also victims of neglect and emotional violence. Notwithstanding, abuse, harassment, powerlessness and subordination are accentuated by discrimination towards poor black women and girls.

## 2. RELATION BETWEEN AFFECTIVE INEQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION/EXCLUSION

One of the main concepts of earlier work, which has been applied to this research, is affective inequality (Lynch, Baker & Lyons, 2009). In fact, participants' social exclusion is deeply connected with affective inequalities that took place in women's early childhood, in school, at their workplace and even in their relationship with social workers. Additionally, abuse and neglect have emotional, health, economic and educational implications.

During early childhood, most of the women suffered from a lack of love and care, neglect and abuse from primary caretakers. In addition, when parents were separated, it was also common the father's physical and affective absence and/or neglect of parental responsibility upon separation or divorce, causing financial distress (Kershaw, Pulkingham & Fuller, 2008). As a result, the interviewees' mothers lacked the time to take care of their children, since they had to work several shifts to provide for the household.

This affective inequality was aggravated by carelessness and even violence in the school environment, where the emotional dimension of education was lacking. Indeed, as abovementioned, the analysis showed that poor children were victims of practices of depreciation (Fraser, 2010), marginalisation and violence by their peers and even abuses of power by teachers (due to stigma based on social class status). These findings are consistent with research from Lynch and Baker (2005) and Reay (2010), highlighting that children with

low levels of material, cultural and psychological resources often have fears and anxieties in their interactions with school environments of carelessness, where they feel culturally marginal and are negatively stereotyped. The carelessness at home and at school blocks the learning process and is a source of demotivation, poor results, disengagement and early school leaving.

Furthermore, the findings are in harmony with Feeley (2014), about the consequences of lack of love and care in adulthood, namely low self-esteem, a sense of worthlessness, trauma and internalisation of the abuse. Indeed, many of the interviewed women suffered from mental illness, aggravated by lack of money to buy prescribed medication. Additionally, some of the interviewed women were also exploited by their employers (Young, 2004), which included low-payment, lack of respect and recognition and even physical abuse. Lastly, their relationship with social workers was often based on their subordination towards their judgements, opinions and practices, since they depend on the latter for surviving.

In sum, mainly in the expected paths, women's lives were regulated by the State and by other people who had more power (Hancock, 2003; Young, 20002; 2006), so, in general, they had been excluded from decision-making and they often felt powerless, ignored and lacking recognition. As aforementioned, often the women resort to conflict and even to aggressiveness to make their voices heard, but only those who persevere in their complaints and who have knowledge about the system managed to achieve their goals, after long and often informal processes.

### 3. CAUSES OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT FOR WELFARE WOMEN

As seen in chapters seven and eight, women from unexpected paths had a different relation with education during their childhood, since they were the only ones who had a pre-school education. In fact, some of them even had good school results and, at an emotional level, good childhood memories from first grades.

Regarding adult education, many mentioned that financed training was a solution for unemployment while providing greater flexibility to take care of their children, as well as enabling the structuration of family schedules, daily routines and planning (Lahire, 1995). Additionally, the emotional dimension was very important to their attainment. In fact, many stated having a good relationship with teachers and/or colleagues, improvements in

their self-esteem and the development of social networks. The opportunity to build additional knowledge, namely related to computers and the Internet, was also mentioned. For one woman, in particular, it was important having the goal of completing her education, for another, it was the realisation of a dream, a reactivation of her disposition to study that had been interrupted for financial reasons (Lahire, 2004). Some women from the unexpected paths would like to continue their education, even if that is unlikely to occur due to their financial situation and their role as carers.

#### 4. CAUSES OF EDUCATIONAL DROPOUT FOR WELFARE WOMEN

It was mentioned above the unlikelihood of women to continue their education. Indeed, they mentioned financial, health and care issues as obstacles to educational success. First, the findings suggest, in line with work from Lynch and Lyons (2009), that for the interviewed women care responsibilities were more relevant than their education, which was eventually abandoned. Evidently, there was a deficit of affordable, accessible and good quality childcare for the children while the women attended education or training courses (Daly & Leonard, 2002; Caragata & Cumming, 2011).

As for the difficulties encountered during vocational education and training, four women stated that they had learning difficulties and/or a bad relationship and conflicts with some of the colleagues. Some also mentioned the differences between the trainees' levels of knowledge and learning paces. As aforementioned, bad recollections of past school days, when women were marginalized and bullied, carried learning traumas and resistance to learning (Feeley, 2014).

The 'choice' of the courses was another obstacle to educational attainment since many women had the perception of being forced to attend courses to avoid penalties and/or to continue being a welfare recipient, regardless of their motivation (Lima, 2010). Besides financial reasons, geographical ones are also crucial to the choice of the course, especially if there is a lack of transportation and mothers had care responsibilities.

As a final note, it is important to mention that even if their skills have improved due to VET, the women's professional future seems to be limited to cleaning houses and/or other low-pay and precarious jobs (Young, 2004; Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004). For some, there was clearly a mismatch between the job they aspire to and the ones they can have, which created feelings of frustration (Lahire, 2004).

## 5. SCHOOL PERFORMANCE AND BEHAVIOUR OF WORKING CLASS/POOR CHILDREN

One of the main theoretical proposals that have been applied to this research was Lahire's (1995), concerning the factors that affect the variation of school performance and behaviour of working class/poor children. This study has proved to be useful in the description of women's practices regarding the education of their children. Firstly, our findings demonstrate the centrality of women's role within the family and refute the myth of parental dismissal in families from working-class backgrounds (Lahire, 1995).

Secondly, the economic conditions (lack of financial resources to buy food, medicine, school materials, clothes as well as substandard housing conditions) and dispositions, such as income stability, regularity of family activities and schedules, rational calculation and ascetical dispositions were decisive for educational attainment, as showed in the unexpected paths. As previously mentioned, for these women, school dropout and child labour were often rooted in the absence of a father figure and of financial stability, as well as on a feeling of moral obligation to support their family.

In what concerns the habits of written culture and the fact that these enable to plan daily activities, only Lurdes had the habit of making lists and reading and she was undoubtedly the woman that had obvious saving and ascetic practices.

Thirdly, regarding the domestic moral order and the ways of exercising authority, it was described how mothers encouraged appropriate behaviour in the classroom and how they stimulated children, asking about their studies, supervising and/or helping with homework (if they had the knowledge to do so), and how the mothers' authority (especially of the unexpected paths, but not exclusively) was based on attention to behaviours and their modification through persuasion. In addition, the moral order provided a framework for day-to-day activities and guided the organisation of study and leisure time (Lahire, 2004). In fact, many women mentioned their children's self-restraint, responsibility, organization and work ethic, asceticism and perseverance (Lahire, 1995; 2004). At the same time, they valued and encouraged the children's initiative, effort and responsibility (Lahire, 1995; 2004). Most women from unexpected paths had non-violent forms of punishment, demanding respect, combined with a strict household moral.

Lastly, in what concerns the ways of pedagogical investment, it implied the family organisation (cooking, cleaning, anticipating and prioritising their children's needs and

interests) and sacrifices (going hungry, saving money, postponing their own education) made to set the domestic moral order. There was also a commitment and investment in education, i.e., participants valued education and managed the home economy so that their children did not lack food and educational resources. Some of them mentioned wanting their children to have a college degree and others strategically chose the subjects that might later give them a competitive advantage. Some mothers also stated that planning the children's educational options between attending a high school or vocational education and training, the field of study, and the aim of pursuing higher education, cultivating that desire in the children, and even considering migrations to other E.U. countries, to have better opportunities. They rationally organized the scarce resources and planned the conditions that enabled a good school performance (Lahire, 1995; Lynch, 2007; Lynch & Walsh, 2009). In fact, their main concerns were related to children's education and professional future. One couple from the unexpected paths participated in school meetings and they had also been members of parents' associations.

The findings of this study also seem to build with the work of Lynch and Baker (2005), Lynch (2007), Lynch and Walsh (2009) and Feeley (2014) on the importance of care (including cognitive, emotional, mental and physical work), nurturing capital (Lynch, 2007) and overall, the importance of the affective and emotional dimension in education. In effect, some mothers describe practices of care work and love labour (Lynch, 2007; Lynch & Walsh, 2009), providing several examples of perseverance, strategy and initiative, often in combination with reports of moments of conflict and even of aggression (Lahire, 2004) with assistants, educators, teachers and school boards about practices they consider unjust or discriminatory. In fact, as abovementioned, schools are often careless scenarios of bullying, discrimination and violence towards children from low-income families, but the interviewees managed bullying situations, as well as teachers' neglect the best way they knew how.

Last, but not least, it was mentioned the lack of State investment in care support and children's welfare, education and health, in contrast with the care concerns showed by some municipalities.

## 6. CHARACTERISTICS OF UNEXPECTED (IDIOSYNCRATIC) AND OF EXPECTED (TYPICAL) SOCIAL PATHS, WOMEN'S STRATEGIES TO COPE WITH POVERTY AND STRATEGIES FOR SOCIAL MOBILITY

As seen in section 3.3, the poor have social distinction strategies (Paugam, 2003) essentially characterised by three main features, the 'avoidance' of 'false poor' and isolation inside home with their families; individual differentiation, namely by escaping the levelling, dissociating from other poor, by criticising them and emphasizing their own values or personal merits and, lastly, transferring the discredit to foreigners (people in a lower hierarchical position, due to ethnic differences), or to single mothers (Hancock, 2003; Skeggs, 2011), thus relativizing their own lower position. Although this type of strategies could be found both in expected paths (for example, discriminating 'black people' or 'alcoholics'), as well as in unexpected paths, it is within the latter group that most women refused to be labelled as 'poor'. In fact, they criticised other recipients who faced related circumstances, mentioning their misuse of benefits and lack of willpower, such as drug dealers in the neighbourhood or Roma people who did not seem to obey the rules. Since women from unexpected paths were the only ones who benefited from council housing, they were also the ones who mentioned their dislike towards the neighbourhood and their isolation at home, as well as protecting their children from playing alone in the street. A performance of respectability (Skeggs, 2011) by the interviewed women, across paths, was their way to justify the unemployment situation, or the use of welfare benefits, by showing that they were honest and took good care of the children, thus trying to prove their value.

The findings are also consistent with previous research from Lahire (2004) about dispositions. In fact, in what concerns dispositions related to time, women from unexpected paths showed a special determination to give their children a better future through education, planning their children's educational future, managing with an ascetic moral the household budget, saving money, recurring to various ingenious strategies and trying to have multiple activities in order to earn some money, revealing determination, strategy, organisation and initiative. As for women from the expected paths, even though the majority had also tried to save money despite their scarcity of resources, their dispositions related to time were mainly present-oriented, showing intense concerns about surviving and paying debts.

With respect to dispositions about rules, order and control (Lahire, 2004), both women from expected and unexpected paths revealed moments of refusal or opposition to rules

they considered unjust as well as conflict, confrontation and aggressiveness. They were often very critical towards welfare services and schools. However, regarding power dispositions, women from unexpected paths showed strategy, initiative and persistence to solve problems, overcoming obstacles and going around established rules (Lahire, 2004), always harbouring the desire to be independent of welfare benefits. They were also more aware of their citizenship rights.

With reference to dispositions for hedonism, participants from the unexpected paths revealed self-restraint, especially when they had to make decisions regarding practices of leisure and consumption. They were also characterised by a strong work ethic and strict household budget management, effort, saving, planning, prioritising and responsibility skills.

Regarding the strategic management of their life, women following unexpected paths showed a strategy for social mobility, mainly for their children, characterised by a strong work ethic and ascetic spirit, planning and organization dispositions (Lahire, 2004). Women from expected paths showed a deficit or lack of strategic management and planning, mainly due to their extreme lack of resources. In fact, these women's main concerns were about survival, they were too caught up in life's circumstances and stated they were living one day at a time. In this sense, concurring with Queiroz and Gros (2012) statement that the apparent lack of ambition, effort, motivation and planning that some women showed are an effect and not a cause of intergenerational processes of poverty and marginalisation. Indeed, the privation of financial resources combined with lack of power, respect and recognition, as well as small and homogeneous social networks produce a psychological adaptation that turns into an intergenerational 'natural' process, that is often perceived as the cause of 'poor's laziness' or 'lack of character'.

In what concerns the disposition for participation, the interviewees from unexpected paths were the only ones who participated in unions, parents' associations, community or church activities, making their voices heard (Young, 2004). They also had some cultural and/or leisure practices, such as friends' and family's birthday parties or picnics. Only one woman declared having holidays away from home, camping.

In relation to children's care and love labour, all women expressed concerns with their health and education, listening to and supporting them as well as looking out for them and taking care of their needs, such as food or clothes and declared having a close and affectionate relationship with their children. Poor mothers' agency was thus strongly related to children's care and the prioritization of their needs (Power, 2005; O'Brien, 2009). For the

interviewed women, children were their main priority and the best part of her life. These findings are consistent with previous research from Daly and Leonard (2002).

As for factors that affect school performance and behaviour, habits of written culture only existed in one of the families from unexpected paths. Overall, the domestic moral order that enabled good school performance, as well as ways of exercising authority that valued self-restraint, the embodiment of behavioural norms close to school's basic rules of conduct and also non-violent forms of punishment, were most common in unexpected paths, as well as in one mother from expected paths (Margarida). Finally, as seen in chapters seven and eight, all mothers from unexpected paths, as well as Margarida, mentioned a very strong pedagogical investment, namely family organisation and sacrifices to manage the household economy.

Regarding the commitment and investment in the education of their children, all women mentioned big concerns with this dimension, as well as their efforts to give everything possible to their children and investing in their education, which they valued. The selection of children's friends and playmates, especially in council housing neighbourhoods, the encouragement and concern about children's higher education and school attainment were more frequent in unexpected paths. As seen, almost all interviewed mothers stated they had concerns and conflicts with social workers, teachers and school boards about their children's education.

Concerning social support networks, those that help people 'get by', and social leverage networks, those who help people have upward mobility (Briggs, 1998; Dominguez & Watkins, 2003), women from unexpected paths were the only ones that had contact with people from different socioeconomic status, thus creating heterogeneous social networks and increasing their access to information and opportunities, as well a community support. These women also had a clear strategy for upward social mobility especially oriented towards her children's education and future. By contrast, women from expected paths showed socioeconomic homogeneity and an over-dependence on institutionally based support and a clear lack of social leverage networks.

With respect to intimate relationships and domestic violence, women from unexpected paths managed to escape violent situations with more determination than women from expected paths. In fact, the latter broke the cycle of abuse after longer periods of time and extremely influenced by social services, which threatened to take the children away if they did not separate from their abusive partners. By the contrary, loving and caring intimate

relationships of mutual and strong emotional support that acted as protective factors from economic and affective inequality, gave the women hope in a better future despite the hardship they lived in.

Finally, women from unexpected paths were the ones who mostly mentioned the active role of the municipality in the promotion of social inclusion, namely by providing council housing with affordable rents, helping them to find paid care activities in services (elderly care and cleaning), but also creating local intervention offices that act as institutionally-based social support networks, offering social, educational and psychological support.

## 7. ACTIVATION POLICIES AND POOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

As seen in chapter one, the first income support allowance in Portugal was launched in 1996, almost 40 years later than in other European countries. It was also mentioned that Portugal is one of the countries where the benefits' value is lower. Furthermore, especially from 2010 onwards, the right-wing coalition government and the austerity policies imposed by the Troika have caused a significant impact in the Portuguese welfare system becoming almost impossible to combat poverty (Queiroz & Gros, 2012; Hespanha & Portugal, 2015). A study was presented showing that Portugal was the country where the poor lost more of their income due to the crisis, between 2009 and 2011, when compared to five other countries. Additionally, austerity has overwhelmed women, due to an increase of burden with care issues (Callan et al., 2011) and children and young people are especially vulnerable to poverty in this country (Schraad-Tischler & Schiller, 2016).

Our research revealed that income support allowance's value is clearly insufficient for the families' needs. In fact, it enables mere survival, keeping the interviewed women in a state of dependency towards welfare. Indeed, conflicting with the objectives of 'autonomy' for which they were designed, welfare payments keep poor women poor and are a restraint to equality of condition in its several dimensions. These findings are compatible with the work of Hespanha (2008) on the execution of activation policies in Portugal. Indeed, these policies do not have a real ability to create access to the job market, contrarily to the mainstream view of politicians, mass media and population in general, which urges poor people to work. The interviewees revealed a low level of participation and decision-making over the courses they were forced to attend, to keep the benefits or many other decisions about their own lives. In fact, this subjective power is often in the hands of social workers

(who are frequently overworked and burden with bureaucratic issues), with a disregard for individual choice. Even though the law establishes the recipients' participation in the design of their insertion programmes, most women denied having an active participation in its development, in line with the work of Queiroz and Gros (2012). In the same way, these women were powerless over welfare cuts and often mentioned feelings of shame, prejudice, humiliation and negative stereotyping in their contacts with social services, and an internalisation of the social stigma towards the recipients of social benefits (Paugam, 2003).

Despite their efforts, most of the interviewed women were either unemployed or placed in precarious and low-paid occupations that hardly led to an effective labour market inclusion and to an employment with a guarantee of social rights. In fact, in line with work from Sorj (2014) and Hirata (2014), the occupations of the interviewed women, who worked in cleaning services, as domestic help or as care workers, was undervalued, unrecognized, highly precarious, low-paid, and often informal. These women paths were frequently intersected by many social disadvantages of socioeconomic status, gender and 'race'. At the same time, the women also mentioned that their care activities (regarding their children and other dependents) were unrecognized or devalued, a notion that should be challenged, since care work is 'real work' and highly valuable and irreplaceable.

Furthermore, activation policies failed to hold men responsible for their lack of care and negligence towards their children or violence against their ex-wives (Kershaw, Pulkingham & Fuller, 2008) as well as to acknowledge the long-term educational and affective consequences of the abuse (Brush, 2003).

Regarding adult education, there are several aspects to consider. The first one is related to activation policies' principle of mandatory attendance of vocational and education training or literacy courses, to receive welfare benefits, regardless of the motivation and people's choices. In addition, some of the interviewed women had to abandon their courses to take care of their children, given the 'gendered essentialism' or their moral imperative to care, concepts developed by Lynch and Lyons (2009) and O'Brien (2009).

Our findings are consistent with the work of Lima (2010) and Queiroz and Gros (2012) about the placement of some people in vocational education and training being merely palliative, an occupation of poor people's time, regardless of their learning interests or real needs. As abovementioned, some of the women were in fact unemployable, due to structural reasons, namely globalisation and the labour market economic crisis, as well as individual reasons as physical and/or mental issues, rooted, nevertheless, in socioeconomic

and affective causes, such as malnutrition, lack of healthcare, abuse and neglect in childhood. The mandatory character of adult education underlies a lack of respect and recognition for disadvantaged groups as well it shows their lack of decision-making power, often resulting in a lack of motivation and interest in the subjects of training. Additionally, some women mentioned the low quality of adult education courses (namely RVCC, stating that the certification was not based in real knowledge), the number of hours of certain subjects, which fell short of the learning needs and criticised the contrasting levels of background knowledge among trainees. Our interviews showed that many women went through different courses with no relation to one another, just to keep them occupied, while, in some cases, their speaking, reading and writing skills remained very limited.

Lastly, the findings are in line with the results from previous national studies (CNRM, 2002) about the feelings of frustration that arise in these women whenever there is no practical possibility of using their new qualifications in the job market, due to the unemployment crisis.

With regards to the positive effects of ISA, they were mainly related to the role of social workers in situations of domestic violence or protecting the children from negligence and/or abuse.

It is also to be highlighted the municipalities' role by investing in council housing (with affordable rents) and local social intervention offices, which act as institutionally-based social support networks (Briggs, 1998; Dominguez & Watkins, 2003). In fact, these networks helped some women 'get by', offering material help, and emotional and educational support for the women and children. However, such support also involved strong social control and over-dependence on these services, which may, in the long run, create more vulnerability (Dominguez & Watkins, 2003).

In sum, the findings are consistent with research from Matos and Costa (2012) about two types of recipients (in the opposite poles). On the one hand, the ones that are motivated for 'autonomy' and can make plans for their future and, on the other hand, those who are demotivated, with a negative self-image, debilitated by intergenerational processes of social vulnerability, who are often unemployable, due to health problems or care responsibilities. This research's perspective highlights that the abovementioned ability to make plans, the motivation and the possibility of 'autonomy' are largely dependent of socioeconomic and affective conditions such as economic resources, housing, education, employment and healthcare.

## 8. THE ROAD AHEAD: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Following the analysis, the study offers suggestive evidence for a comprehensive policy development in the areas of social justice, such as education, work, welfare, housing and health so that services for the poor do not become poor services, defined by low standards and underfunded (Daly & Leonard, 2002).

As seen in chapter one, besides being a moral imperative in a just and democratic society, education is also vital to communities due to economic reasons. Early school leaving, unemployment, low-skilled employment, in-work poverty rates and a precarious labour market have huge social costs to the health system and the social system and lower a country's productivity.

For all the aforementioned reasons, affordable and good quality early childhood education and care to promote physical, cognitive, social and emotional development, as well as after-school programmes, are essential, as well as higher standards of education for all social groups. Furthermore, it is also important to recognise the emotional dimensions of education.

In what concerns adult education and disadvantaged groups, several studies point out to the importance of higher levels of education to an improvement in income and to find a job in a competitive labour market, so it is important that the State invests in education and training. However, these policies must be adequate for the recipients' real needs and motivations, in a process created with them and considering their entire life path and current family circumstances. In fact, training and education should not only have a recreational side but provide real options for professional integration, if that is the best option for the recipients. If lone mothers have to interrupt their studies in order to take care of their children, this process should be monitored so as to minimize the impact on their training and enable them to return as soon as possible. In this regard, mechanisms are necessary to allow access to the contents and to carry out eventual evaluations (possibly online, through e-learning, with computers provided by the education/training institutions), as well as to have available services and structures such as crèches, kindergartens, nurses or assistants who help lone mothers in their task of caring. It would also be necessary to hold fathers accountable and include other family members. To respond to the lack of support that inhibits the presence of beneficiaries until the end of training, especially when children are involved, it is suggested to increase the training grant in order to prevent abandonment

for economic reasons, as well as improvement of the transport network and the adaptation of its schedules to the real needs of the population.

Given that the essential factors for poor women's attainment in education and training are the importance of reconciling family life and training (support network for the recipient's family, community support - local social support structures, neighbours); the way in which people are accepted in the courses is important and that teachers/trainers have a specific approach to this type of population; and the opportunities in local businesses and available jobs (it means a greater motivation for the commitment to training), our study suggests that training should be appropriate and specific to the needs of people and the local labour market, since it was mentioned by the interviewed professionals that the IEFP and the Government promote bottom-down policies, pre-established and decontextualized training and that within the communities there are often no professional exits for those courses; certified vocational training should continue to be allowed for people with the 4th grade, because many beneficiaries do not have the 1st CEB. It is also paramount to make the legislation more flexible, with an increased room for manoeuvre, especially in the case of beneficiaries without basic skills to be integrated into education or training pathways or into employment.

To conclude, the actual under-employment or sub-wage enabled by activation policies does not grant poor people the same rights, as they would have in the regular labour market (Martin & Paugam, 2009). Our proposals are consistent with the view of Hespanha (2002), which states that only activation programmes based on useful work, qualification programmes and qualifying training may have a significant impact.

In what social intervention is concerned, it needs to be diversified and adjusted accordingly to different types of recipients. Indeed, welfare recipients are not all the same, as the mainstream rhetoric proclaims. As such, for those who have to deal with intergenerational disadvantages in several intersecting inequality dimensions, the intervention should primarily target just levels of living conditions. For others, the responses can be more focused on education and/or employment. Treating all recipients in the same standardised and bureaucratic way often creates the same dependence that policies aim to end, while, at the same time, involving strong social control and over-dependence on these services. This may entail the dangers of more vulnerability to welfare cuts, as well to consider gratitude and loyalty forms of reciprocating, thus not creating opportunities outside the neighbourhood and isolating recipients even more (Dominguez & Watkins, 2003; Duvoux,

2009). As already mentioned, social intervention should actively include the recipients in the definition of their insertion contracts. In fact, instead of their mere signature, recipients should feel empowered and participate in the decisions that concern their future (as already predicted by Law, but not actually put into practice). Accordingly, social intervention should be more personalized, regular and locally delivered.

Concerning welfare, the first point to address is the low level of ISA and the need for its value to be substantially increased (Daly & Leonard, 2012; Queiroz & Gros, 2012). Irregular expenses payment should also be addressed. When labour market inclusion is possible it should be complemented with social benefits over a considerable period of time, in order to stabilize the income, as well as affordable and good quality childcare and after-school programmes (including within the community) and care services for dependents (disabled, elderly or ill people).

Additionally, policies and laws should reinforce paternal financial responsibility and accountability for their negligence towards their children or violence against their ex-wives, as well as for the payment of their own debts (Kershaw, Pulkingham & Fuller, 2008). It is also imperative that public institutions provide appropriate protection and care in cases of domestic violence. Furthermore, activation policies should acknowledge the long-term consequences of abuse, namely the cognitive and emotional obstacles to education that persist long after the abuse has ended (Brush, 2003).

Regarding contact with welfare recipients, professionals working in social services, job centres and other public services have to be trained on how to empower that specific population and to prevent practices of stereotyping and marginalisation. Notwithstanding, in order for these professionals to promote inclusion and have a more personalised intervention, it is necessary to increase their number and to change their own work contracts, since many of them are overworked, underpaid and in precarious work situations themselves.

In what concerns employment, the findings show that poor women and their families are subjected to labour exploitation, including child labour, low-paid, precarious jobs and under-employment. Furthermore, the mainstreamed idea that 'poor people don't want to work' it is highly hypocritical and demagogic, given the delocalisation of production, due to economic globalisation, that results in a shortage of low-skilled jobs, that in the past were performed by this type of population. Labour laws should, therefore, have in consideration the need for an increase of minimum wage, to combat precarious work and to invest in

good quality training, since low-skilled work is cheaper in other countries and is becoming a less important factor in the Portuguese economy.

In addition, several authors mention the possibility of a basic income, defined by the Basic Income European Network (BIEN) as a ‘periodic cash payment unconditionally delivered to all on an individual basis, without means test or work requirement’<sup>39</sup>. The beginning of this idea dates back to Moore (1516) and Vives (1526) during the Renaissance period. It has also been mentioned by Condorcet (1794), Paine (1796) and by utopian socialists in the XIX<sup>th</sup> century, such as Fourier (1836), Charlier (1848) and Mill (1849). In the XX<sup>th</sup> century, the first debates started in Denmark, the ‘citizen’s wage’ (Meyer et al., 1978) and in the Netherlands, with the concept of a ‘guaranteed income’ (Kuiper, 1976). In Britain, the Basic Income Research Group (BIRG) was formed in 1984 and in Germany, Offe (1992, 1996) also defended this notion, as well as Gorz (1997), in France. Bauman (1999, 2005) draws attention to the fact that full employment does not exist anymore, hence the need for an income independent of paid work, based on an ‘ethic of life’ instead of an ‘ethic of work’.

With respect to housing, here understood as a universal right, State policies should include the investment on affordable housing for low-income/poor citizens, located across the city and not concentrated, as they exist currently, in order to prevent the formation of ghettos. In the existent council estates leisure equipment (sport and culture) and green spaces should be created, where the inhabitants themselves would be responsible for maintaining and managing the annual budget, together with mediators from the city council. The children and youth of these neighbourhoods should be provided free transportation for educational, sports and leisure equipment outside the neighbourhood.

In what concerns health, several studies point out that the lack of income is a risk factor for physical health given malnutrition, lack of hygienic conditions, work accidents and other factors, as well for mental health disorders, due to social isolation, anxiety related with worrying about the lack of income.

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. <https://basicincome.org/basic-income/faq/-definition>

The study offers suggestive evidence for a greater investment in the National Health System, given the long waiting lists in the public system to certain medical specialities and the lack of money to pay for private medical appointments or dental treatments, to buy medicine, glasses or dental prosthesis. Furthermore, eyesight and/or dental problems caused great concern, as they hindered normal activities such as working or learning. Most women's lack of teeth or rotten teeth also blocked their access to the labour market as well as lowered their self-esteem. Overall, this situation does not contribute to an adequate educational or professional inclusion. Regarding sexual and reproductive health the evidence suggests there is a lack of access to planned parenthood and information about abortion. Information and access without prejudice should be articulated between health, education and welfare services.

## 9. IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As discussed in the methodology section, this is a qualitative research whose findings are limited to the interviewed women in Northern Portugal. Possible areas for further research on the intersectionality of inequality dimensions of poor women might include a quantitative study with a representative sample. It would also be interesting if future research includes people from other 'races'/ethnicities (this research only included one black woman) in order to further explore its intersections with inequality dimensions in Portugal. In addition, it might be useful to deepen the study on the role of educators/teachers as well as welfare professionals in the promotion of inequality. Lastly, it would be important to address the issues of rectification (Lynch & Baker, 2009; Feeley, 2014). If family and State failed to provide these women with love and care during their childhood, and if this abuse and neglect have branded them for life, preventing them from having a socio-professional inclusion, they should be entitled to some form of compensation. Future work could discuss the forms of such compensation.

## 10. AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL REFLECTIONS

When I started this journey, I was intrigued by the fact that some women managed to get out of poverty, against all odds, while others lingered there. I set myself to capture their 'success stories' and this illusion shows how naïve I was, thinking I could measure in such terms poor women's social inclusion, to whom some much was taken away and almost

nothing was given. The contact with reality during my first interviews with ISA recipients started to show the clear insufficiency of my initial theoretical framework, especially due to the pattern of neglect and abuse experiences during early childhood, and domestic violence in the relationships with their partners. When I came across Equality Studies and Intersectionality my initial perspective broadened to other dimensions, besides redistribution, employment or education, such as care, power, respect and recognition and its intersections. I realised that equality does not depend solely on professional inclusion or on having an education or a house (even though these are essential). I have come to realise that amid the most precarious conditions poor mothers found comfort in their family life, especially in their children, some much so that their dreams were related to the latter because in their 30s almost all the interviewed women had stopped having dreams for themselves. Cristina asked me what she could possibly dream in the misery she was living in. In the interviews held in December, I could not stop comparing the expensive toys advertisement on TV and the lack of basic goods of the children I had met. How it all seemed excessive and pointless in the face of the anguish of not being able of feeding one's children! And the most strange and poignant realisation was that they were happy with the most simple, little things.

After this journey together, I wondered what has become of these women and their children, so I have tried to contact them in 2016, some years after the first interviews. Elvira had gotten married and her daughter was institutionalised (just like Elvira was when she was her daughter's age). Once a month she spent a weekend at Elvira's home. Her husband was sixteen years older, he was employed, and she helped at a friend's bakery. Even though she worked all day she was not paid. Estela's son went to live with his father due to Estela's mental issues. Her social worker and psychiatrist considered it was best for the child and she agreed. She still saw him every day. After being unemployed for a long time, she now has a job working at a supermarket. Lurdes finally got a job as a factory worker and lived with her family in the house they have built. Her son wanted to study in Cambridge. Her husband was ill. Although I have tried to contact the other women I could not. In the future, I would like to contact them and write about their paths after the Troika intervention in Portugal.

I look back and remember the dialogues I had with the women. I am in Mariana's house, on those Saturdays afternoon, while her dog sleeps on my feet and she remembers how it was like to deal with her father's disappearance from her life, living in the shacks, with the help of the community and her extended family, and considering it as one of the happiest

times of her life. Lurdes was crying when she revealed how her abusive father threatened to kill her mother when she had just given birth. Despite all the abuse, she endured from her mother, Elvira, who went through an alcohol rehab and was institutionalised when she was only ten years old, said she forgave her mother because she did not know better at the time. Estela cried telling me how her mother had tried to kill her with a knife when she was just a five-year-old and how, years later, she was institutionalised in a mental institution for attacking her sister the same way. Despite all the drama in her life, she managed to finish 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Margarida managed to escape an abusive relationship after 21 years and confided to me how she got to a point where she just ran out of love. Salomé told me about the war in Angola and how the police in Sao Tomé attacked young women. In Portugal, she lost her babies because her employer, without her consent, gave the pills that caused her to have an abortion, and still she shows no rage towards that woman. Her biggest dream? Being the woman behind the wheel, the destiny in her hands.



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## APPENDIXES

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### 1. TOPIC LIST 1: INTERVIEWS WITH KEY INFORMANTS (SOCIAL AND EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS WHO WORK WITH ISA RECIPIENTS, SUCH AS TEACHERS, SOCIAL WORKERS, PSYCHOLOGISTS AND SOCIAL EDUCATORS)

Data:

Nome:

Formação académica:

Função:

Instituição:

1. Âmbito da intervenção do entrevistado junto de beneficiárias de RSI.
2. Com base na experiência de intervenção junto de beneficiárias do RSI:
  - a. Situar as beneficiárias na trajetória familiar geracional;
  - b. Principais razões que motivam o requerimento de RSI (problemáticas das famílias); modos de vida quotidianos; relação c/ o dinheiro/poupança; conceito de autonomia (horizontes; responsabilização); sentimento das beneficiárias face à situação de exclusão/pobreza;
  - c. Consegue distinguir diferentes tipos de beneficiárias; conceito de autonomia;
  - d. Importância da contratualização (contrato de inserção): pontos fortes e pontos fracos;
  - e. Principais impactos da aplicação de medidas ligadas à educação e à formação no contrato de inserção; papel específico da formação/educação na inflexão do percurso de exclusão;
  - f. O que é para si um percurso de sucesso?; explique-me as causas de sucesso; Conhecimento sobre casos de sucesso e reinserção socioprofissional de mulheres permitidos pela frequência de formação/educação?;

Há mecanismos específicos do papel de género feminino nas trajetórias biográficas de sucesso e reinserção/ na aplicação e concretização de objetivos de reinserção da medida?;

- g. Fatores que contribuem para que algumas mulheres consigam autonomizar-se face à medida e outras não; Há condições ou disposições que são comuns nos momentos de mudança de trajetória (quebra ciclo/padrão de exclusão)?
  - h. Principais aspetos negativos/positivos do RSI;
  - i. Se pudesse mudar algo no RSI, o que seria?
3. Esclarecimentos sobre nomenclaturas de estatísticas - motivos de cessação (ver quadro 2 do relatório semestral 1º semestre 2010 do RSI, p. 8)
4. Comentários e sugestões:

Temas para as entrevistas com as beneficiárias:

- Família: origem geográfica; migrações; profissão e habilitações dos pais; história familiar: nº de irmãos, lugar ocupado na fratria, rupturas familiares, relações atuais c/ a família; família constituída: situação conjugal; nº de filhos; nº de pessoas a cargo)
- Escolaridade (percurso escolar; nível atingido; diplomas ; relações c/ a escola, os professores e os colegas; etapas que marcam a escolaridade; até q idade esteve na escola e (eventualmente) por que é que abandonou os estudos?; relações da família, ascendentes e descendentes, em relação à escola)
- Formação e qualificação profissional (aprendeu alguma profissão?); motivação para novas formações? Em que áreas?;
- Atividades Profissionais: percurso profissional; tipo de atividade exercida durante mais tempo (nº de meses e anos de experiência neste tipo de atividade); motivos das eventuais mudanças de situação; outros tipos de atividades desempenhados; procura de trabalho: procura emprego numa nova área? Tem habilitações para o fazer?; representações sobre o trabalho;
- Saúde (acesso a médico de família; toxicodpendência; alcoolismo; doença mental);
- Habitação: tipo de habitação (social?); mudanças de habitação; problemática de habitação?; infraestruturas lazer e comércio; relações de vizinhança e comunitárias (conflito, entreajuda, grupos, comportamentos);

- Ação social: relações de guichet: tipo de relação com os trabalhadores sociais; frequência (lembra-se da 1ª vez que se deslocou a um serviço de acção social?; como é que as coisas se passaram na 1ª vez? Esperou muito tempo?; Geralmente como é que o atendimento se processa? Onde?; Autonomia vs dependência (sentimento de responsabilidade individual; O que é o programa de inserção?; contratualização – contrato de inserção; participação na elaboração do contrato com o trabalhador social; conteúdo do contrato; correspondência ao projecto do beneficiário; apreciações sobre as actividades propostas, formativas, profissionais e/ou outras);
- O que é ser pobre? Considera-se pobre? (Se sim, por que é que considera que é pobre?); Pensa que hoje conseguiria dispensar os serviços da assistência social?;
- Rendimentos (rendimentos não declarados), prestações sociais, redes sociais de ajuda (familiares, vizinhos, amigos). Neste momento recebe prestações?; RSI (data início prestação; motivos);
- Sociabilidades (contextos de socialização relevantes ; interação beneficiárias vs trabalhadores c/ salário mínimo);
- Sentimento de participação na vida social (amigos, vizinhos, participação política e associativa);
- Tempos livres: práticas de consumo, culturais, desportivas e recreativas – longo do dia, noite, fim semana e férias;
- Perspetivas para o futuro (Como vê o seu futuro?; o que significa para si ‘ter sucesso na vida’?)

(Inspired in Duvoux, 2009; Paugam, 2003)

5. Aferir sobre a possibilidade de indicação de potenciais entrevistadas (mulheres com passado na medida e que se conseguiram autonomizar face à mesma, graças a medidas ligadas à formação/educação e/ou mulheres q não se conseguiram autonomizar, tendo sido submetidas ao mesmo tipo de políticas de inserção).



## 2. TOPIC LIST 2: INTERVIEWS WITH ISA (EX) RECIPIENTS

### **Antes de começar:**

Garantir à entrevistada anonimato e confidencialidade;

Explicar o âmbito do estudo: beneficiárias de RSI que tenham passado por percursos de educação/formação graças à medida e que estejam em processo de inclusão social e/ou profissional;

Explicar a duração do processo: 6 horas no total e entrevistas de 1h30/2h00.

### **Notas prévias de aspetos a considerar:**

- Sempre que possível, precisar a informação com contextos (onde?; quando?); pessoas (com quem?); forma como se passava; solicitar exemplos variados: histórias de práticas concretas;
- colocar questões precisas, contextualizadas, para fazer aparecer indecisões, pluralidade de escolhas possíveis, contradições;
- carácter biográfico de cada tema: da infância ao momento presente;
- atender às dicotomias disposicionais: modos práticos de aprendizagem vs. modos escolares e pedagógicos; ascetismo vs. hedonismo; planificação vs. espontaneidade; relação estrita e tensa com as regras e normas vs. relação relaxada relativamente às mesmas vs. recusa ou resistência; disposições culturais legítimas vs. pouco legítimas; disposições estéticas vs. utilitárias; disposições ligadas à atividade pública e coletiva vs. retiro individualista ou na esfera privada, fechamento em si; passividade vs. iniciativa ou liderança;
- atender às relações de força: dominante/dominado, líder/seguidor, responsável/participante, competente/não competente;
- 2º entrevista pedir para trazer objeto significativo ou uma fotografia privada de forma a estabelecer diálogo.

Entrevista nº:

Data:

Nome fictício:

Local de realização:

## I. A entrevistada – dados sociodemográficos

1. Naturalidade
2. Idade
3. Habilitações literárias
4. Nº de anos que frequentou a escola (ensino regular e/ou recorrente)
5. Escolaridade obrigatória: Sim/Não

## II. Percorso profissional

1. Percorso
  - Idade de início;
  - Atividades que teve ao longo do percurso e tipos de vínculo;
  - Tipo de atividade exercida durante mais tempo (nº de meses e anos de experiência neste tipo de atividade);
  - Motivos das eventuais mudanças de situação;
  - procura de trabalho: procura emprego numa nova área? Tem habilitações para o fazer?; representações sobre o trabalho;
  - Condições de trabalho (acidentes de trabalho; nº de horas; doenças profissionais, entre outras);
2. Desemprego
  - Caracterização das situações de desemprego;
  - Razões justificativas das situações de desemprego;
  - Teve dificuldade em arranjar trabalho por falta de habilitações?
  - Perceção sobre a(s) dificuldade(s) de arranjar trabalho/emprego;
  - Ações/iniciativas de procura de emprego (motivação para aceder ao mercado de trabalho);

- Recurso a apoios institucionais e a redes de suporte informais;
- Caracterização dos modos de vida (sociabilidades, gestão e vivência diária, etc.);
- Contributos do RSI para resolução da situação de desemprego/não trabalho;
- Situação do mercado de trabalho atual e procura de um novo emprego.

### 3. O futuro...

- Profissões/atividades profissionais mais valorizadas e razões que o justifiquem;
- Profissão ‘desejada’ e razões que o justifiquem.

## III. Percurso escolar e de formação profissional

### 1. Práticas precoces de escrita e leitura;

### 2. Avaliação do percurso escolar

- (analfabetismo, escolaridade obrigatória, insucesso, abandono e absentismo escolar, necessidades educativas especiais); nível de escolaridade atingido (idade que tinha quando terminou os estudos e (eventualmente) razões para abandono escolar precoce); diplomas ; relações c/ a escola, os professores e os colegas (afetos, participação nas aulas e nas atividades extraletivas); etapas que marcam a escolaridade;
- Relações da família, ascendentes e descendentes, com a escola (níveis de escolaridade e razões de eventual abandono/insucesso);
- Postura do agregado familiar de origem face ao percurso escolar do entrevistado;
- Perceção da influência do abandono/interrupção dos estudos na condição socioeconómica atual
- Valor atribuído à escola;

### 3. Experiências de formação proporcionadas pelo RSI:

- Motivação/vocação para os cursos. Era o q desejava?
- Tipos de formação frequentada
- O(s) curso(s) que fez foram a sua 1º opção?
- Já tinha frequentado outros cursos?
- Está a frequentar algum neste momento?
- Gostou de o(s) frequentar?
- Apoios para frequentar o (s) curso(s)
- Descrição tratamento/relações que manteve c/ serviços, formadores, colegas
- Relação entre atividades profissionais que desenvolveu/quer vir a desenvolver e curso(s) frequentado(s)
- Alguma vez pensou em desistir? Porquê?
- Diferenças entre a altura que frequentaram a escola e o momento presente?
- Principais razões que levaram à frequência de formações, desde que está no RSI?
- Ambiente das aulas nas formações e importância para a aprendizagem?
- Aspetos positivos e negativos;
- Impactos: o que é que pensa que poderá ter mudado na sua vida - níveis: pessoal, familiar, social e profissional: acha que vai ser mais fácil arranjar emprego depois de ter frequentado o(s) cursos(s) - graças às formações/aulas?
- O que espera(va) que o(s) curso(s) lhe proporcionem/proporcionassem?
- Correspondência do(s) curso(s) face às expectativas iniciais;
- Aprendeu alguma profissão?; motivação para novas formações? Em que

áreas?;

4. Regresso à escola/formação: sensação de recuperar o tempo perdido?
5. Planificação de atividades; ponderação; cálculo; estratégia.

#### IV. Rendimentos, ação social, percurso no RSI e avaliação de impactos

##### 1. Rendimentos;

- Salários (existência, nível, regularidade);
- Ausência de rendimentos provenientes de trabalho;
- Desemprego;
- Pensões;
- Subsídios (desemprego, RSI, outros,...);
- Outros rendimentos;
- Contribuição de todos os membros do agregado;
- Pagamento de pensão de alimentos;
- Autonomia financeira (sobre-endividamento), consumos elevados (por necessidade, por má gestão) e acesso ao crédito;

##### 2. Atendimento

- Tipo de relação com os trabalhadores sociais;
- Frequência (lembra-se da 1ª vez que se deslocou a um serviço de ação social?; como é que as coisas se passaram na 1ª vez? Esperou muito tempo?;
- Geralmente como é que o atendimento se processa? Onde?;

##### 3. Razões da candidatura ao RSI e imagem inicial da medida

- Data início da 1ª candidatura e percurso na medida;
- Razões de candidatura ao RSI;

- Razão para a manutenção do estatuto de beneficiário do RSI (se aplicável);
  - Percepção do direito a beneficiar do RSI; sentimento de ser assistido?
  - Caracterização da relação anterior com os serviços de segurança e de proteção social (relação pontual, continuada, etc.);
  - Percepção sobre a existência ou não de ‘abusos’ relativos à atribuição do RSI;
4. Autonomia vs. dependência (sentimento de responsabilidade individual e responsabilidade da sociedade face à situação de pobreza);
5. Contratualização
- Conhecimento sobre o seu programa de inserção;
  - Participação na elaboração do programa de inserção com o trabalhador social e concordância com o mesmo;
  - Correspondência ao projeto da pessoa;
  - Apreciações sobre as atividades propostas, formativas, profissionais e/ou outras).
6. Relação técnico/beneficiário
- Conhecimento sobre os aspetos formais associados ao RSI (nome do técnico, dias de atendimento, etc.);
  - Caracterização da relação estabelecida com o técnico do RSI;
7. Vantagens e desvantagens do RSI;
8. Opinião sobre o valor da prestação;
9. Existência de apoios complementares:
- institucionais (ex: cuidados de saúde, mensalidade de creches, apoio na procura de emprego, etc.);
  - informais (apoios de familiares, amigos, vizinhos, etc.);

10. Impacto da medida do RSI nos modos de vida:

- Avaliação das principais alterações decorrentes do RSI na vida pessoal e na do agregado familiar (consumos; saúde; escolarização; qualificação profissional, emprego; habitação; apoio social; autonomização face aos serviços);

11. Impactos da medida na identidade e imagem pública:

- Autoimagem enquanto beneficiário do RSI;
- Autoestima;
- Perceção da imagem pública sobre os beneficiários do RSI;
- Participação, exercício de cidadania (informação sobre direitos, reivindicação de direitos, reclamação, responsabilização pessoal);
- Sociabilidades;
- Afeto, cuidado e solidariedade.

**V. Representações face à pobreza**

1. O que é ser pobre?
2. Considera-se pobre? (Se sim, por que é que considera que é pobre?);
3. Existência de situações de privação no agregado (alimentação, vestuário, saúde, transporte, habitação, educação, lazer, informação, ...)
4. Pensa que hoje conseguiria dispensar os serviços da assistência social?;
5. Comparação da condição socioeconómica atual face à(s) condição(ões) socioeconómicas anteriores;
6. Perceção de situações de discriminação social;
7. Influência de eventuais situações de discriminação social na condição socioeconómica atual.

**VI. Saúde (do próprio e do agregado)**

1. Deficiência e/ou incapacidade;
2. Dependência de terceiros (deficientes ou idosos);
3. Acesso a serviços de saúde e a médico de família;
4. Acesso a medicamentos;
5. Doença grave e/ou crónica; toxicodependência; alcoolismo; doença mental;
6. Doenças profissionais ou acidentes de trabalho;
7. Perceção subjetiva do estado de saúde.

## **VII. Quotidiano, Reconhecimento, redes de relações sociais, participação, consumos e práticas culturais e de lazer**

1. Contextos de socialização relevantes:
  - Primeiras instâncias de socialização (agentes): família, ama, creche, pré-escola, escola 1º ciclo, grupos pares, instituições desportivas, culturais ou recreativas;
  - Sociabilidades: natureza (contacto, convivência, entreatuda), extensão e intensidade de contextos de socialização relevantes: família, amigos (de infância até aos mais recentes), vizinhos, ex/colegas trabalho) – perda e novos laços criados;
  - Solidão?
  - Relações sociais no local onde reside: existem grupos?; faz parte deles?; insegurança? Estima pelos vizinhos?; relação dos filhos com os vizinhos?; comércio local; equipamentos locais; associações locais.
2. Participação:
  - Tipo e frequência de participação em:
    - ass. de estudantes, de trabalhadores, de pais, de condóminos, ...;
    - partidos políticos ou juventudes partidárias;
    - movimentos sociais reivindicativos ou movimentos de solidariedade

social;

- grupos ou ass. juvenis ou recreativas;
- grupos religiosos;
- grupos desportivos;
- cooperativas,
- sindicatos;
- grupos de formação;
- outros...
- Sentimento de participação na vida cívica, associativa, social e comunitária;
- Voluntariado?

3. Reconhecimento:

- Pessoal (autoconceito, autoimagem);
- Coletivo (pertença à família, grupo profissional, grupo social, grupo vizinhança, entre outros);
- Adesão/recusa normas e valores dominantes;

4. Cultura e lazer:

- Primeiras experiências de socialização cultural;
- Práticas de consumo, culturais, desportivas e recreativas; passatempos – ao longo do dia, noite, fim semana e férias;
- Acesso a equipamentos /atividades desporto/culturais e acesso a outros espaços de lazer (parques, jardins e outros);
- Mudanças de gosto a nível de lazer, cultural, alimentar, recreativo, ...

**VIII. Família**

1. A família de origem...

- Constituição; condição socioeconómica; habilitações escolares e profissão dos pais; nº de irmãos, lugar ocupado na fratria;
- História familiar: migrações; eventuais privações; demonstrações de afeto; abusos/negligência; celebrações; momentos mais marcantes ou de viragem; ...)
- Boas e más recordações dos anos de infância e juventude;
- Problemas experienciados na infância e na adolescência na vida familiar (maus tratos; privação económica,...);

2. A família constituída...

- Constituição; nº de pessoas a cargo...; papel do companheiro; relação com os filhos;
- Ruturas familiares; institucionalização de elementos do agregado; inexistência de familiares próximos; conflitos resultantes da tarefa de cuidar de dependentes; migrações; demonstrações de afeto; abusos/negligência;
- Bons momentos em família;
- Preocupação com o futuro dos descendentes;
- Relações com a família alargada.

**IX. Percurso residencial**

1. Locais de residência ao longo da vida e razão(ões) para a(s) mudança(s) de residência (em alguma altura da trajetória houve perda de habitação, despejos, e/ou situações de sem-abrigo);
2. Caracterização das condições habitacionais anteriores;
3. Local de residência atual e condições de habitabilidade atuais:
  - Tipo de habitação (social, barracas; ...);

- Qualidade da habitação;
- Problemas de manutenção;
- Ausência de infraestruturas básicas;
- Sobrelotação.

4. Ocupação:

- Rendas/prestações elevadas;
- Problemas legais;
- Habitação emprestada;
- Habitação ilegal;
- Indefinição da situação habitacional;

5. Apreciação sobre a casa e a zona residencial (existência de infraestruturas de lazer e comércio);

6. Projetos de mudança de habitação e/ou de zona residencial;

7. Contributo do RSI para a melhoria da condição habitacional;

8. Implicações do(s) local(ais) de residência na vida pessoal, social, profissional, etc.

## X. Aspetos positivos

1. União e apoio familiar;
2. Fortes vínculos entre pais e filhos;
3. Capacidade de organização e partilha de tarefas;
4. Capacidade de resolver problemas;
5. Estabilidade no emprego;
6. Ter boa saúde;
7. Ter rendimento suficiente;

8. Boa relação conjugal;
9. Boas relações sociais (incluindo as profissionais);
10. Ter uma casa com condições adequadas;
11. Adequado desenvolvimento individual.

**XI. Momentos mais marcantes do percurso de vida (especial atenção a momentos de crise, ruturas biográficas, mudanças significativas nas condições de vida, modificações nas trajetórias, escolhas, reviravoltas)**

1. Orientação escolar;
2. Fim dos estudos;
3. Regressar aos estudos;
4. Partida ou regresso ao domicílio parental;
5. Mudança de casa;
6. Migrações;
7. Escolha cônjuge;
8. Divórcio/separação;
9. Voltar a casar/estar em casal;
10. Escolha/fim atividade cultural, desportiva, lúdica;
11. Primeiro trabalho/primeiro trabalho fixo;
12. Perda de emprego;
13. Institucionalizações;
14. 1º filho, 2º filho, ...;
15. Grandes problemas de saúde,
16. Mortes na família.

## XII. Futuro e sonhos

1. Perceção sobre a necessidade de continuar a beneficiar do RSI;
2. Motivação para ‘dispensar’ o RSI;
3. Motivação e iniciativas para melhorar condições de vida;
4. Perceção sobre a vida futura;
5. Perceção sobre o futuro dos filhos e comparação com o percurso de vida dos seus pais;
6. Projetos futuros;
7. Sonhos profissionais, escolares, familiares, culturais,...
8. Como vê o seu futuro?; O que significa para si ‘ter sucesso na vida’?

(Inspired in Lahire, 2002; Duvoux, 2009; Paugam, 2003; Sousa, Hespanha, Rodrigues & Grilo, 2007)

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<sup>i</sup> Nine years of compulsory education