

PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES OF SENIOR MANAGERS TOWARD GENDER IN ACADEMIA

A comparative study from Portugal and Turkey

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This paper examines the inequalities of women's position in senior management in higher education in Portugal and Turkey. It also examines the perceptions that rectors (vice-chancellors)/vice-rectors have about gender inequalities in higher education institutions (HEI) and the potential attitudes they may have about institutional policies developed to eliminate these inequalities. A qualitative study was developed with 46 interviews conducted in both countries. The paper then explores senior managers' perceptions about gender inequalities in top positions in academia and the link between these perceptions and their attitudes concerning decisions to promote gender equality for senior managers in Portugal and Turkey. It concludes that in spite of the persistence of different obstacles for women working towards top positions in both countries, senior managers perceive universities as gender neutral, denying the importance of institutional policies and practices to change the situation.

Keywords: gender, higher education, rectors/vice-rectors, perceptions and attitudes

Introduction

Despite the ideal of universities, where equality and merit are endorsed as the main values, gender inequality still persists as a ubiquitous and omnipresent problem (Pritchard, 2007), as

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revealed by studies developed in different contexts (Bagilhole, 2000; Bagilhole & White, 2011; Rees, 2001; Sagaria & Agans, 2006; Kraiss, 2002; Leathwood & Read, 2009).

Although it may be true that women have been increasing their participation in higher education (HE) as students, the low number of women in top-level careers and their scarce presence in senior management positions do not support the enthusiastic vision of a feminised future (Leathwood & Read, 2009).

Several studies have been developed with the aim of understanding the difficulties that women encounter in the course of their careers, and in proposing actions that institutions should take to improve the situation. Studies concentrating on senior managers' perceptions, attitudes and roles in promoting equal opportunities are less developed. This study intends to advance the topic by analysing senior managers' perceptions of gender differences in their institutions and potential attitudes to overcome gender inequalities in Portuguese and Turkish higher education institutions (HEI).

Even if the persistence of gender inequality in universities has been gradually assumed as an important research topic within higher education studies, the literature in the field of gender and higher education is, as Morley noticed (2005), mainly concentrated on the west and, more precisely, on the Anglo-Saxon world. The exclusion of other national realities is an important gap that needs to be overcome in order to develop more knowledge on the way gender and gender relations are politically and socially constructed.

Following this logic, it is our conviction that perceptions of gender equality of senior managers in South European countries have not been scientifically mapped, and there is an absence of comparative studies. As so, the main objective of this paper is to contribute this research field by studying two South European countries: Portugal and Turkey. The rationale of the comparison between Portugal and Turkey is based on the fact that both countries have distinct gender systems. This is mainly due to social, cultural, and religious traditions. For instance, women in Turkey do not benefit from the same equal legal rights as in Portugal. The differences in those gender systems are particularly expressed in rates of female employment. In spite of these great differences and even though there are not similar academic structures, both countries have high levels of female participation in academia, even if they are less representative in senior leadership positions when compared with other developed countries (with the exception of women as rectors in Turkey) (Göransson, 2011).

Although the two countries have different levels of economic and social development, both have been assisting in the expansion of HE, in the increasing number of students and of public and private institutions. At the same time, increasing participation of women – along with the presence of horizontal and vertical segregation – has also been reported in the two countries in spite of the fact that neither has developed policies of affirmative action at the

organisational level. The number of women participating in HE is particularly relevant in Turkey. However, as opposed to what happened in Portugal, the modernisation and urbanisation process had led to a decrease in female employment.

This paper provides a contextual analysis, which presents the general social and economic profile of the two countries and the analysis of the HE systems in each. The analysis of HE system includes issues related with their structure and management and a brief description of the career pattern within them. Following this background, a brief explanation of the empirical work is given. Finally, the results are discussed and the main conclusions are presented.

1. Overview of the two countries

The position and situation of women in universities is inseparable from their position and situation in society at large. In developing their roles in the production of knowledge and research, universities perpetuate gender biases that are dominant in social systems, structures, norms and values. Portugal and Turkey have different social systems and different gender systems, which are a result of distinct historical and cultural routes.

Even if some initiatives started early in Portugal, namely with great improvements in education for girls in the first republic (1910), it was only with the 1974 democratic revolution that political efforts started to develop towards the promotion of gender equality in society (Monteiro, 2010). The situation improved, especially regarding legal rights, with women obtaining the same social and political status as men. Women received the right to vote without any condition in 1976.

In Turkey, attempts to promote gender equality started earlier. In 1923, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk started a series of reforms aimed at giving women equal status with men. His reforms enabled Turkish women to participate in the first municipality elections in 1930 and gain the right of representation in the parliament in the 1934 elections. However, that did not mean that the new perspectives on women were widespread or instantly and easily embraced by the majority of the population.

As a result of this political effort to promote equality, but also due to other factors – social, cultural, and economic development, and for Portugal, integration in the European Union (EU) in 1986 –, the situation for women in society changed. In Portugal, women's participation in the labor market has increased steadily since the mid-1980s, rising from 32.5% in 1985 to almost 40% ten years later (Cabral-Cardoso, 2004). In 2011, the participation rate of working men was 68.1%, superior to that of women at 55.7%, but nevertheless the unemployment

rate is always higher for women than for men (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2011). In 2011, the female unemployment rate (12.4%) exceeded that of men (11.9%) (INE, 2011).

In Turkey, the level of female labor force participation has been declining in the last 30 years from 48% in the 1980's to 27% in 2006 (Uraz, Aran, Hüsamoğlu, Şanalmiş, & Capar, 2010). According with the *2011 Global Gender Gap Report*, this rate decreased to 26% in 2010, ranking Turkey among the ten worst performers in economic participation. The reasons for this decline seem to be related with the migration of low-skilled women (who comprise 80% of the working population of all women) from the rural to the urban areas, the large gap in earnings for low-skilled women and men, the absence of affordable childcare for urban women and the traditional family values (Uraz et al., 2010). In fact, patriarchal ideologies along with religious influence are relevant explanations for the decrease in gainfully employed Turkish women (Gündüz-Hosgön & Smiths, 2008).

Women's presence in top positions is low in both countries. However, aligned with a greater participation of women in the labor market, in Portugal there is also a high percentage of women in these positions in public organisations. In Turkey, the representation of women in management in public companies is low, with women comprising just 3.9% of general managers, 6.6% of assistant general managers, 14.1% of heads of departments, 16% of managers and 27.3% of assistant managers (Tüsiad-Kagider, 2008). In Portugal, data from 2011 reveal that the percentage of women in top positions in public institutions was of 53.5% (DGAEP, 2012).

Today, the different situations of women in society in the two countries can be analysed based on data from the World Economic Forum. The global gender gap index (Table 1) shows some differences between the two countries, with a relatively large gender gap in Turkey. Large variations between the two countries are found in labor force participation by gender, as well as in the political representation of women in parliament. Fertility rates are also distinct, with Portugal closer to the EU average. The high fertility rate of many Turkish women, along with persistence of the traditional family ideology that positions women as the primary domestic workers, are relevant reasons for their low participation in the labor market (Gündüz-Hosgön & Smiths, 2008). Among other factors, national work-life balance policies can be an important variable to understanding this difference. In Portugal, female workers are entitled to four months of paid parental leave, or up to five months while receiving partial pay, which can be shared with a partner. In Turkey, the length of paid maternity leave is four months with recent changes in labor laws introducing paternity leave for workers. However, the ratio of wage equality for the same work is similar between the two countries.

TABLE 1
Gender profiles from Portugal and Turkey

	Portugal	Turkey
Female labor force participation ratio	69	26
Wage equality for the same work	0.56	0.58
Women in parliament	27	14
Fertility rates	1.40	2,10
Global gender gap index	35	122

Source: World Economic Forum *Global Gender Gap Report 2011*.

After this brief description of women's participation in the two societies, it is important now to reflect upon women's presence in the HE system of each country under analysis. The comparison between the two countries is particularly interesting because it contrasts/combines the case of a country with a low level of participation of women in the labor force (Turkey) with another (Portugal) with a high level. Even more important, women's rights in the two countries are also different, as Portuguese women experience more legal protection¹ and benefit from a more equalitarian environment.

2. Participation of women in higher education

In the Portuguese HE system, 1974 is an unavoidable date. It was with the democratic revolution, at this time, that a binary system was created and new public and polytechnic universities emerged in Portuguese HE, creating the pathways to a mass education system. From the mid-1980s, Portuguese HE experienced rapid expansion with the growing number of students vacancies (*numerus clausus*) in public institutions and with the proliferation of private institutions (Amaral & Teixeira, 2000). The number of higher education institutions increased from 4 to 118 institutions (47 universities, 65 polytechnic schools, and 6 military and police HEIs). Turkey, like Portugal, has experienced rapid growth in HE, with the number of universities increasing from 29 to 77 between 1990 and 2006 (YOK, 2006). Approximately three quarters of these are public universities with the remainder are mostly private foundation universities. In Turkey, there are currently 168 universities (103 public universities and 65 foundation universities).

¹ Even if the Turkish Penal Code has been revised due to the Europeanization process in order to meet the political aspects of the EU's Copenhagen criteria, it still reflects the Turkish society's gender-based inequalities. For example, the Turkish Penal Code allows rapists to go free if they agree to marry the woman they raped.

In both countries, the expansion of the system has been accompanied by feminisation. This phenomenon is a trend that has been identified in Europe, as well as in other developed countries (Bagilhole, 2000; Rees, 2001; Sagaria & Agans, 2006; Krais, 2002; Leathwood & Read, 2009). In Portugal, the substantive increase of student enrolments included high rates of women participation. In fact, the extraordinary increase in the number of students is mainly due to women. Out of the 269,989 students enrolled in 1993, 53.4% were women and in 2003/2004 this percentage increased to 56.2% (Observatório da Ciência e do Ensino Superior, 2004) and, even though it decreased in 2007/2008 to 54%, women are still the majority of enrolled students in HE (Gabinete de Planeamento, Estratégia, Avaliação e Relações Internacionais, 2009).

In Turkish universities women comprised of 45% of the students in undergraduate and graduate programmes in 2006. It is important to highlight that these women aspire to be part of a small elite of educated women. Gündüz-Hosgön and Smits (2008) identify three major groups of women in the labor market. The first are privileged, who come from middle or upper class family backgrounds, benefited from social changes in the country with good positions in the labor market and are distinguished by their different lifestyle. The second is a large group of uneducated women in the countryside whose daily lives have not yet been influenced by changes. And, between them, there is a third group of uneducated women who are fulltime housewives or work in low-paid jobs in the informal urban economy.

Women have increased their presence not only as students but also in the academic staff. However, before we can reflect upon the presence of women in the professoriate, differences between the career structures in the two countries must be highlighted.

In Portugal, in accordance with the existence of a binary system, there were also two different careers: one in the university (Decree-Law No. 448/79) and another in the polytechnic sector (Decree-Law No. 185/81). Recently, mainly due to economic recession, a new legal framework emerged that regulates the institutions of higher education (Law No. 62/2007) and professionals (Decree-Law No. 205/2009 – university – and Decree-Law No. 207/2009 – polytechnic). In both legal frameworks, «the university career drew on Humboldtian values with academics assuming three forms of responsibility: teaching, research and services to society» (Carvalho, 2012: 336). As the Portuguese interviewees developed their careers under the first legal framework, it is relevant to explain its main principles.

The academic career was highly hierarchical, with five categories, both in the universities – trainee assistant, assistant, auxiliary professor², associated professor, and full professor («cate-

² One of the main changes in the new legal framework was the elimination of the two initial ranks being the PhD, now the minimum qualification required entering into the career.

drático); and in the polytechnics – assistant (1st triennial), assistant (2nd triennial), adjunct professor, coordinator professor, and coordinator professor with «*agregação*»³. There are two career paths – with the existence of the legal figure of invited professor – of which only one carries security of tenure.

Promotion is dependent on credentials (in the university sector and on a tenure track, promotion is automatic by obtaining a masters degree or a PhD) but also on academic merit (assessed mainly by the number of publications). To be a full professor, it is necessary to have a post-doctoral degree («*agregação*») and to wait for vacancies determined by the state (in each step to the next rank) and to apply to a national competition in which the *curriculum vitae* is evaluated. The rector is elected from a group with representatives from stakeholders, the academic staff with a PhD, and students and administrative staff. Being a full professor is a prerequisite for the typical academic career path into senior management. In public HEIs, the payment brackets are equal for each level. Based on this, and contrarily to what happens in other countries (Sagaria & Agans, 2006; Bagilhole, 2000; Saunderson, 2002), there are no differences in academic criteria for promotion or even in the salaries of women and men in the same position in public HEIs.

In Turkey, both academic and administrative staff members in state universities have civil servant status and, except for research assistants and assistant professors, the academic staff has tenure. The number of academic and administrative staff posts allocated to each state university is determined by YOK (Turkish Council of Higher Education). Staff appointments at all levels are made exclusively by the universities themselves. The Higher Education Law No. 2547 only sets forth the minimum requirements for academic promotions and procedures to be followed in making appointments. For example, it explains the average number of articles published in prominent academic journals recognized by an evaluation committee appointed by the Turkish Council of Higher Education (YOK, 2007). In Turkey, YOK regulations on professional appointments are similar for both women and men academics, and for that reason, there is no formal gender discrimination in academic promotion (Özkanlı & Korkmaz, 2000a, 2000b).

In Portugal in 2007, there were 24,831 academics in public higher education institutions. Of these, 14,220 were men and 10,621 were women, meaning that the majority of academics in public HEIs in Portugal were men (57.3%). The presence of women is higher in the polytechnic sector when compared with the university (39% in universities and 48% in polytechnics⁴) (Carvalho & Santiago, 2008).

³ The «*agregação*» refers to an academic degree similar to the German «*habilitur*».

⁴ This is due to the fact that polytechnic schools have lower status, as they are concentrated in low cost and more vocational and professional oriented degrees, with very little or no research. This data is in line with the tendency,

In higher education in Turkey, there has been also a relatively high participation of women. According to the 2006-2007 data from the Student Selection and Placement Center (ÖSYM, 2008) in Turkey, approximately 40% of all professionals working in higher education are women. In fact, Turkey has a better situation for women in HE if one takes into account the low participation of women in the labor market. This may be due to the fact that, as Zeytinoglu (1999) noted, academic careers were historically and socially constructed and gender typed as «safe» and «proper» choices for educated women in Turkey. Academic careers have been considered harmonious with the potent image of «a respectful Turkish woman» (Özkanlı & White, 2008). This ideology effectively demarcated women's careers in «safe», «secure» and «esteemed» forms of professional employment (Healy, Ozbilgin, & Aliefendioglu, 2005: 253). Moreover, Özgüç (1998) suggested that traditionally male graduates pursued career opportunities offering better financial prospects outside of the university sector and, therefore, male graduates became increasingly uninterested in academic careers.

Like in almost all HE systems all over the world (Leathwood & Read, 2009; Morley, 2005), the analysis of the situation for women in HE in Portugal and Turkey also reveals the persistence of both horizontal and vertical segregation. Women are mainly concentrated in soft areas, such as humanities and arts, and are least present in hard sciences or engineering.

In Portugal in 2005, women comprised of 62.9% of academics in education; 54.1% in the arts and humanities and only 23% of academics in engineering (Carvalho & Santiago, 2008). In Turkey, women are best represented in language-based studies at almost every grade, and are least represented in engineering and technology. For example, in medical sciences and literature women comprise of over 40% of the academics, but in engineering and architecture they are only 30% (Sağlam, 2005). In Portugal, the percentage of women in early and middle careers is between 39% (trainee assistant) and 45% (assistant). But at the top, this percentage decreases to 32% (associate professor) and 22% (full professor) (Carvalho & Santiago, 2008). Women's representation in senior management positions is very low. Currently, there is no female rector and women represent 30.6% of vice-rectors and 31.4% of pro-rectors⁵. In Turkey, the representation of women in professoriate positions is significantly higher than Portugal (32% for associate professors and 28% for full professors) (YOK, 2009). Nowadays, in Turkey, 41.24% of all academics, 28% of all professors, 10% of all rectors and 7% of all vice-rectors are women (*ibidem*).

also detected in other contexts, for women to experience more difficulties in accessing the most prestigious and oldest higher education institutions (Rees, 2001; Stromquist et al., 2007; Bagilhole & White, 2005; Carvalho & Machado, 2010; Morley, 2005).

⁵ This data was gathered from the websites of Portuguese public universities. When the interviews for the project were made, there was a woman rector in one public university.

Despite the fact that women have increased their participation as students and also in the academic staff, the top management positions are mostly occupied by men. Different explanations have been offered to justify these low percentages of women at the top of the career path or in senior management positions, in spite of laws explicitly forbidding gender discrimination. The initial explanations were based on biology, namely, on the differences in women's and men's brains. Only more recently social justifications emerged in research about women in science (Amâncio, 2005). Different family roles are one of the most cited variables, however there is no general consensus on its effects. The maternity argument for keeping women away from the top positions has its limits because statistics show no great differences between countries that have child-care infrastructures and those which do not (Cole, Zuckerman, & Bruer, 1992; Fox, 1998; Xie & Shauman, 2003). Studies have been calling attention to institutional variables, namely the role of research structures (Fox & Ferri, 1992): e.g., the utilized promotions procedures (Brink, Brouns, & Waslander, 2006); the tendency to reproduce traditional stereotypes by giving more administrative and pastoral work to women (Nakhaie, 2002; Poole, Bornholt, & Summers, 1997; Poole & Langan-Fox, 1997; Sax, Hagerdon, Arredondo, & Dicrisi, 2002; Carvalho & Santiago, 2008; Carvalho & Machado, 2011); and a relationship between masculinity and power has also been identified (Acker, 1994; Carvalho & Machado, 2010; Hearn, 2001; Morley, 1999; Prichard, 2007), with women having more difficulties in entering men's networks (Kyvick & Teigen, 1996; Webster, 2001; Vázquez-Cupeiro & Elston, 2006; Perna, 2005; Conley, 2005; Oakley, 2000). It has been extensively explained in the literature that universities are organised according to male standards and norms that, inevitably, interfere in judgement systems (Hearn, 2001; Currie, Thiele, & Harris, 2002). This means that notions such as merit or career paths are, in fact, based on male life styles and priorities (Brooks, 2001; Currie et al., 2002; Hearn, 2001; Oakley, 2000; Davies & Thomas, 2002).

3. Methodology

This paper is part of a cross cultural project being undertaken by the Women in Higher Education Management Network, of women in senior higher education management (WHEM) in Australia, Ireland, New Zealand, Portugal, South Africa, Sweden, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. The aim of this research project is to analyse gendered organisational cultures and their impact on the representation of women in university senior management. In a more precise way, one can describe the research objectives as: to gain an understanding of women's representation and experience in senior management in the eight countries being studied.

The first phase of this research analysed women's representation in senior management in HEIs in the participating countries. The research found that representation was consistently low across most countries, especially at the rector/VR/president level. Sweden was exceptional, with higher percentages of women at all levels in senior management (Göransson, 2011), as can be seen in the next table.

TABLE 2
Percentage of women in senior academic positions in eight countries

Country	Rectors	Vice-rectors	Pro-rectors
Australia	18	36	40
Ireland	0	14	18
New Zealand	0	17	17
Portugal	7	27	16
South Africa	22	30	0
Sweden	41	35	55
Turkey	10	7	4
United Kingdom	8	6	21

Source: Göransson, 2011: 50-77.

When comparing data from Portugal and Turkey, it is relevant to note that even if these countries have considerable presence of women in the higher education staff, they are also amongst the group of those countries with lower female participation in management positions, with the exception of women rectors in Turkey, who represent 10%⁶ of the total.

In order to make these differences more comprehensive, a qualitative study was also developed. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of rectors and vice-rectors in public universities⁷. The interview procedure, which was the same for the two countries, was divided into three parts. The first cluster of questions was about entering senior management. The second cluster focussed on «performing» senior management requirements, and explored perceptions of how colleagues regarded them, how they worked with men and women in their management team, and if women had a different management style. The final cluster concentrated on the broader management culture. In Portugal, 22 interviews with

⁶ This high number of women in rector position may be due to the fact that rectors are appointed by the government and in the last years the Turkish government has made an effort to demonstrate to the European Commission its commitment to improving women's position in society.

⁷ In Portugal, private universities and all the polytechnic schools were excluded.

rectors and vice-rectors were conducted (nine men and 13 women) and 24 were conducted in Turkey (16 men and 8 women) (Table 3). Eight of the 24 Turkish senior managers were women. Turkish interviewees comprised six rectors, nine vice-rectors, and nine former vice-rectors. Eleven of the Turkish senior managers were from regional universities and 13 of the Turkish senior managers were from metropolitan universities. Twenty-two Turkish senior managers were from public universities, only two rectors (one female and one male) were from foundation universities and all, except for one, were face to face interviews. There was only one phone interview. All interviews, except the phone interview, were tape-recorded and summaries were made of each interview.

TABLE 3
Number of interviewed women and men rectors and vice-rectors

	Portugal		Turkey	
	Rector	Vice-rector	Rector	Vice-rector
Men	8	6	4	12
Woman	1	8	2	6
Total	9	13	6	18

The interviews ranged from 30 minutes to over two hours and provided a wealth of in-depth data that were analysed for content, based on which major findings were extracted, and these will be presented next.

First, the career paths of women and men in academia are analysed, and then the perceptions of gender inequalities by senior managers and their potential attitudes to overcome it are revealed.

4. Gender in academia: perceptions and attitudes of senior managers

Focusing on the content analysis of the discourse of Portuguese and Turkish rectors and vice-rectors on gender differences in senior academic management, findings were structured around three main issues: the paths for entering senior positions; perceptions of gender discrimination; and attitudes to promote change in gender balance in senior academic positions.

4.1. Career paths into senior management

In order to understand the reasons for the gender imbalance in senior management in higher education and to identify potential obstacle for women to enter these positions, interviewees were asked about their career paths. Rectors and vice-rectors were asked to identify important steps for reaching their present position and the main difficulties they felt along the way.

Neither in Portugal nor in Turkey did the majority identify gender differences in the necessary personal traits to develop senior academic management roles. In both countries, senior managers identified organisational factors as important steps to succeed in the career, such as: to have previously developed managerial roles, to be respected in the research domain by their peers, and to be «inside» the right networks. These factors were mentioned as important for reaching the top, both by women and men. As one male rector expressed:

During my academic life-time, I have performed many managerial roles. I was president of diverse national institutions with regulation responsibilities in research. Previously, I was a vice-rector and to be a rector is the natural consequence of this. Nevertheless, I usually say that it is fundamental to work hard to ascend into top positions, but it is also true that it is essential to have the support of the right person when it is needed, and I also had that. (PT man 15)

Along with developing previous managerial roles, specialised knowledge in management was also mentioned in Turkish interviews: «I must confess my academic specialisation, management, was definitely an asset» (TR man 10).

As vice-rectors are appointed by rectors, most women also referred to the importance of having previously worked in managerial duties with the rector. In this context, to take part in networking also emerged as equally relevant. Some interviewees said, for example:

To be in senior positions you need two different things: the merit, or personal value, and to be recognised by your colleagues. You can have merit but if you are not able to make it visible (...) you are never seen by the others. However, I think this is the same for women and men. (PT woman 22)

In a country such as Turkey, relationships are more influential and important than so called merit, my personal links (...) were the really important factors. (TR man 10)

The importance of having a solid research career to reach top positions was mentioned in the Turkish discourses – e.g., «you have to devote yourself to teaching and research before you become a rector» (TR man 12) –, but it was particularly highlighted in the Portuguese discourses: «I think that (...) a rector should be someone with high quality as a researcher. If the rector is not a good researcher, he has no moral authority to impose policies such as increasing research productivity» (PT man 3).

These analyses reveal the importance of distinct factors for obtaining senior positions that have been identified in the literature as disadvantageous for women. To have a valuable research career is not a neutral concept. It is recognised by different authors that what is valuable in knowledge production is also identifiable with hegemonic masculinity (O'Connor, 2007; Bagilhole & Goode, 2001; Brooks, 2001). The relevance of engagement in research and managerial activities is also a discussed issue in gender in higher education studies, even if without consensual results. Some classic studies emphasise gender differences in professional roles and academic work, with women giving priority to teaching and men to management and research (Poole & Langan-Fox, 1997; Poole et al., 1997; Sax et al., 2002; Nakhaie, 2002). More recent studies (Carvalho & Santiago, 2008), however, confirm that there are no significant differences in the amount of time women and men allocate to these activities. Nevertheless, to be a prestigious researcher and to have full professorship is, in our interviewees' opinions, indispensable to ascend to senior positions. In this context, a great number of women in academia are kept away from it just because they are less numerous in full professor positions.

The problem for women to enter into the «old boys' network» has been recognised as an obstacle for women in management in general (Oakley, 2000). It seems that higher education is not different and, in this context, women also have more difficulties in entering the circles of academic power (Kyvick & Teigen, 1996; Webster, 2001; Vázquez-Cupeiro & Elston, 2006; Perna, 2005; Conley, 2005).

After identifying these obstacles, the analysis proceeds with senior managers' perceptions.

4.2. Reasons for gender inequalities in top positions

Under the same logic as the majority not identifying gender differences on the necessary personal traits for developing senior academic management roles, the dominant discourse also lacks reference to barriers for women to reach the top. The dominant discourses emphasise the gender-neutral nature of procedures for recruitment and promotion and the importance of HEIs being ruled by the meritocratic culture. Most senior managers in Turkey and in Portugal stated that they had no difficulty moving into leadership roles and had been encouraged to apply by their rector/vice-rector.

When explicitly asked to identify potential barriers keeping women away from top positions in HEIs, the majority emphasised external factors related with the dominant stereotypes on society and the need women have to develop a multi-focus on career and family responsibilities. The obstacles most frequently cited for women to ascend to the top in HE careers are

identified, in both countries, outside of academia, such as marriage, domestic responsibilities, role conflict, and the culture of the country.

I think discrimination does not exist in universities. I think the problems are related with the dual roles of women: the familiar and the professional. The familiar roles withdraw opportunities for women to advance in their career when compared with their male colleagues. (PT woman 21)

This issue is universal, not specific to my university. The «dual life» of working women is always the main barrier for their career. (TR woman 4)

The women in Turkey referred specifically to the husband's role, revealing the persistence of a traditional division of labor in the private domain: «Classical family roles, giving birth, taking care of babies and so on, and the worst of all, being wives of terribly trained, overly expectant and over demanding Turkish husbands» (TR woman 10).

In referring to the presence of women in paid work, Gündüz and Smits (2008) have also sustained the importance of the husband's education and job in women's participation in the labor market, stressing the importance of family control over female labor.

The work-family relationship has been strongly developed in the literature as a reason that keeps women in low status in organisations (Kossek, Noe, & DeMarr, 1999; Acker & Armenti, 2004; Jacobs & Winslow, 2004; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Empirical studies previously made in Turkey and in Portugal emphasise its importance in academia (Santos & Cardoso, 2008; Özkanlı & Korkmaz, 2000a).

Özkanlı and Korkmaz (2000a) argue that the reason for low participation in academic management in Turkey is mostly the increased family responsibilities of academic women. In their studies, some academic women pointed out gender discrimination, while others said that they were not willing to take administrative responsibility because they accepted, internalized and reproduced the traditional social roles of women, and therefore prioritized the housewife and mother roles. Moreover, other researchers confirm these findings, sustaining that women avoid responsibilities that involve business trips and increased work load due to fear of not fulfilling their traditional roles (Acar, 1986; Köker, 1988; Ersöz 1998).

Santos and Cardoso (2008) found, in an empirical study developed in Portuguese universities, that both men and women faced difficulties in reconciling work and family. Nevertheless, these were primarily felt by women, particularly mothers of dependent children, due to distinct factors such as the preservation of traditional gender roles in the family, ineffective legislation, and a work-family culture classified as family-unfriendly.

However, if it is true that a work-family conflict exists, felt particularly by women, one can not ignore that there are other studies emphasizing that family variables contribute little or nothing to predicting the productivity of women's research (Toren, 1993; Perna, 2005; Sax et

al., 2002), based on which promotion is made on both countries. The political and social construction of a discourse highlighting the differences in family roles can also be interpreted as a way to deny, or make more invisible, the importance of organisational variables (Asmar, 1999; Ruth, 2005; Lafferty & Fleming, 2000). Authors such as Toren (1993), Perna, (2005), Conley, (2005), and Webster (2001) identified such professional variables as academic rank, salary, access to economic resources, orientation to research, research assistants' availability and desire for recognition as more important and influential in women's research productivity. In fact, some of these organisational variables were also highlighted in the interviews, even if in minority discourses, with special emphasise given to informal processes.

Knowing what I know today and thinking back, I must say that indeed there was some gender discrimination expressed in some envy and discomfort from male colleagues. Obviously these are not reflected positions, and sometimes not even perceived by them, but there is no doubt that it exists. I think that in situations with competition between us, it is not the same if you are a woman or a man. And it is worse as you go further in career; our male colleagues turn more unwilling, jealous and uncomfortable. (PT man 8)

If you are being promoted you have to take different tests. I passed them all. I was deputy Head of Department and now I am Deputy – Vice-President. My managers had to test me. It is a matter of capability and performance. I did not experience gender discrimination. (TR woman 7)

These discourses seem to confirm Morley's analysis that there are a «myriad of ways in which women are undermined and excluded from access to resources, influence, career opportunities and academic authority» (1999: 4).

Nevertheless, as we mentioned previously, the global tone in the interviews is one that denies gender influence in reaching top positions.

4.3. Attitudes toward gender balance in academia

When explicitly asked about the way people in top positions could help to improve the presence of women in HEI senior management, rectors, and vice-rectors in Portugal and Turkey were reluctant and absolutely against the introduction of effective formal gender equality programmes or even to any initiative in this domain. The reasons for rejecting affirmative action have to do with a set of social beliefs: the pipeline theory; the gender neutral processes of promotion in academic careers; and the meritocratic ideology.

The first set of beliefs is related to emerging dominant views that it is just a question of time for women to get into senior management in HEIs. And, as it was not necessary to develop these initiatives for women to be the majority in universities, it also would not be necessary for advancing their careers:

We do not need quota system or something like that. Women are capable of getting there on their own. (PT woman 11)

It is just to be patient and to wait 5, 10 or 15 more years and we will experience an inverse situation. (PT woman 12)

The second set of beliefs exhibits the conviction that discrimination does not exist in academia: «there is no gender in my work life. I am a manager. I do not feel any difference between male and female managers» (TR woman 2). In this context, affirmative action could mean, in the opinion of some of the interviewed, that some women would take advantage of it.

Finally, the third set of beliefs includes ascending to senior positions in a kind of «social Darwinism» logic. To enter senior management is interpreted as the finish line in academic competition and introducing other mechanisms could mean that selection would not be made based on meritocratic principles: «Ascending to the top is like the evolution of species – only the best can get there, and this could interfere with this principle» (PT woman 14).

Generally, Portuguese rectors and vice-rectors considered that they could influence the gender profile of senior management only by taking symbolic measures. Among them, the most cited was to appoint women to their teams. However, it is important to highlight that one rector mentioned more pragmatic reasons to have women on his team: it was a way to receive more votes from academic women in his institution.

With the exception of one woman, who was in favor of affirmative action policies in her institution, all the others referred only to symbolic initiatives like serving as role models or talking about the importance of gender issues in public discourses. «There is nothing that someone in my position could do about the current predominantly male management culture» (TR man 19).

Data analysis reveal that gender is far from being acknowledge by senior managers as a relevant variable in an academic career. Even if overt and covert discrimination is identified, it is never recognise by senior managers.

These empirical results reveal that in spite of the gender differences in the social systems of the two countries, the situation for women in higher education does not seem extensively different. The presence of women in higher education is high, but, in both countries, the phenomena of horizontal and vertical segregation are present. If it is true that discourses reveal difficulties for women to reach top positions that are described in the literature as overt and covert discrimination against women, this is not recognise by the men and women. In both countries, universities are perceived as gender neutral, which makes the idea of developing positive attitudes against women's discrimination unthinkable.

In Portugal, it is possible to sustain that in higher education one finds the same controversial situation as that of women in society. In fact, women's position in society or in higher

education is not due to women's emancipation but instead to social, political and economic circumstances (Ferreira, 1999).

The same seems to apply in Turkey. Even if the number of women in the labor market has been decreasing, there is a large amount of women in higher education. However, data reveal that the persistent influence of family in women's professional decisions, along with patriarchal ideology, are seen as greater obstacles for these women to reach the top.

These results are in line with the tradition of southern countries «where traditional attitudes and reluctance to introduce effective formal gender equality programmes have often prevailed» (Vázquez-Cupeiro & Elston, 2006: 601), in contrast with those countries from Northern Europe.

Conclusion

Despite the improvements in recent years, women's participation in higher education in Portugal and Turkey cannot be defined as equal. Women increased their participation in academic staff but are under-represented in some areas (such as technology and engineering) and in top management positions. The analysis of these two countries is particularly relevant since women in these HE systems have almost reached the parity in teaching, but, at the same time, they belong to the group of countries in which women are more under-represented in higher education management.

Academics with senior manager positions identify, in their own career paths, elements that are usually acknowledged in the literature as limitations to women's progress. However, they restrict what they see as obstacles only to social and cultural characteristics identified outside of academia. This is particularly relevant in Turkey where a patriarchal ideology seems to be more present. It was only in Turkey that the personal and familiar networks were referred to as an important element in progressing in the career.

The dominant perception of universities is one that considers these institutions as gender neutral and based on meritocratic principles. Universities are conceived as neutral organisations where men and women can succeed based on their merits. The dominance of assumptions of gender-neutral ideals along with the presence of a meritocratic ideology makes the «veiled» forms of discrimination even more invisible and, as a consequence, enables positive attitudes towards gender equality programmes in academia.

This may demonstrate that «many people working in universities are in a state of denial about how women are treated in most universities in the world» (Currie et al., 2002: 4), and also that actors with managerial responsibilities still look at universities as an ivory tower

(Benschop & Brouns, 2003). These responses illustrate that some senior academics are in complete denial of the existence of gender inequalities within universities.

However, this comparative study also reveals that women in academia are not a homogeneous group. There is a group of few women able to reach the top. A relevant question that seems to emerge is: who are these women who were able to get there? Does their socio-economic background have any influence? Can we expect that those who have high social and cultural capital are more able to break the obstacles than others? Can we find differences between countries with different levels of social and economic development in this respect? These are some of the relevant questions this study raises for further empirical studies in this area.

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