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*Manuela Silva (1932-2019): a
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Manuela Silva (1932-2019): a humanistic approach to economics in Portugal

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Abstract

Manuela Silva (1932-2019) was a remarkable Portuguese economist, the first woman to obtain a degree in modern economics from a Portuguese university (in 1954, with the highest grade), the first woman to teach economics in a Portuguese university, and a very dynamic progressive economist, well-known in the country for her deep concern with common good, social justice and development, and for her vast and long experience in several domains of real-world applied policy, in particular social policy areas and planning. In this seminar I will provide details on Manuela Silva's life and work, will put her contribution to Portuguese economics in context, and show how relevant were her catholic beliefs, values and ethical principles for a humanistic way of doing economics.



Manuela Silva
(1932-2019):
a humanistic approach
to economics in
Portugal

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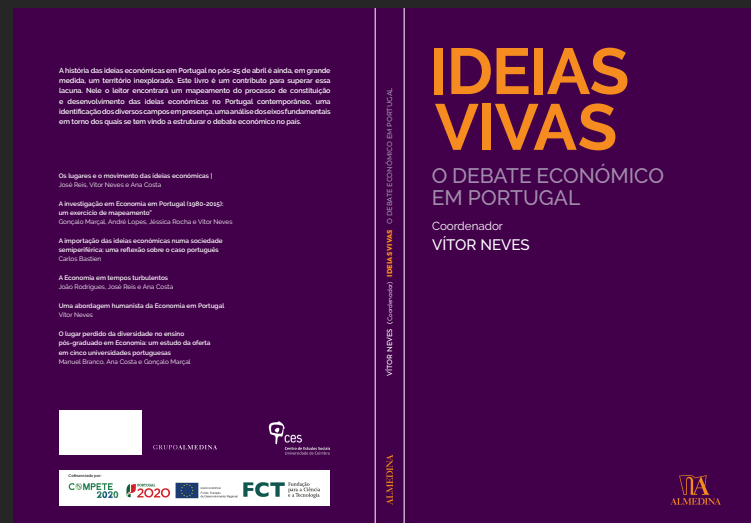
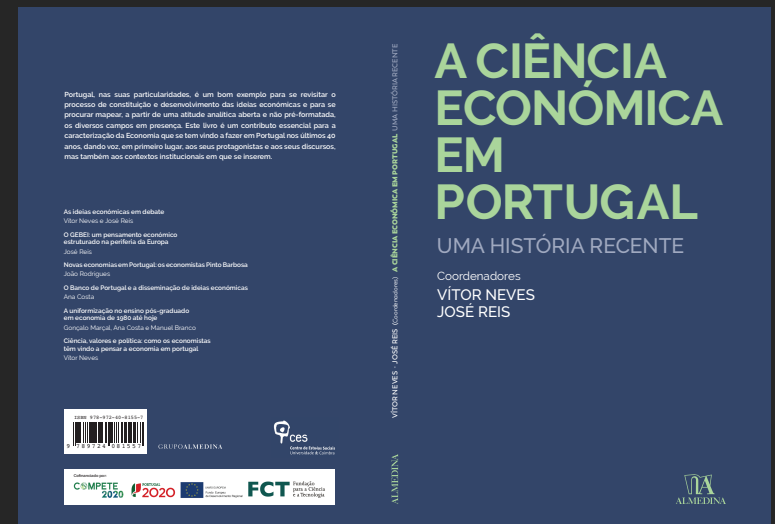
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 - an investigation on the making of economics in Portugal in the recent past
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3. The impact of religious and ethical beliefs and values in the economic thinking of Manuela Silva

1. The context of this research



The context:

an investigation on the making of economics in Portugal in the recent past

- A fundamental assumption
 - Economics: a plural universe made of several fields
- The production and international circulation of economic ideas
 - Isomorphism vs. *'elective affinities'*
- The Portuguese case
 - An “intellectual periphery” in economics
 - A rich history in the recent past
 - A significant clash of economic ideas
 - The increasing dominance of the American mainstream-style of doing economics (Nova School of Business and Economics, The Catholic University (Lisbon) and the Department of Studies of Bank of Portugal)
 - Developmentalist policies vs. the management of a “small open economy”

-
- The study of:
 - **Science, values and politics: how Portuguese economists have been thinking about the economy**
 - The work of Manuela Silva

Manuela Silva
(1932-2019)



2. Who was Manuela Silva?

□ A remarkable Portuguese economist

- The **first woman to obtain a degree in modern economics** (with the highest grade) from a Portuguese university (in 1954)
- The **first woman to teach economics in a Portuguese university** (from 1970, at the age of 38, until her retirement in 1993)
 - She was precluded to do it before, due to the fact of being a woman
- A very **dynamic progressive economist**, actively involved in Christian activities all over her life, well-known in the country for her deep concern with the common good, social justice, poverty, social exclusion and development, and for her vast and long experience in several domains of real-world applied policy, in particular social policy areas and planning

Manuela Silva's background

- i. A first degree in economics (1949-1954)
- ii. An active involvement in catholic university action
 - The organization of the first congress of the catholic university students (*“Catholic Thinking and the University”*), 1953.
 - President of the Female Catholic University Youth (JUCF)
(*Christian Faith and Progressive Social Change*)
- iii. A clear preference for “social” rather than more traditional “economic” areas like banking or finance

Early professional experience

- A research grant in the Portuguese Statistical Office
(and the first publication in the review of the Centre for Economic Studies of the Portuguese Statistical Office)
- The experience at the Corporative Studies Office (1954-1961)
 - An active participation in the *Revista do Gabinete de Estudos Corporativos* [Review of the Corporative Studies Office]
 - A new concern with development

Work in social policy areas in the 1950s and 1960s

- Assistant in the Services of Social Action of the Ministry of Corporations (1955-1959)
- Coordinator of an experience in Community Development (1962-1965)
- Founder and leader of a Service of Communitarian Social Action at the Ministry of Health (1965-1971)

Teaching (1970-1993) and Research

- Teaching of various courses in Social Policy, Economic Policy, Economic Planning, ...
- Founder and director of the review *Estudos de Economia* [Economic Studies]
- Founder and member of the first Directive Board of the CISEP (Research Centre on the Portuguese Economy)
- Set up of the first Portuguese postgraduate degree in *Economics and Social Policy* ...

- A pioneering work on **poverty in Portugal**

- Silva, Manuela (1982), “Crescimento económico e pobreza em Portugal” [Economic growth and poverty in Portugal], *Análise Social*, vol. XVIII (72-73-74), 1982(3°-4°-5°), pp. 1077-1086.
- Costa, A. Bruto *et al.* (1985), *A Pobreza em Portugal* [Poverty in Portugal], Lisboa: Cáritas Portuguesa.
- Silva, Manuela *et al.* (1989), *A Pobreza Urbana em Portugal* [Urban Poverty in Portugal], Lisboa: Cáritas Portuguesa.

Involvement in Politics

- **Secretary of State for Planning** in the first constitutional government (socialist) after the 1974 Revolution (1976-1977)
 - Responsible for the 1977-80 medium-term development plan, based on a strategy that prioritizes the satisfaction of population's basic needs and employment
- **Member of the Political Commission of the candidacy of Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo for President of the Republic** in 1986
(MLP was the first woman in Portugal to be prime minister and candidate to the presidency of the republic)

and always, a Christian activist...

(a belief that faith can and should transform the world)

- Graal (early sixties)
- Centro de Reflexão Cristã (CRC) [Christian Reflection Centre] (Founding member and first President, 1975 onwards)
- *Fundação Betânia* [Betania Foundation] (lifetime President, 1990 onwards)
- Pax Romana – International Catholic Movement for Intellectual and Cultural Affairs (President 1983-1987)
- Comissão Nacional Justiça e Paz [National Commission for Justice and Peace] (President, 2003-2008)

...

Manuela Silva, the economist, the teacher, the committed citizen, the woman of faith “are not separable”

A leader

A humanist economist

“tell my friends that I really enjoyed living”



3. The impact of religious and ethical beliefs and values in the economic thinking of Manuela Silva

My starting point...



Nothing is fragmented, there is a unity behind [all my] life journey and that unity is my faith in Jesus Christ and in the Church, it is my faith that unifies all [my] commitments and it is also my faith that makes it possible to discern in each concrete situation the possible or desirable solutions.

(...)

It is the key to understand everything.

Manuela Silva (2004)

...

*I do not consider my quality of being a Christian as a frame for my personal and professional life, but **a life requirement** that comes from faith in Jesus Christ and proposes to me a **matrix of values** to which I try to correspond to in any situation, as a professional, as a citizen or simply as a person.*

(Manuela Silva, personal email, 21 Jan 2019, emphasis added)

“Economics is an ethical science”

Manuela Silva (2005)

Economics, beliefs and values: a controversial issue (two examples)

- **Partha Dasgupta**

- Values may condition or determine the questions, not the answers. When economists discuss problems such as poverty or distributive justice, they argue about the most effective means to solve the problem, about its magnitude or about the distribution of benefits and costs among people. **They argue about “facts”, rarely about values** (even if their perceptions are conditioned by their values).

- **Nuno Martins**

- Ethical assumptions are at the base of the various economic theories and influence them **even at the level of their conceptual and analytical structures.**

Let us discuss the issue at **two levels**:

1. The **problems / topics of study**
2. The **concepts and theories** produced

The relevance of ethical beliefs and values in the economic thinking of Manuela Silva

1. There is no doubt that **the choice of the topics and problems MS dealt with was not independent of her religious and ethical beliefs and values.**
2. What about the **conceptualization/discussion of the problems?**

It is “of the greatest interest for economic science to reconcile itself with ethics and that it accepts – without shame – to make explicit its basic principles and the values that follow from them, integrating those values in its reasoning, in the presuppositions of the models it constructs and, above all, in the design of policies it bases on them”

(Manuela Silva, *in* Speech at her Doctorate “Honoris Causa”, ISEG, 2013).

Economics and ethics in the work of Manuela Silva

- The concept of **rationality**
- The way the **firm** is considered
- The dominant model of **economic growth**
- How **poverty** and **social exclusion** are conceived

Ends and means

Manuela Silva questioned the supposed neutrality of an economic science reduced to the analysis of the best adequacy of means for the achievement of exogenously determined objectives – a pure science of means – and the lack of an explicit reference to, and critical evaluation of, the objectives to be achieved, defending the importance of bringing into economics the discussion of the purposes of human action.

final thoughts

1. *A plea for a humanistic approach to economics*

A return to ethics, “from where it should never have departed”, is needed.

Economics, Manuela Silva emphasized, should seek in ethics its foundations and criteria for assessing the performance of the economy, and be connected to the “coordinates of ethical reference enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, keeping them explicit in its fundamental assumptions and translating them into the operating variables of its abstract systems”.

2.

However, if Christians “*can – and must – carry with them a set of values, convictions, hopes, which are their own and stem from their faith*”, this does not mean the defense of any “Catholic” approach to economics or of “Catholic” (or “Christian”) solutions or alternatives to the world’s problems (Silva, 1999a, p. 43).

One of the key ideas of the doctrine of Vatican II was the affirmation of the autonomy of terrestrial realities and the recognition that the understanding of human phenomena must be done through the use of the instruments proper to the Human Sciences. Consequently, the Christian who intervenes in the sphere of temporal reality, does so from an analysis or vision of that reality that is provided by the scientific knowledge to which he has access and by the political-ideological option that informs his attitudes and behavior.

(Manuela Silva, 1986, p. 38).

3.

Related work:

- Daniela Parisi e Stefano Solari (Eds.), *Humanism and Religion in the History of Economic Thought: Selected Papers from the 10th Aispe Conference*, Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2010.
- Bradley Bateman e Spencer Banzhaf (Eds.), *Keeping Faith, Loosing Faith: Religious Belief and Political Economy*, History of Political Economy Annual Supplement to Volume 40, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008.