

**THE WORK OF TEACHERS IN TIMES OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC:
PROBLEMS AND CONSTRUCTIONS OF TEACHING AND CARING IN THE
DOMESTIC SPHERE IN PORTUGAL**

***O TRABALHO DAS PROFESSORAS EM TEMPOS DE PANDEMIA COVID-19:
PROBLEMATÍCAS E CONSTRUÇÕES DA DOCÊNCIA E DO CUIDAR NA ESFERA
DOMÉSTICA EM PORTUGAL***

***EL TRABAJO DE LAS PROFESORAS EN TIEMPOS DE PANDEMIA COVID-19:
PROBLEMAS Y CONSTRUCCIONES DE LA ENSEÑANZA Y EL CUIDADO EN EL
ÁMBITO DOMÉSTICO EN PORTUGAL***

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ABSTRACT: Throughout history several pandemics have been experienced. However, the current covid-19 disease has caught societies and individuals off guard, leading to social isolation and the experimentation of new work situations, such as distance learning. Since teaching is a feminized profession, in Portugal, in this article we tried to discuss the consequences for female teachers of the double journey at home, accumulating work and family care, which is part of a general logic of neoliberalism. However, we found that despite some changes in legislation and in daily life regarding gender equality, it has essentially fallen to women to take care of their children and younger daughters or older parents. Therefore, in daily practice, there is still a way to go in the teaching profession to effectively lead to gender equality and inclusion for the citizenship of all people.

KEYWORDS: Pandemic. Teaching. Female teachers. Distance education. Caring. Gender equality.

RESUMO: *Ao longo da História foram vividas várias pandemias. Contudo, a atual doença covid-19 apanhou desprevenidas as sociedades e as pessoas individualmente, levando ao isolamento social e à experimentação de novas situações laborais, como no ensino a distância. Sendo a docência uma profissão feminizada, em Portugal, neste artigo procuramos discutir as consequências para as docentes da dupla jornada em casa, acumulando o trabalho laboral e o cuidar da família, o que se insere numa lógica geral do neoliberalismo. No entanto, verificámos que apesar de algumas mudanças na legislação e no quotidiano sobre a igualdade de género, coube essencialmente às mulheres o cuidar dos filhos e das filhas mais pequenas ou dos progenitores mais velhos e velhas. Logo, na prática diária, há*

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um percurso ainda a fazer na profissão docente que conduza efetivamente à igualdade de género e de inclusão para a cidadania de todas as pessoas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Pandemia. Docência. Professoras. Ensino a distância. Cuidar. Igualdade de género.*

RESUMEN: *Varias infancias se han vivido a lo largo de la historia. Sin embargo, la actual enfermedad covid-19 ha pillado a las sociedades y a las personas despreocupadas, lo que ha llevado al aislamiento social y a la experimentación con nuevas situaciones laborales, como el aprendizaje a distancia. Dado que la enseñanza es una profesión feminizada en Portugal, en este artículo tratamos de discutir las consecuencias para las profesoras del doble viaje en el hogar, la acumulación de trabajo y el cuidado de la familia, que forma parte de una lógica general del neoliberalismo. Sin embargo, hemos encontrado que a pesar de algunos cambios en la legislación y en la vida cotidiana sobre la igualdad de género, depende esencialmente de las mujeres cuidar a sus hijos e hijas más pequeños o a los progenitores mayores. Por lo tanto, en la práctica diaria, todavía hay un camino por hacer en la profesión docente que conduzca efectivamente a la igualdad de género y la inclusión para la ciudadanía de todas las personas.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Pandemia. Docencia. Profesoras. Enseñanza a distancia. Cuidado. Igualdad de género.*

Introdução

Hegemonic neoliberalism, along with theories of the information and knowledge society and theories of flexible rationalization, constitute the three driving forces that have been shaping work in the current regime of capitalist accumulation that Harvey (1989) called “flexible accumulation”, which constitutes the system's response to its structural crisis and in which the destructive nature of capital (Mészáros 1996) deepened. This destructiveness, which constitutes the norm of the “antisocial metabolism system of capital” (ANTUNES, 2020, p.12), manifests itself in several dimensions, from the environmental to the economic, passing through the social, in the latter particularly affecting work and the employment, which are degraded, devalued and dehumanized.

At the same time, based on the premise that “less state is better state”, a fact for which “there is no alternative”, as Margaret Thatcher once said, a process based on several pillars was initiated. In the economic domain, the State withdrew, which is observable either through the abandonment of productive activity, through privatization processes or the reduction of public investment, or through the self-weakening of its regulatory capacity. In the social domain, there was the *commodification* of its social functions (turning it into a commodity),

the decrease in the number of workers in the public administration and a profound transformation of social work relations in the public sector.

Basically, as Wacquant (2003) highlights, in the wake of Bourdieu, states end up replacing their “left hand”, relative to public education, health, social security and housing systems, which had expanded during the phase of monopoly capitalism, as yet another appeasement mechanism for the class-that-lives-from-work (ANTUNES, 2009), by its “right hand”, that is, by its repressive apparatus. The economic state is removed; the welfare state is dismantled and the penal state is strengthened (WACQUANT, 2003, p. 76). A Darwinian state is born that fetishizes competition and acts unilaterally, using its “iron fist”.

In more recent years, with the ultra-neoliberal, and within the framework of austerity policies, this program of “spoliation of the State”, as it was called by Petrella (1996) or of “methodical destruction of collectives”, in the words of Bourdieu (1998), deepened, inducing an even more extensive transformation of social labor relations. Education was one of the hardest hit sectors.

To complete the perfect storm that has been hitting the world of work, in December 2019 a new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) was detected in China and quickly spread through that country and the world, leading the WHO (World Health Organization) to declare on March 11, 2020 that the resulting covid-19 had reached the level of a pandemic. Thus, we enter a context that Antunes (2020) calls “pandemic capitalism”, where the previous tendencies of destructiveness of a system that is by nature autophagic are intensified.

Throughout history, we know the written and oral reports of pandemics that devastated families and societies, causing serious damage to economies and social crises, from East Asia to Europe (Eurocentric spaces at the time). Just think of the Black Death, in the Middle Ages, originating in Asia and which reached all of Europe, and would return punctually in the following centuries, to pneumonic, right after the First World War, plagues that always killed thousands of people regardless of social class. in which they were inserted (SNOWDEN, 2020).

The main objective of this article is to identify and discuss the consequences of the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on the lives of teachers and their households in Portugal, since February 2020. As we will see, teaching is a predominantly female profession. from a feminist perspective, to assess the consequences of the pandemic on the working life of women teachers and, by extension, on their relationship with their families, verifying gender equality in these households.

Currently, in education, there are several objectives requested from public and compulsory schools up to the age of 18 – literacy, universal programmatic skills, equal access to learning, education for citizenship and the inclusion of all children and young people, regardless of their contingencies. physical or mental (Ministry of Education, “Learnings of students leaving secondary school”, 2018-2019). This situation of inclusion is also foreseen in University education, with the inclusion of young people with some degrees of disabilities.

As throughout the world, the Covid 19 pandemic spread in Portugal, from the beginning of 2020, with governments decreeing the confinement of populations, in order to limit the spread of the disease. People who considered themselves to have essential professions related to health, policing, food, transport and communications remained active. As a result, schools and universities closed for long periods, in part or in all of 2020 and from February to May 2021. Thus, much of the teaching and learning began to be carried out at a distance, using digital platforms. These situations interfered in the scope of pedagogy and socialization of children and young people and of the teachers themselves.

The article is structured in five points that we consider vital for this reflection on the work of teachers in distance learning. In the first point, we aim at a general reflection on the situation of the teaching problem in Portugal, at all levels of education. The second point focuses on the feminization of the teaching profession, a situation that has progressed throughout the 20th century, starting from daycare centers and primary and secondary education, and is now a predominantly female profession. In the third point, we will approach the trajectories that have been outlined by the teachers in distance learning or accumulating face-to-face classes with telework. gender, in a time of new experimentation in education. In a fourth point, we intend to identify and discuss this articulation of the double shift, at home, of the work functions of the teachers accumulated with that of family caregivers, in the domestic sphere. Finally, in the fifth point, we will try to find out if the pandemic brought new power to teachers as agents of education in the opinion of the population, or if, on the contrary, they were weakened by the performance of the profession.

We relied on recent existing literature on the pandemic context and used semi-structured interviews and document analysis as observation techniques. The twenty-five interviews were conducted with teachers of all levels of education, from pre-primary to university, in July 2020, by phone or in person.

This study, conceived from a feminist perspective, has the limitation of being, however, Eurocentric and white, since the teachers we contacted fall within this identity. The

identification of this characteristic, which will not be studied in this article, will allow us to question the reasons for “whiteness” in teaching or discrimination due to socioeconomic racialization, which still does not allow other identities, such as black and gypsy populations, to access the professions that pass through the exit of universities.

We conclude that, nowadays, this accumulation of work tasks and care in the family space is part of neoliberalism that deprives working time of its real value. It also evokes work at home in proto-industrial societies, in which work carried out as a family was not accounted for by a regulated schedule, as in industries and workshops, from the industrial period onwards. In this era of pandemic, women were penalized in the context of current capitalism, due to the increase in the workload of working hours, some had salary penalties, and they remained (as always) family caregivers, in relation to their professional colleagues, which demonstrates gender inequality in most female teachers' households. Also, the work in the area of gender equality and inclusion that was carried out in schools was greatly conditioned by electronic tools and the participation of people specialized and carrying out activities in these areas (OMGs or government departments).

The teaching profession in Portugal

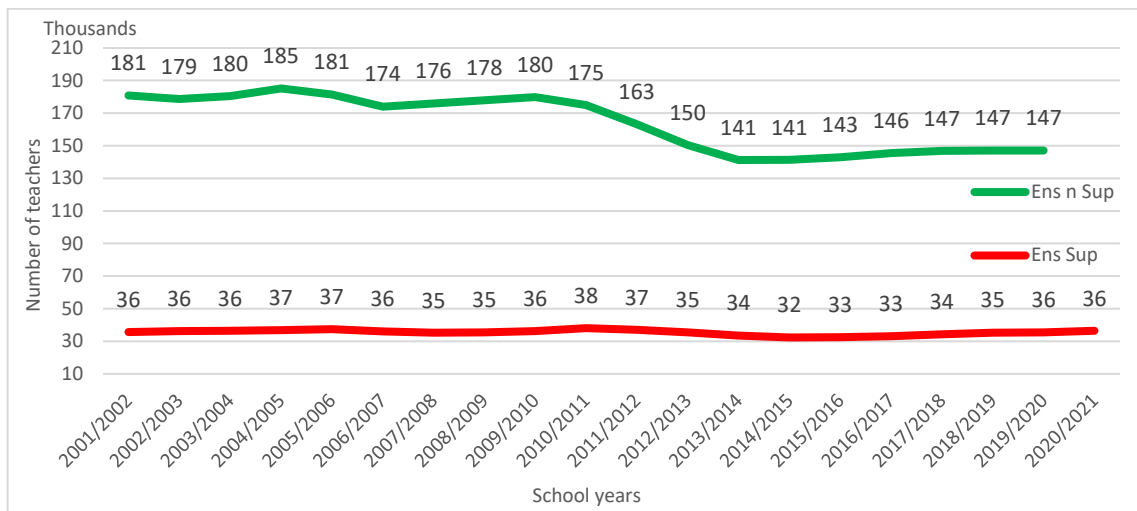
In recent decades, changes in Portuguese public administration have been profound (DUCATTI; ALVES; SOUZA, 2020; ALVES, 2016;). First, with the imposition of the New Public Management concepts aimed at the convergence of the social work relations of this sector with the type of relations in force in the private sector, in order to guarantee the fulfillment of the goals of the Stability and Growth Pact defined by the European Union. Subsequently, due to the international financial crisis and the subsequent intervention of the *troika*³. These changes profoundly affected the education sector, which is essentially public, with consequences in terms of a decrease in the number of teachers, particularly in non-higher education (International Standard Classification of Education ISCED levels 0 to 4), in salaries and in careers.

Since the 2005/2006 school year, the Portuguese education system from pre-school to secondary education has lost more than 38,000 teachers (of which more than 33,000 during

³ Following the international financial crisis that began in 2008, the liquidity crisis and the difficulty of accessing international financial markets due to the downgrade of the Portuguese Republic's rating, led the Socialist Party government led by José Sócrates to sign a “Memorandum of Understanding”, to be in force between 2011 and 2014, with the *troika* constituted by the IMF – International Monetary Fund, the ECB – European Central Bank and the European Commission. Extremely harsh austeritarian policies were then imposed on Portugal.

the troika's intervention period), despite a very slight recovery from the 2015/2016 school year. In higher education (ISCED levels 5 to 8), the trend is similar, although much more attenuated (Graph 1)⁴⁵.

Graph 1 – Evolution of the number of non-higher education and higher education teachers in Portugal between the academic years 2001/2002 and 2020/2021



Source: DGEEC – Directorate-General for Education and Science Statistics

Tracing the profile of teachers in Portugal necessarily implies making reference to two aspects that are central: the feminization of employment and the aging of the teaching staff.

Concerning the first aspect, Table 1 shows us a very high rate of feminization of teaching employment, although it decreases as education levels rise. Women are not the majority in higher education despite the feminization rate having risen almost 5 percentage points over the last two decades (from 40.8% in the 2001/2002 academic year to 45.8 in 2019/2020 and 2020/2021). If higher education is still a male stronghold, on the other hand, pre-school education is a female stronghold, with women always representing more than 97.0% of the total number of teachers, even reaching values above 99.0% in some of the school years.

⁴This decrease is due to several factors, including the real demographic drop, but it is mainly due to the policy measures taken, where the chronic low financing of the system is looming; the reorganization of the school network, with the closure of numerous schools and the concentration of students in school groups; curricular changes, with an increase in the teaching load of some subjects and a decrease in others or even their suppression from the study plans; the reduction of zero hours; the increase in the size of classes; the increase in the timetable of the teachers of the 1st Cycle of Basic Education; and the retirement of thousands of teachers faced with a devaluation of the teaching career that we will discuss below, many of whom retire before retirement age despite suffering cuts in the pensions they will earn: of 14.5% due to the sustainability factor and 0.5% for each month of anticipation.

⁵The values in the chart are leased. In professional schools, whose data are not represented in the graph, the same trend is also observed, although more attenuated.

Chart 1 – Evolution of the feminization rate of the teaching staff (%) in Portugal, by level of education, between the academic years 2001/2002 and 2020/2021

School years	Elementary Education				Higher Education
	Preschool education	1st Cycle of Basic Education	2nd Cycle of Basic Education	3rd Cycle of Basic Education and Secondary Education	
2001/2002	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	40,8
2002/2003	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	41,2
2003/2004	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	41,9
2004/2005	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	42,0
2005/2006	98,1	89,5	77,6	79,1	43,0
2006/2007	97,2	89,8	78,1	80,3	43,2
2007/2008	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	43,2
2008/2009	97,4	86,9	75,5	77,5	43,4
2009/2010	97,3	86,6	75,2	77,2	43,5
2010/2011	98,7	86,3	75,1	76,1	43,7
2011/2012	98,6	86,4	75,4	76,5	43,8
2012/2013	98,9	86,1	76,9	77,7	44,0
2013/2014	99,1	86,1	77,8	78,4	44,0
2014/2015	99,1	86,2	78,3	79,1	44,4
2015/2016	99,1	86,6	79,0	79,8	44,5
2016/2017	99,1	86,9	79,6	80,3	44,3
2017/2018	99,0	86,7	79,8	80,5	44,8
2018/2019	99,1	86,9	79,7	80,4	45,1
2019/2020	99,1	87,0	80,0	80,7	45,8
2020/2021	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	45,8

Source: DGEEC – Directorate-General for Education and Science Statistics

Regarding aging, which has been worsening over the period under analysis, the latest available data show that, in the 2019/2020 school year, only 1.6% of non-higher education teachers were under 30 years old. (in private education, the situation is a little more favorable, since in the previous school year, its proportion reached 6.9%, against only 0.5% in public education), while 50.9% were 50 years old or older, with 14.7% were 60 years of age or older. In the 2013/2014 school year, only 36.1% of the teachers at these levels of education were over 50 years old and 3.5% over 60.

In higher education, the trend is also towards a deepening of aging, although with less seriousness when compared to other levels of education. In fact, in the 2020/2021 school year, 4.3% of the teachers were under 30 years old, compared to 12.8% in the 2001/2002 school year. On the other hand, the proportion of professors aged 50 years or older rose by 23.9

percentage points (from 22.9% to 46.8%), and that of professors aged 60 or over increased by 10.6 percentage points, while from 6.3% to 16.9% in the period considered.

In view of this situation of lack of rejuvenation of the teaching staff and the projections on the number of retirements that will occur in the coming years, the National Council of Education⁶ has been making recommendations to take measures to provide schools with more teachers. At the same time, studies have been carried out, such as the one in 2019, made at the request of parliament, where it was concluded that by 2030, 57.8% of teachers, which corresponds to 51,983 teachers, will retire, with 17,830 retiring. would retire by 2024, another 24,343 by 2029 and the remaining 9,810 between 2029 and 2030 (RODRIGUES *et al.*, 2019).

The consequence is already being felt, particularly in some disciplinary groups, with thousands of students being without classes for long periods every year.

More recently, another study (NUNES *et al.*, 2021), prepared at the request of the DGEEC, with the objective of diagnosing the need for teachers by 2030, estimated that by that year it would be necessary for 34,500 teachers/ them into the system. It so happens that the teaching profession is no longer attractive.

In its annual report, entitled State of Education for 2019, the CNE emphasizes that there has been a decrease in demand for teacher training courses, which are taught at Higher Education Schools, and that even though the number of vacancies has decreased, many remain unfilled. The report also notes that the entry grades for these courses are among the lowest among the entire offer of courses in higher education, which does not fail to raise questions about the skills of future teachers.

What is the reason for this loss of attractiveness of a profession that until a few decades ago was socially highly valued?

Certainly the explanation lies in the continuous devaluation that the profession has been suffering in recent decades and that makes those who are in the educational system look forward to retiring and those who are not opt for other professions.

This devaluation of the profession, which is transversal to all levels of education, predates the intervention of the *troika*, deepened with it, and was not reversed after its

⁶ O CNE – National Council of Education in the Portuguese acronym, is an independent body with a consultative nature that was created by Decree-Law n.º 125/82, of 22 April. It is made up of 61 members representing the government, schools, unions, employers' associations, parents' associations, other types of associations with intervention in the field of education, etc. Whoever presides over it is elected by parliament. It is responsible for carrying out studies and issuing opinions and recommendations on educational policy, either on its own initiative or at the request of Organs legislative and executive bodies.

departure, manifesting itself in the precariousness of the employment relationship of those trying to enter the system. ; by the wage freeze, if not by cuts in wages, as happened during the troika period; by the freezing of careers in basic and secondary education and by obstacles to progression (close to 5 thousand teachers are held back in accessing the 5th and 7th levels, due to the lack of vacancies, so they will hardly ever reach the 10th level, the top of their careers) ; by the growth of bureaucratic work and the intensification of teaching work due to the increase in the size of classes and/or the number of classes to teach; by an evaluation of the teachers' performance that is not oriented towards an effective improvement of the quality of teaching, but rather aims to prevent career progression (two thirds of the teachers being evaluated will not be able to obtain the classification of Very Good or Excellent , even if that is its classification, due to the implemented quota system); due to the lack of social recognition and, in particular, of the public authorities.

During the troika period, in addition to salary cuts, the right-wing government in office at the time, which intended to “go beyond the troika”, as Prime Minister Pedro Passos Coelho then stated, decided to freeze the time of service of non-higher education teachers in 9 years, 4 months and 2 days. It's as if they haven't worked all this time, which has consequences for their careers.

With the change in the political cycle in 2015, substantiated by the replacement of the right-wing government by another of the Socialist Party, with the parliamentary support of two parties to the left of the PS, teachers and their representative organizations had hope that this process of devaluation of the profession was reversed. Despite the replacement of salary cuts, the PS government refused to fully recover the frozen service time, imposing in October 2018, unilaterally, the recovery of only 2 years, 9 months and 18 days, so there are still 6 to recover. years, 6 months and 23 days of service time actually provided and not counted. To this fact, the teaching union movement, which is quite fragmented ⁷, reacted by creating a platform that brought together the vast majority of unions ⁸. A vast repertoire of forms of collective action (TILLY, 2006) was used: strikes, demonstrations, vigils, lawsuits, etc. Currently, the conflict remains open.

The pandemic, being a public health problem, quickly spread to the economic fabric, causing a crisis in the labor market, which, however, is unevenly distributed, as shown by

⁷The teaching union scenario in Portugal is composed of 5 federations and 28 unions, and this fragmentation is due to the existence of different political lines and different statutes.

⁸ The platform brought together 22 of the 28 unions. Only three unions did not integrate it, the same happened with three unions with jurisdiction in higher education, since their careers are different.

several studies (CALEIRAS; CARMO, 2020; CALDAS *et al.*, 2020; MAMEDE *et al.*, 2020; SILVA *et al.*, 2020a; 2020b). It has reinforced the already existing high levels of unemployment and underutilization of the workforce, as well as further degrading the conditions in which work is performed, and it is far from over. According to a recent ILO report, the employment deficit will still reach 75 million in 2021 and 23 million in 2022 (ILO, 2021). At the same time, the pandemic has also become a laboratory for experimenting with new ways of working. Hence the explosion of Uber - like work, telework and distance learning. As a result, old social inequalities are joined by new ones.

In Portugal, all indicators point to a significant impact of the pandemic in several areas. According to a document from the National Statistics Institute (INE, 2021), with regard to the labor market, the employed population fell by 2.1% and hours worked had a significant reduction of 14.9%. The impact was not more profound due to the emergency mechanisms implemented, of which the simplified lay-off stands out, along with other measures aimed at protecting employment. Its destruction was uneven, particularly affecting precarious and low-paid jobs. In the second quarter of 2020, 22.6% of the employed population was “always or almost always” in telework, the highest value recorded since the beginning of the pandemic crisis. This means that around one million workers were in this regime, and the possibility of access to this form of work is also unequal. Various strata of the population lost income and poverty levels increased.

In the field of education, the pandemic “forced an abrupt transition from face-to-face teaching to distance learning” (SANTOS *et al.*, 2021). This takes place within a framework of several structural deficits, given the insufficiencies in terms of the digital skills of many teachers, particularly the older ones; the obsolescence of many equipment; difficulties in accessing computers and the Internet for a large part of the population, given the socioeconomic conditions.

The migration to digital has worsened the working conditions of many teachers, placing new obstacles for them, having had a more negative impact on those who previously showed symptoms of extreme tiredness. Several studies have shown high levels of burnout among Portuguese teachers (GOUVEIA, 2010; VARELA; ROLO; AREOSA, 2018). This is, in fact, a professional category that is very vulnerable to this syndrome, since several factors that contribute to it are present in the teaching activity: high stress; heightened levels of responsibility across multiple planes; intensified work; devaluation of the profession. In

addition, the high feminization of employment, which subjects many women to a double working day.

Feminization in the teaching profession: Late age in motherhood and aging

In 2020, in Portugal, according to the indicators of the National Institute of Statistics, women were globally half of the working population, 49.9%, which means that women are, in percentage, on an equal footing with men in the labor market. However, statistics also show that the most precarious and unskilled jobs are carried out by women, and that they still do not reach the top of management and business careers, and in a situation of equality in their careers, they earn lower wages than those of their male counterparts (CITE, 2018).

In Portugal, fascism, called Estado Novo, took place between 1933 and April 1974, and until that time women were despised and dependent on men by the Civil Code, which was in force between 1867 and 1966, and by the Constitution of 1933, which defended the equality of women with men, except in biological and family matters, actually because they are women and potentially mothers (BAPTISTA, 2016).

The percentage of working women has always increased since 1960, with women accounting for around 36.6% of the active population in that year, and in 1974, 41.7% of the same. This increase from 1960 to 1974, between the beginning of the Colonial War in Africa (Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique) and the year in which the fascist dictatorship was overthrown and democracy was implanted in Portugal, is explained by the emigration and exile, mainly male, to Europe, due to the poverty of a country, essentially rural, the escape from the Colonial War, which mobilized about 900 000 thousand men, mainly the younger ones, uprooted from their villages and hometowns, and to fascism (ROSAS *et al.*, 2020).

If women have always been in the job market and in progression, this situation is clearly visible in teaching, as the percentages of female teachers have continued to increase since the beginning of the 20th century, especially in basic education. Interestingly, the girls from the popular and middle classes, to whom the families allowed a profession, were referred to teaching, nursing or social assistance, all professions related to care, considered the most favorable for women. In practice, it was the maintenance of the prevailing ideology in the working classes – women would have more appetite, agility and patience for the uniform rhythm of industrial machinery, the sewing machine and later the typewriter (GUINOTE, 2001).

As mentioned in the previous point, according to 2019 data from the Directorate-General for Statistics, Education and Science, education professionals account for around 77.9% of pre-university teachers, with the pre-school education sector having the highest feminization rates, 99.1% of early childhood educators. Only in higher education is the rate of female teachers lower, at 45.10%. This situation confirms the bottleneck in women's careers and the glass ceilings for women workers, visible in management positions and university and research careers (data from the European Institute for Gender Equality). On the other hand, it was found that for the year 2019, more girls were attending higher education, making up 54.14% of the total number of students enrolled in universities. This situation proves the difficulty of accessing or giving up on an academic career for many girls.

Still on a demographic level, in 2019 the average age of women at first child was 30.5 years (INE, 2021). The increase in the age of maternity is explained by several factors: extension of studies for girls after graduation, many of them undertaking masters or doctorates, later entry into the labor market, the explosion of precarious employment, which leads to postponing the constitution of families and their limited composition. In turn, the high payment of private daycare centers, since public daycare centers are limited and most are linked to Social Security, which selects and prioritizes families with lower incomes, leads to work options that still lead young women to dedicate family, to the detriment of professional careers.

On the other hand, in teaching there is, as demonstrated, an aging rate of the profession, in which data from the 2015/2016 Teacher Profile published by the Directorate-General for Statistics for Education and Science indicate that only 0.4% of male and female teachers are under 30 years old and most are over 50 years old.

In Portugal, the retirement age, without penalty, is, in 2021, 66.6 years (PORTUGAL, 2019). This retirement age has increased in line with the country's sustainability factor, which articulates average life expectancy with the balance of social security. Hence, despite the aging of the teachers themselves, many had to take care of their parents.

According to data from the Directorate-General for Health (updated daily), covid-19 infected more women in the 30-45 age group who remained in the labor market, in professions related to health, care in Homes, despite mortality of women was lower than that of men (SÁ, 2020). Some international studies have advanced the hypothesis that there is greater protection/immunity for women of childbearing age, due to female hormones (RABIN, 2020). people over 80 years of age, hence, at least in European and American

countries, a vaccination system has been set up in which people in this age group have priority, and in Africa the vaccination situation is still very far from what would be desirable!

In Portugal, there is an aging population or ageism, especially among women, who currently have an average life expectancy of 83.5 years. Ageism for women will be another interesting issue to discuss because it discriminates against them at a certain point in their lives; them becoming more wrinkled and they more “charming”, despite identical ages (WAY; SALES, 2021). In an oral testimony given by a 67-year-old woman who was taking a short walk with her companion of the same age, during a period of mandatory confinement, she heard her shout: “O old woman, go home”! Even in a pandemic period, the house is more feminine!

If the younger teachers felt the great burden of taking care of the youngest children who were at home, the older teachers redoubled their care for older and older parents, either with autonomy in their homes or living in institutions, called Homes, in which they were, as a rule, dependent or limited by the care and visits of their daughters

Distance learning: problematization of gender equality pedagogy in education

In Portugal, as a pedagogical support, the majority of teachers in basic and secondary education, after graduation, of 3 or 4 years, had two years of pedagogical training for teaching or a master's degree in education. Most had contact with active pedagogies, namely Jean Piaget, Paulo Freire, Maria Montessori, among others (NÓVOA, 2014).

Distance learning in education has changed this framework of active pedagogy, more personal, of socialization and interactivity, due to the use of platforms and communications made by emails. We asked ourselves if the digital platforms have reached all students in the same way, regardless of the social class to which they belong, allowing inclusion and gender equality, one of the components of the Citizenship and Development area, mandatory until the end of the secondary education (students aged 18).

In Portugal, since 1965, and officially extinct in 1984, there has been television education, the so-called "Telescola" or "Mediated Basic Education", daily on public television, aimed at students who lived in more remote places, in rural and suburban areas, which went up to the 6th year of the current Basic Education (children aged around 12 years old). At the time, it was considered a successful technological education, with the monitoring of students in school posts by monitors.

At an international level, there are scattered reports about the existence of professors who have taught classes by correspondence since the 19th century, the BBC broadcasting radio classes during World War II, and universities around the world having started distance learning, providing to male and female students, of their own volition, or due to specific conditions, to undertake university courses. In fact, on the part of a university professor interviewed, these courses taught using platforms require a rigorous selection and preparation of scientific materials and permanent contacts with students, precise guidelines and corrections of the work carried out (because the time to distance with each student has to be reduced), as well as a maturity on the part of students due to the discipline of the autonomous research work they have to carry out. In Portugal, the case of Open University of Lisbon, founded in 1988, is the only public university offering higher education at a distance. It should be noted that it was to this University that the first degree and master's degree in the area of Women's Studies is due, but in a face-to-face context. It was notorious on the part of the directors of Schools and Universities and guardians, mothers and fathers to denounce that distance learning did not work due to the main factors: not all students and students had access to computers, not all areas of the country were covered by the networks of telecommunications operators or had signals open to the population, and there was a risk of early school leaving (mandatory up to the age of 18 in Portugal).

We are also acquainted with the texts of the UN (United Nations), UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) and the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) the concern and recommendations so that in situations of wars, calamities and pandemics, children and young people must interact so that learning does not regress, there is a healthy socialization among peers under the watchful eye of adults with the skills to detect cases of abuse, aggression and even violations in the family or neighborhood.

Mandatory confinements led each household to stay together, contributing to the isolation of children and young people prevented from socializing among peers and from having natural physical activity, outdoors. For students, there was no equity in teaching, nor equality of opportunities, as defended in the Portuguese Constitution and in the Basic Law for Teaching, because distance learning had many limitations that weakened education..

Living with a family 24 hours a day, with little contact with the outside world, situations of greater tension and violence were foreseeable. Requests for help to the National Support Network for Victims of Domestic Violence increased between March 30 and June 7,

during much of a period of mandatory confinement. The Network received around 16,000 calls, 698 were requests for help and a total of 564 women victims of domestic violence were removed from their family homes (JORNAL EXPRESSO, 2020). It will also have prevented dynamics and activities in the areas of gender equality or on racist discrimination.

It is in this context that extreme right or fascist parties begin to proliferate and the arrival of their deputies to parliaments, as in the case of Portugal. by the government in relation to confinement, unemployment, which generated in sectors such as catering and culture (shows), workers “with an intermittent subsidy regime” (LAZZARATO, 2020, p. 17), but also with archives, museums and closed bookstores and of the coronavirus denialists, who came to speak out publicly against the mandatory use of masks. According to Francisco Louçã, “there is the intrinsic promise of total liberalization, the use of people as the last commodity” (LOUÇÃ, 2021, p. 171). This advance of the extreme right or fascism, still unimaginable a few years ago, led to sexism, to the contestation of feminism, to the attack on homosexuality, seen, in the last case as a disease, as defended at the time of the Estado Novo (FREIRE, 2020), as well as a throwback to long-proven scientific theories (such as the defense of the earth being flat!). In this pandemic period, the remnants of five hundred years of colonialism emerge, which is evidenced by racism in society (LANÇA, 2021) and in the greater violence and imprisonment of black people, as Angela Davis (1983) called attention in her book *Women, Race & Class*.

The double shift at home: work and caring

Historically, caring has always been mostly female. From the nurses, who were only able to marry after 1963, for the mission as the profession was perceived (SILVA, 2011) to the servants to serve (BRASÃO, 2012). Many servants ended up dying unmarried in the houses where they went to serve, almost children, as a rule originally from rural areas. Currently, they have been replaced by domestic, business and hotel maids, many emigrants of African, Brazilian origin and in smaller numbers from eastern countries, many of whom are unemployed due to the pandemic. These professions considered feminine were linked to doctors, mainly in the areas of gynecology, specialists in women's diseases, and teachers, during the Estado Novo, seen as inserted in a profession in line with women. Despite this, at the beginning of the Estado Novo, in the 30s and 40s, when teachers married they had to prove that their husbands' salaries were higher than theirs, due to the meager salaries they earned.

As noted earlier, the demographics of the population and the aging of the teaching profession demonstrate the challenges faced by the teachers who are the target of this study. There is, on the one hand, an extension of working hours with telework, which is more demanding, and at the same time the need to take care of the family, sons, daughters and parents, many and many living alone, often far from their daughters, increasingly aged, being the group most weakened by Covid-19.

In June 2010, by telephone or in person, we interviewed a universe of 25 kindergarten teachers, teachers of primary and secondary education and higher education, aged between 25 and 64: four kindergarten teachers, seventeen teachers of basic and secondary education and four higher education teachers. Eight teachers, about 1/3, live without a partner, or a partner in their household, but are primarily responsible for children who are younger or older than 18 years of age. One of them mentioned having to take care of a disabled child all day, because the father is a health professional. Eight teachers live in stable affective relationships, with sons and daughters, one of whom was pregnant at the time: she had medical leave during the entire pandemic period. We verified the existence of five teachers who live in affective relationships without children and four teachers who live alone, without sons or daughters. About 60% admitted that they had to take care of their fathers and mothers, as they were over 75 years old, and about 20% had their fathers or mothers in institutions, called Homes. We found that the teachers mentioned feelings of tiredness, exhaustion, stress, due to the articulation between professional and personal life, in the domestic space. To the classes taught by the platforms, the time of their preparation, the placement of materials on platforms, the correction of the works, the permanent sending and receiving of emails was added. They also had the perception that students often asked questions, electronically, more to be in contact with teachers. The greatest difficulties arose with teachers with younger sons and daughters, who had to provide more assistance, and those who had to support older and older fathers and mothers with food and medication. On the part of the teachers who live alone, there were, as a rule, feelings of loneliness, anguish and anxiety.

The non-separation of the work place from the family space seems to us to refer to the societies before industrialization, from the work at home carried out by the family. However, faced with the two confinements experienced from February to May in 2020 and 2021, it was the mothers who accused the difficulties of articulating remote work and caring for children, tasks that we concluded were still more in the hands of women. Neoliberal capitalist society was felt by the increase in working hours and the isolation of teachers in terms of labor claims

and more distant from their unions, despite, for example, the FENPROF (National Federation of Teachers made up of seven Unions on the continent, archipelagos from the Azores and Madeira and abroad) to have kept in touch with all the professors and associate professors.

Distance learning: The power of female teachers or their weakening as workers

Distance learning was taught at all levels of education. The youngest children, who attended elementary school, were in front of computers, initially with the help of their fathers and mothers. Gradually, new technologies and access to new platforms began to dominate. Secondary and higher education students globally already mastered these technologies.

There are two perspectives, two angles, in the perception of distance learning. For the students, computer interaction sought the appearance of being in the classroom. In many cases it was the school that provided the computers, in other cases there was a sharing of computers in the family, as well as the work and study places deferred from their own room to the living room or kitchen, places shared with other people in the family.

For their part, as a rule, the teachers worked in their office, but knowing that they were scrutinized, at times, by members of the students' families. There were some reported cases in which families interfered in online classes, drawing attention to teachers for the methodologies used, opposing the attention of students, and even the satire on social networks about situations that occurred in distance learning.

Teaching, which is inherently a dynamic and formative pedagogical and scientific profession, focused on learning, debates, presentation of works and discussion of the same, suddenly found itself with many limitations in the methodologies and materials to be applied. The debates took place, but required a great deal of preparation and moderation on the part of the teachers for the students to remain in the sessions and also to comment on the themes.

Added to all the invisible work (which seems to continue the hidden domestic work of women: preparing classes, placing materials on platforms, sending and receiving emails, correcting assignments, even conducting online tests), with students placed in classrooms, which may or may not have privacy and diverse support, from people or technology.

This public exposure of the teachers' work and the invisibility of much of this work does not seem to have contributed to the empowerment of teaching, in general, and in some cases contributed to the weakening of workers, especially those who are in charge of younger children. . It was common among the population for fathers and mothers, also in telework, to refer that they were unable to work because they had to support their sons and daughters at

home, presupposing an attempt to disregard the need for children to stay at home, as they thought that these were neither affected nor carriers of the coronavirus, so they defended the opening of daycare centers and basic schools.

Final remarks

This article focused on the work of teachers in times of the COVID-19 pandemic, in Portugal, and their problems due to the combination of work organization and family care, in the domestic sphere.

In this study, an intersectionality of gender and identities is not possible; since all the teachers interviewed are white and assumed that they were heterosexual.

It is worth noting the great inequality in the overall work of women in the context of covid-19 in relation to that of men. Women were more overwhelmed, accumulating paid work and caring for the family, a situation expressed by the interviewed teachers. In the general population, more women lost income, because in many companies they were the ones who stayed at home with their youngest sons and daughters, during mandatory teleworking, receiving only 60% of wages. Effectively, it was the teachers with younger children, followed by those with older and older fathers and mothers, who were most affected by situations of anxiety and stress.

Gender inequality remained in distance education, with great difficulties for women in reconciling professional, family and personal life. The working day was extended by spending more time on the platforms and by the permanent contact in sending and receiving emails, which highlights the prevailing neoliberal society that despises the stipulated working hours, which no longer obeys collective employment contracts. People have become extensions of machines in permanent work, in an aggressive mechanization system and with different hiring.

There was also reference to hostilities, doubts about professional credibility and intimidation of parents and guardians who attended classes and intruded, which caused emotional instability in some teachers. Anxiety was added to the uncertainty due to the situation experienced, difficulty falling asleep and fatigue that led to the use of medicines and anxiolytics, at a time when the SNS (National Health Service) gave priority to patients with COVID.

We conclude in this work that although the female gender predominates in teaching, and these workers have remained in telework, maintaining the work of education has not

empowered women vis-à-vis the population, because they are judged to be more privileged for remaining in telework and not having lost Yield. We observed that they were made more fragile by the permanent exposure to families, who considered themselves competent to discuss the methodologies and pedagogies adopted. Within the framework of capitalist, neoliberal and sexist society, it was also the teachers who mostly maintained the functions of caring and with limitations in the enjoyment of their personal time, maintaining gender inequality in their households.

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