

## Gender, Citizenship and Education

**Fernanda Henriques**  
**University of Évora, Portugal**

This text is framed by the WINNET 8/WOMEN RESOURCES CENTRE /FAST TRACK NETWORK – (WINNET 8/WRC FTN) Project, one of the 74 projects that “on 5 November 2009 were conditionally approved within the framework of the Interregional Programme of Cooperation (INTERREG IVC: <http://www.interreg4c.net/Projects.html>).

This Programme allows the cooperation between authorities and actors both at a regional and local level of the different countries of the EU.27, together with Norway and Switzerland”. It was designed by a Swedish team and integrates 7 partner member countries of the EU: Bulgaria, Finland, Greece, Italy, Poland, United Kingdom and Portugal. In Portugal the project develops in collaboration between the University of Évora and CCDR Alentejo (Coordination Commission of the Alentejo Region).

The basic intention of the WINNET Project is to foster women’s empowerment, namely allowing them conditions for a greater participation in the rural and urban economic development, enhancing already acquired competences or encouraging the acquisition of new ones.

Therefore, Citizenship is a core concept to be promoted among the Women who

participated in the Project, making them aware of what is a true, effective and inclusive citizenship. Following the same logics and in the medium-term, one has to look also at how education – formal and non-formal – can contribute to the development of such perspective about citizenship. Both aspects are fundamental for a real empowerment of Women either directly or indirectly through the deconstruction of sexist, social and androcentric representations and of their reconstruction in terms of a true equality between sexes.

This text aims at contributing to some kind of enlightenment about these questions, and is divided into two parts: 1.invokes some essential elements for the historical understanding of the exclusion of Women from a full citizenship and 2. reports the mode these questions have been approached in Portugal and which institutional courses they have taken.

### 1. Modernity and the exclusion of Women from Full Citizenship

Luce Irigaray – a feminist on difference – systemically says in her work that if difference between men and women has been the basis of the discrimination of women throughout the centuries, only the resignification of such difference can lead to a new situation of the social relations. Likewise, in order to speak of the question of gender and citizenship, I think it is essential to go back to the most pernicious theorist of femininity, Jean Jacques Rousseau (Rosa Cobo, 1995; Fernanda Henriques, 1998).

He was a crucial thinker of the institutionalization of the modern, democratic society, a society that promoted equality; however, as far as the situation of Women was concerned, Rousseau managed to theorize the feminine and to make a configuration of its educational process that determined the destiny of girls' education and their social role until the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

For Rousseau, pedagogy has a political dimension. He attributed a political meaning to education, reason why his educational proposition aimed at constructing a New City. Thus, the different configuration he makes of the feminine and of the masculine education, based on an idealized human nature simultaneously presupposes and produces a conception of the feminine connected with fragility, sensuality and with subjection, clearly constructing the idea that the feminine rationality is restricted to a strictly practical nature.

The radical difference between the masculine human nature and the feminine, thought in terms of valuing asymmetry, was evident for Rousseau:

The supreme being wanted all in all to honour the human species: giving men immeasurable inclinations, he gave him at the same time the law that rules them, so that he is free and commands himself; by attributing him immoderate passions, he added to those passions reason to rule them: by attributing to women unlimited wishes, he added to those wishes the modesty to contain them. (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1969: 448)

Thus, the common destiny of women is to be educated to please men, and the last part of *Émile*, the great pedagogical novel of Rousseau, defines the rules of that education in order to deny women any possibility of, at least, transforming that destiny into a personal project. The fragility of their nature subjects them always to the dominion of a man: the father, the husband, or even a son. For Rousseau, Women are a collective, with no individual insights; therefore, Rousseau denies any representative value to those women who distinguished themselves from their common destiny. From his point of view, the rule and not the exception prevail in women, and the rule is: beauty, cunningness, weakness, unruly character, arbitrariness, sensitivity, sweetness, dependence, fragility.

The power of Rousseau's ideas is exemplary symbolized, in the awakening of the modern society, by the booklet published by Sylvain Maréchal in 1801, giving shape to a Bill that forbade women to learn to read.

The booklet was composed by 113 preambles and 82 determinations, containing also a *Decalogue* (the ten commandments of love) and a poem "to a cultivated woman". Such set consubstantiate argumentative panoply that highlighted a conceptualization of the feminine as lacking capacity to determine herself and to live autonomously. It simultaneously defended the idea that study and knowledge only made women prig and prevented them from fulfilling their mission as mothers and as lovers.

Fictional as it was, the booklet can be taken as the symbol of a certain way of thinking,

dominant in that new society that was emerging from the revolutionary struggles when some people looked for a way to keep women out of the great transmutation that was happening at all levels of human life. Said otherwise, on the one hand, when the western imaginary shaped itself in order to think humanity in terms of equality and freedom, there was the will, the power and the strength to exclude women from such an enriching cosmivision, postulating and defining their difference as a stigma of inequality. On the other hand, the controversies that Sylvain Maréchal's booklet raised also allow seeing the key lines of thought of the emergent society about the feminine nature, showing in all its extension, the ominous legacy of Rousseau.

According to Geneviève Fraisse, who studied in detail this period:

Sylvain Marechal's text crystallizes all the themes that feed debate about women's exclusion by democracy. We can sum them up this way: fear that exception becomes a rule, refusal of public life to women and control of their appearance, insistence on the naturalness of the feminine sex, especially in their reproductive function, certainty about an identical destiny to all women domestic and public producers of customs, political will of conferring them neither citizenship nor power in the city. (Geneviève Fraisse, 1991 :175)

Over more than 2 centuries, there was the need to fight against the ideas Rousseau so well had defended, so that Women could have access to an education like the one

societies offered to boys, so that they could have the right to decide over material goods, so that they could have the right to think of a project of personal life according to their actual needs, and so that they could participate in the political life either as voter or as eligible. And even today, social representations are full of traces of that asymmetrical anthropological configuration that made the feminine a "second sex".

## 2. Women, Education and Citizenship in Portugal

Rousseau's legacy was a burden for Portuguese women who only after the Carnation Revolution had the legal right of full citizenship and were allowed to elect and to be elected; they were free to hold whichever professional activity and, finally, they were acknowledged the right to be considered heads of the family. Access to citizenship, at least from a legal perspective, was indeed a revolutionary conquest, because almost until the end of the 60s of last century, Portuguese married women were not heads of the family, needed a work permit from their husbands and could not leave the country without their permission; moreover, husbands were legally entitled to open their wives' private correspondence.

This obvious situation of inferiority, among others, of the Portuguese women in relation to men had a strong educational reason, because, on the one hand, within a considerable universe of illiteracy like the Portuguese, women composed the greatest percentage of illiterate people, and, on the other hand, their systematic access to all

levels of education was slow. Only in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century did it have a relevant qualitative difference.

In the 70s of last century, the creation of the *Condição Feminina*, which turned into an institutional organization for equality among sexes, contributed for the production of knowledge and divulged ideas that, slowly, opened the social imaginary to a new way of understanding social relations of gender. But, the study undertaken by Lígia Amâncio (1994) about the representations of the feminine and the masculine in Portuguese society reveals an essential symbolic asymmetry against women and a high stereotypy.

In order to assess the important inventory in Portugal about the questions normally called 'gender', we have to take into consideration the bibliographic repertoire organized by Regina Tavares da Silva (1999) that collects bibliographic information between 1518 and 1998 and the recent database of Women's Studies, organized by Patrícia Mendes, under the supervision of Teresa Joaquim that prolongs and develops the work done by Regina Tavares da Silva. As far as commented information and critique about the extension of Gender and Feminist Studies in Portugal is concerned, the *Ex aequo* journal, a Journal of the Portuguese Association of Women's Studies, edited on a regular basis since 1999, in its numbers 5 and 6 from 2001 and 2002 respectively, trace an overall picture of the development of such Studies, in the different areas of knowledge and of cultural activity in general.

Any of the three sources referred above accounts for the growing importance, mainly

from 1980s onwards, that the gender and feminist questions have had among us, an importance that can be measured, among other aspects, by the number of academic works, mainly Master Theses, but also Doctoral, as well as the number of Scientific Meetings that are annually convened all over the country. One has to stress, though, that the implementation of Gender or Feminist Studies in the university is still weak. It is mostly done within optional curricular units offered at graduate or postgraduate level. In the Faculty of Letters of the University of Coimbra there is a Doctorate in Feminist Studies, supervised by Irene Ramalho and in the Open University there is a Master's in Women's Studies supervised by Teresa Joaquim. The University of Évora, partner in the WINNET 8 Project, as stated before, created in 2004 a Master Degree in Education called *Questions of Gender and Education for Citizenship*, supervised by Fernanda Henriques. It has had two editions with the outcome of 10 theses whose themes centred on the following thematic axes: citizenship and politics; education and citizenship; education and discrimination; citizenship and poverty. The Master's in Philosophy of the same University offers an option called Ethics, Gender and Citizenship.

It seems hence fundamental to strengthen the academic importance of Gender and Feminist Studies so as to achieve a multiplying effect of the educational processes and through them to intervene at the level of daily practices, deconstructing former representations about the humanity of women and men.

## References

*Ex aequo*, Revista da Associação Portuguesa de Estudos sobre as Mulheres, nº5 (2001).

*Ex aequo*, Revista da Associação Portuguesa de Estudos sobre as Mulheres, nº6 (2002).

Rosa, Cobo, *Fundamentos del pratriarcado moderno*, Madrid, Cátedra, 1995.

Fernanda Henriques, “Rousseau e a exclusão das mulheres de uma cidadania efectiva”, in M<sup>a</sup> Luísa R. Ferreira (org.) *O que os filósofos pensam das mulheres*, Lisboa, CF-UL, 1998, pp. 171-190.

Geneviève Fraisse, Versão castelhana, *Musa de la razón*, Madrid, Cátedra, 1991.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Œuvres Complètes*, Paris, Gallimard, 1969, tomo IV, p. 448.

Lígia Amâncio, *Masculino e feminino. A construção social da diferença*, Porto, Afrontamento, 1994.

Regina Tavares da Silva, *A Mulher. Bibliografia Portuguesa Anotada*, Lisboa, Cosmos, 1999.

<http://acidadedasmulheres.blogspot.com/2011/03/base-de-dados-em-estudos-sobre-as.html>