

Seminario, 26 de marzo de 2021 a las 16.00h
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Care as distributive agency: Immediate needs and struggles for worth in austerity Portugal

The global pandemic has highlighted the crucial role of care in enabling human flourishing capabilities and in sustaining economies and societies. In this talk, I explore care as a form of distributive agency within conjunctures of crisis. Based on ethnographic research undertaken in 2015 and 2016 in Setúbal, a post-industrial Portuguese town, I examine the multiple caring labours and efforts of working-class women in austerity Portugal to act upon household impoverishment and destitution. I show how feminized care networks and caring practices enabled the transfer, circulation and allocation of material livelihood resources and claims making instruments, thereby promoting and sustaining the agency needs of those being cared for. While a significant tendency in welfare theory tends to link the development of agentic dispositions to the expansion of people's capabilities for freedom and autonomy, the specificity of the modus operandis of care as distributive agency resides in grounding and sustaining people's agency needs of livelihood conditions of being and possibilities of becoming by nurturing their abilities of interdependence, relationality, obligation and affect. Distributive agency operates not by the expansion of substantive freedoms alone but also through the development, sustenance and maintenance of substantive networks of care and sociality, which secure the circulation and allocation of various kinds of personal and collective agency resources enabling the material autonomy of recipients as well as their capabilities to make claims and articulate the legitimacy of their entitlements. I suggest that approaching care as a form of distributive agency enables to envision the political potentials of care in rethinking collective life towards constructing a better post-covid world.