

# History and Memory of Portuguese Social Work. Social Work Training in Coimbra During the Dictatorship (1937-1974)

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**Abstract.** The paper explores the history and development of Portuguese Social Work at the Miguel Torga Institute of Higher Education (ISMT) in Coimbra, Portugal, during the Estado Novo dictatorship. Documentary research in the archives of ISMT–Coimbra, Portugal, made it possible to carry out a socio-historical analysis of social work (SW) training in times of dictatorship (1937-1974). The course was created by French nuns, under the influence of municipal socialism and Catholic trade unionism, to support pregnant women and children in need. The dictatorial regime regulated training from 1939 until 1956, allowing a curriculum with medicine, law, religious culture and corporate philosophical morality. The duration of the training increased from three to four years in 1940, and by 1962, it transitioned from a technical program to higher education. The study highlights significant changes, including the introduction of sociology, the compulsory apprenticeship and the inclusion of male students, as a result of profound changes in the world and, consequently, at the national level. Despite the regime's tight police control, international relations of various influences developed, generating resistance with the support of allies opposed to the regime.

**Keywords:** Portuguese SW, SW Training School, Resistance Strategies, Coimbra

## 1 Introduction

On the occasion of the 83rd anniversary of the Social Work course at the Miguel Torga Institute of Higher Education (ISMT), a search was carried out in its Archives (AISMT). In these archives, we found the primary sources that made up our corpus of analysis: written documents ("official letters", "circulars", "letters", "curricular programs", "meeting minutes", "registration forms", "student files" and many others); final course works - in the form of monographs and reports - as an expression of different eras and academic orientations. To overcome some of the difficulties of analyzing isolated documents that do not "show" the dynamics of the issues, discussions and formalities that underpin so many years of History, we inventoried newspapers from the time, contacted Maria Celeste Lúcio [1] from the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMM) congregation in Coimbra and social worker Teresa Granado [2], Director of the

Coimbra Institute (1962-1974), who gave us interviews. We also consulted materials and photographs from the personal archives of alumni and teachers. In addition to legal diplomas, official founding documents were also consulted.

## 2 Institutionalization of Portuguese Social Work and the Coimbra ENS (1937)

The genesis and emergence of Portuguese Social Work took place in the context/process of the state's confrontation with the social question at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. In a struggle for the separation of powers in the relationship between state and church, secularization was one of the pillars of the construction of the liberal and republican ideals of the Portuguese state [3], which consecrated the right to assistance in the 1911 Constitution of the Republic. With the Church gone, the Republican State counted on the aristocracy and new qualified professionals (doctors, lawyers, educators, among others). These professionals proposed the creation of new secular professions in the medical-social and judicial fields [4], [5], [6], [7] enhancing a new relationship between public regulation and the construction, management and private direction of assistance.

The proposals for Social Work courses were expressed in 1934 in the conclusions of the First Congress of the single party of the Portuguese dictatorship, the National Union. Claimed and influenced by the Hygienist and Social Medicine movements, the *Instituto de Serviço Social de Lisboa / Lisbon Social Work Institute* (ISSL) was created in 1935 and, two years later, the *Escola Normal Social - Coimbra / Coimbra Social Normal School* (ENSC). The emergence of these schools was also due to the creation of medico-social services, which required the development of collaborative knowledge and new professionals. The institutionalization of Social Work took place during the Estado Novo (1933-1974), during the Salazar dictatorship, a period of reconciliation between the State and the Church, culminating in the signing of the Concordat with the Holy See (1940). According to Lúcio, "the State structured itself corporately while the Church, for its part, began a new strategy with the creation of the Portuguese Catholic Action, seeking an effective re-Christianization of society. At this juncture, the organization of social assistance and the preparation of its professionals is situated at the crossroads of the interests of the State and the Church"[8]. The creation of the ISSL (1935) and the *Instituto de Serviço Social do Porto / Porto Social Work Institute* (ISSP) directly reflects this cooperation. The first through its connection to the Lisbon Patriarchate, and the second in 1956, at a different conjuncture, still marked by conservatism and controlled by the State and the Church until 1974.

In 1937, it was Professor and doctor Bissaya Barreto, President of the *Junta da Província da Beira Litoral* (a territorial and administrative delimitation of the central Portuguese coast), who invited the Congregation of the FMM to direct and organize the ENS in Coimbra, which was intended to train professionals to work in the *Obra de Proteção à Grávida e Defesa da Criança* (OPGDC), where these religious had been working since 1936. Founder of the Evolutionist Party in the First Republic, Bissaya Barreto was, during the Estado Novo, a collaborator and personal friend of the President

of the Council of Ministers at the time - António Oliveira Salazar. In Coimbra, he created a maternal and child health and anti-tuberculosis policy that was representative of the Social Medicine movement [9], [10]. His influence marked the creation of the *Escola Normal Social - Coimbra*, where he was Professor and its President. Marie Constance Davon, having worked as a volunteer with Catholic trade unions in the south of France, would later join the FMM Congregation. Having graduated in 1919 from the School of Childcare at the Faculty of Medicine in Paris, she was a childcare worker and an assistant in psychology and mental hygiene [4]. She asserted herself as an advocate of multi-purpose French Social Work and was the first director of the ENSC (1937-1958). With the course in place and public recognition of its training, Bissaya Barreto applied to the Ministry of National Education (MEN) for a license for the ENSC, which was granted in December 1940 [5]. This Ministry passed the license for the *Escola Normal Social "A Saúde" / Social Normal School "Health"* to the *Junta da Província da Beira Litoral* (JPBL), with authorization to operate technical education, guaranteeing the uniqueness of this being the only School under public tutelage, despite its strong links with the Catholic Church.

The inaugural Conference was given by the director of the OPGDC, doctor Luís Raposo, on January 11, 1937. The *ENS "A Saúde"* Charter states that fifty students were authorized to attend the "Family and domestic teaching course for social workers, under the terms of Decree no. 30,135 of December 1939, and may also teach specialties, including childcare social workers."

The first students on the Social Work course, many of them boarders, came from various geographical areas of mainland Portugal, the islands and the then Portuguese colonies, for which the school had a residential home. The strictness imposed on internal discipline, clothing, the rules of behavior, and conviviality in public spaces can be seen in the ENSC's *Discipline and Uniform Regulations* [12], which read:

"The uniform is provided by the school. (...) The students wear uniforms (white blouse, apron and veil, black socks and shoes) to internships and classes. Their hair is tucked inside the veil, and their ears are uncovered. For the length of the gown, a height of 0.20cm is measured between the floor and the bottom of the gown. The uniform must be impeccable. An untidy student will not be admitted to the internship or to classes. Gowns, aprons and veils put on for external service may not be worn for internal service until they have been washed."

The ENSC school motto "*The flame that is born will grow*" was taken very seriously by the students and alumni. This motto, inscribed on the lapel pin, flanked a lamp placed in the center, and is an enduring symbol of the formation's Catholic matrix.

### 3 Social Work training from 1939 to 1956

Decree-Law n° 30135 of December 14, 1939 [13], which was in force until 1956, was the first instrument to regulate the training and access to the profession of social worker. According to its article 1, the aim was to "ensure that the needs of technical workers are met, both for public services and for private institutions which, in any form of their activity, aim to provide education and social help/assistance." Access to training

required a secondary school diploma (9 years of schooling) and an age between 18 and 30 (art. 7).

This Decree required State Examinations in order to be awarded a Diploma. The Minister of Education was responsible for appointing a national jury to preside over the written tests, practical tests and oral tests. Also, according to the same Decree, diplomas for Social Work assistants, with or without a mention of specialty, were made official at the request of the directors of the respective schools, on the advice of the National Board of Education. The first exams were held in November 1940, awarding the title to the first Social Workers who graduated from the Coimbra ENS.

The jury appointed by the MEN was chaired by a professor from the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Lisbon and was composed of a professor from the Faculty of Law of the University of Lisbon and the ISSL; two doctors and professors at the ENSC; the technical director of the ISSL; a priest and the delegate of the *Obra das Mães pela Educação Nacional / Mothers' Work for National Education* [4]. They were all personalities from the academic, political and catholic circles.

The preamble to the 1939 Decree [13] explicitly stated the government's obligation not to shy away from training, so as not to allow it to deviate from the "*human, corporate and Christian sense*" and to guarantee that "the general plan of studies and programs" was aimed at training "suitable and responsible leaders (...) at the same time conscious and active cooperators of the National Revolution."

Academic training in Social Work developed in the absence of university training in the social sciences. In the period between 1939 and 1956, the Social Work courses in Portugal were an exception, as they integrated knowledge from the positivist social sciences, from the social science of Le Play and his followers, such as Emile Planchard, a Belgian pedagogue who lived in Portugal and was a professor at the ENS in Coimbra [4]. The first syllabus, which had a three years curriculum, defined the organization of theoretical courses with a broad focus on various subjects of medicine and law, but also economics, demography, philosophy, religious culture and philosophical morality. The female students also attended courses in domestic education, caring for children and the sick, practical classes and an introduction to Social Work.

From 1941-1942, the Social Work diploma was only awarded to female students who completed a specialization internship, i.e. after completing four years of training.

In 1956, Decree-Law n°. 40678 of July 10 [14] determined that the work of social workers should be directed towards the problems of health, work, social aid, research and social planning. It encouraged educational and cultural group activities, the organization of communities and sociological studies. Article 4 and its sole paragraph stipulated that training was theoretical and practical, including "study visits and internships, the preparation of reports and other works and the carrying out of social work" and, for the 4<sup>th</sup> year, the outline of a sociological work, with the preparation/elaboration of a social monograph.

Correspondence and other documents from the 1950s and 1960s reveal the ENS's close relationship with other similar schools and other French entities: study trip programs, negotiations for internships with the Portuguese emigrant population, cultural, recreational and religious programs [15], [16], [17], [18], [19], [20], [21], [22].

Despite the parsimonious reform in training, the monographs and studies carried out by the female students reveal what Ferreira [23] defined as consent to the place of the social sciences. However, for Martins, this was not official consent, since the opinion of the Corporate Chamber on the proposal for the Decree-Law maintained the proposition that "the teaching provided in schools of social work should always be oriented in a human, corporative and Christian sense"[24].

The academic work carried out at the Coimbra ENS provided local knowledge of the most impoverished villages and communities, making it possible to characterize a vast area of Portuguese territory from a historical, geographical, social, demographic and health point of view. They developed thematic studies on social problems (crime, tuberculosis, begging and the teaching of the deaf) and methodological issues (occupational therapy, communication and professional relationships). All this academic production was officially known, and the Minister for Corporations [25] even requested (in a letter dated March 1969) the submission of papers on "responsibilities for children placed in institutions" and on "social housing estates."

Academic internships began to develop in various sectors of professional activity. They took place all over the country, on the islands, in the then colonies and with Portuguese emigrants in the French *bidonvilles*. For example, one female student did her internship in Luanda, the capital of Angola, in Corporate Social Work, when the war of liberation began (1961), which led to a complete change in her internship program. This handwritten report is a relevant piece of history due to its analysis of the context and, above all, the social perspective it provides/reveals on the start of the Portuguese colonial war [26].

The 1956 Decree-Law [14] and its regulatory diploma fixed the training at four years, made access to the candidates more restrictive, requiring either the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle of the lyceum course (11 years of schooling) or the *elementary school teaching course*, and also changed the State Examinations. These now took place two years after the beginning of the profession and gave preference for access to specialist places.

#### **4 Social Work at the Coimbra (Higher) Institute of Social Work (1962-1974)**

The Coimbra School was directed by women from the FMM congregation until 1974. First, the Frenchwomen Marie Constance Davon (1937 to 1958) and Raymonde Trouvay (1958 to 1962) and, later, Teresa Serra Granado (1962 to 1974), a graduate of the Coimbra ENS. The 1960s were a period of change in Portuguese society, in Social Work and in the Coimbra Normal Social School. In 1962, the Social Work course taught at the ENSC was decreed a higher education course. The endorsements made to the Social Normal School's Charter in 1964 show that male students were allowed to attend the course.

In 1965, the School's name was changed to *Instituto de Serviço Social de Coimbra / Coimbra Social Work Institute (ISSC)* and, in 1969, to *Instituto Superior de Serviço Social de Coimbra / Coimbra Higher Institute of Social Work (ISSSC)*, a name it kept

until 1998 - when it was renamed *Instituto Superior Miguel Torga / Miguel Torga Institute of Higher Education* (ISMT).

Teresa Serra Granado's international religious and professional experience before becoming a director was very intense and very confrontational with what she encountered in the country and at the ENSC. Coming from Macau and confronted with Portugal's underdevelopment, she saw the generalized poverty of the population, the absence of political and institutional responses, and the migratory processes [2]. It is, therefore, her consciousness of the political, economic and social environment/situation/conjuncture that inspires her and drives her to transform both the educational/training plans and the internal and external dynamics of the school.

In terms of internal life, the archives tell us about the intense activity in international relations during this period (1962-1974), which expressed the concern to take part in international events, study trips and debates with the heads of similar French schools, particularly in Montpellier and Paris. By expressing the concerns and challenges facing the schools and Portuguese social work, the exchanges called for the restructuring of academic training in line with the needs of the Portuguese reality.

Travel outside the country had to be authorized by the political police, the *Polícia Internacional e Defesa do Estado* (PIDE). In 1962, the Director of the ISSC, professors and students were authorized to attend the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress of the *Association National des Assistantes Sociales* (ANAS), in Montpellier and the European Seminar on "Community Organization and Development" of the *International Catholic Union of Social Work* (UCISS), held between April 26 and May 6 in Estoril, Portugal.

Thus, under the direction of Teresa Serra Granado, the Institute opened up to building and developing responses to social problems, creating free training activities and services for the population. The first was the *Escola da Amizade /School of Friendship* for workers, whose trainers were university students and volunteer evening teachers. Later came the *Escola de Chefia/School of Leadership for Entrepreneurs; services for the children of emigrants* (study rooms) and support for the elderly [9]. An *Gabinete do Secretariado dos Voluntários da Acção Social/Office of the Secretariat of Social Action Volunteers* was created [2].

The three *historic schools* of Social Work [27], as academic leaders, were not the only ones to be concerned about changes in social work training, but also the then *Sindicato Nacional dos Profissionais de Serviço Social / National Union of Social Work Professionals* (SNPSS). At the end of the 1960s, it was this organization that set up a *Comissão para o Estudo da Profissão de Serviço Social em Portugal/Commission for the Study of the Social Work Profession in Portugal*, with the mission of encouraging the creation of a *common minimum base* in the *course programs* for the three Institutes, which would allow for the emergence of a professional identity.

The efforts and movements coordinated by Teresa Serra Granado, outside and inside the country, in favor of Social Work training and the ISSC, led her to a range of contacts abroad to exchange views and impressions on training guidelines. In order to achieve the bachelor's degree, she worked on several fronts: with the other two *historic schools*—a designation adopted by Branco [27]—the *Instituto Superior de Serviço Social de Lisboa* [ISSSL] and the *Instituto Superior de Serviço Social do Porto* [ISSSP]; with the public course created in the meantime, which only ran from 1964-1967, at the

*Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Política Ultramarina / Higher Institute of Social Sciences and Overseas Politics (ISCSPU)*; with professional organizations (Trade Unions); with the highest ministerial authorities (Corporations and Assistance; Education) and with the University of Coimbra (UC).

Internally, at the Institute, the work continued under the guidance of a Pedagogical Committee, which included "by right, the Director and the four Social Work Professors, and by secret voting at the General School Assembly, two Professors of other subjects, two full-time Social Workers, also elected, and two 4<sup>th</sup> year students" [25].

At the ISSSC, the main strategy was to develop relationships and invite professors from the University of Coimbra to teach classes, all of them against the dictatorship and personalities who resisted the regime, whom Granado considered to be "excellent people, very interested, dedicated and competent. (...) A cohesive, motivated and committed team". With these personalities, she began the process of creating the Social Work course at the UC in order to obtain the bachelor degree [28].

From 1967 onwards, an abundance of correspondence with the Minister of National Education, the Director General of Higher Education and Fine Arts, the Minister of Corporations, the President of the Council and others shows the gigantic task set in motion to explore the possibilities of integrating the Social Work Course into the Faculties of Letters or Law at the University of Coimbra. The Directors of the respective Faculties were also collaborating in this project.

In the interview given to us by Teresa Granado [2], it was reported that the Institute's professors had an audience with the Minister of Education, who agreed with the proposed project, but by reserving the power to appoint professors for himself, he called into question the foundations and objectives defined by the team. In 1970, according to Martins, the Institute didn't concede and made another request to the Minister of National Education asking to be affiliated Decree-Law n° 30135 of December 14, 1939 with the University of Coimbra. Two years later, it applied to be converted "*into an official teaching establishment*," given the inexistence of a public Social Work course. In 1973, due to the severe financial difficulties experienced by the Institute, it was the *Junta Distrital de Coimbra/Coimbra District Council (ex-JPBL)* itself (the entity that held the ISSSC's license at the time) that, in a letter to the Minister of National Education, expressed: "the Institute's desire to be incorporated, with all the rights and duties that this entails, into official higher education (...), which it believes cannot sustain an educational work of national and not district interest" [4].

## 5 Conclusions

The initial training in Social Work was primarily technical, with a three-year *curriculum*. In the 1940s, with the introduction of internships, the Diploma was awarded after 4 years. The technical dimension is perpetuated until the 1960s, when the course was upgraded to a higher education status, but without conferring a degree.

Since 1960, a set of strategies have been developed to advocate for undergraduate and university integration. Despite these diverse efforts and diligence, all attempts were

all in vain—the Ministry of Education, during the *Estado Novo* regime, refused authorization for the proposed changes.

The degree was only granted to the course of the ISSSC already in full democratic period—January 1990 (Ordinance nº 15/1990)—just a few months after being conferred to the ISSS of Lisbon and ISSS of Porto. In turn, the establishment of Social Work courses at public universities—University of Madeira (2001) and University of Coimbra (2004)—took even longer, as it had to wait for the entry into the new millennium.

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