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## Social work, contestatory movements and socio-professional struggles in the Iberian Peninsula in the 1970s

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A Revolution in Portugal and a democratic transition in Spain marked the end of the Iberian dictatorships in the 1970s. In this article, the results from research focused on the repercussions of contestatory movements for the social work profession in Portugal and Spain during that decade are presented. The information gathered from literature and oral sources allows perceiving the changes endured by social work in both countries, its professional disputes and the impact of the Latin American Reconceptualisation Movement. Special attention will be devoted to the influence of this social work movement, considering the specific socio-historical contexts of Portugal and Spain, and its particular professional backgrounds.

**Key words** Spain • Portugal • social work • contestatory movements • socio-professional struggles

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### Introduction

The 1970s marked the end of the dictatorships in the Iberian Peninsula. The Spanish one was instituted at the end of the Civil War in 1939 by Francisco Franco, who was

the leader of the military movement that fought and deposed the Second Spanish Republic (1931–39), supported by Falangist organisations and by the most conservative nationalist sectors, as well as the Catholic Church (Preston, 2006). The Portuguese dictatorship was instituted in 1926 following a military coup, which led Oliveira Salazar, an austere, conservative and Catholic academic, to be in charge of finance (in 1928). In 1932, Salazar also assumed the presidency of the Council of Ministers, and in 1933, he approved a new constitution that formalised the withdrawal of rights and freedoms, and consolidated the bases of the authoritarian, repressive, colonial, nationalist, corporatist and mono-party regime of the *Estado Novo* (New State) until 1974 (Rosas, 1998), four years after the death of its founder. The Portuguese dictatorship ended due to a military coup headed by intermediate-ranked military officers from the armed forces, in the early hours of April 1974, thus initiating a process of revolutionary rupture in which social movements had a prominent role in the transition to a multiparty democratic parliamentary system (solidified from the end of the 1970s, especially with the new 1976 Constitution). Different circumstances and processes followed the end of Franco's dictatorship and the democratic transition in Spain. This coincided with the death of its founder, Franco, in 1975, after which Juan Carlos I was appointed to be the head of the Spanish state. In 1977, the monarch agreed to a national referendum that endorsed the introduction of reforms in the political system that would lead to the approval of the 1978 Constitution, which instituted social rights, freedoms and guarantees.

The changes of the two dictatorial regimes in Portugal and Spain, their Revolution and democratic transition, respectively, although within the same external context, were formed as two different processes in the pursuit of democratic freedom. In Spain, shortly before Franco's death, there was fear that the events in Portugal would have repercussions and influence the democratic transition in a country where the end of Franco's dictatorship was approaching. This influence, however, did not occur. Among other reasons, first of all, the Spanish army could not be a catalyst for a revolution, as had happened in the neighbouring country. In Spain, Franco's dictatorship originated from a civil war, with a strong convergence between the regime, its leader and the military sector over decades. In Portugal, especially from the end of the 1960s and in a context of friction caused by the colonial conflict, there was a progressive disaffiliation between the military structures and the regime, especially in regard to the groups of subordinate officers (Rezola, 2008). This disaffiliation did not take place in Spain, which is why it would have been unlikely that Franco's regime would be overthrown by military means (López, 2010). However, this does not mean that there were no important contestatory movements, social struggles, opposition and resistance groups in Spain during this period.

In Spain, starting in the 1960s, a general process of change began related to the transformations that were taking place at the international level, thereby triggering a period of economic development through opening to international trade, with industrialisation and booming tourism in most of the country. In this context, a significant mass rural exodus from the countryside to cities resulted in the proliferation of slums and the absence of basic services in many of the new peripheral neighbourhoods. The creation of such a reality in those years represented an essential part of the context of intervention by social workers in conjunction with associations of neighbours, workers' movements and the progressive Catholic Church. In Portugal, the 1960s were also a time of evident social and economic change, and understanding

that is essential for a better comprehension of the political changes that would occur next. The colonial issue progressively transformed into a pole of convergence for different political tendencies of opposition to the regime. Similarly to Spain, despite the different levels and specificities of socio-economic fields, as well as political and economic options, Portugal also went through a period of growth in its industrial activity, mainly in its main urban centres, which attracted migratory movements from rural areas to urban peripheries, thereby creating slums and making housing one of the most urgent problems (Andrade, 1992).

During the period of democratic transition and the process of consolidating the rule of law, there was tension in Spanish social work between conservative professional positions and one marked by progressive political militancy. The participation of these social workers in different forums and anti-Franco movements was evident. According to Domènech (2013), in professional conferences held in the 1970s, in order to overcome the lack of theoretical and ideological knowledge in the profession, it was mandatory to read documents that referred to the Reconceptualisation process of social work in Latin America, as well as the texts by Paulo Freire regarding pedagogy and conscientisation. In 1978, with the establishment of the Spanish Constitution, a process of guaranteeing citizenship rights began; at the same time, it allowed the implementation of the *Sistema Público de Servicios Sociales*, where social workers had a prominent role. This fact had a profound impact on the restructuring of professional work, accentuating the technical-instrumental dimension of the profession in the context of neoliberal social policies. In Portugal, particularly from the end of the 1960s, the involvement of social workers in contestatory movements and resistance against the dictatorship also occurred. This involvement happened through civic participation in movements and organisations that were openly opposed to the Estado Novo and, even before the 1974 Revolution, through the union that represented the profession.

In this article, we present the results of a research carried out in Portugal and Spain as part of the project called 'The Reconceptualisation Movement of Social Work in Latin America (Brazil, Chile, Argentina and Colombia): Historical Determinants, International Dialogue and Memory'. We aimed to investigate whether there were any contestatory movements in Portugal and Spain with repercussions on the social work profession in these countries in the 1970s. During this process, we aimed to identify if there was dialogue/communication (in both countries) with the Latin American Reconceptualisation Movement (LARM). In order to present these results, considering the limitations of this article, they are grouped into one introduction, two sections (which refer to the particularities of the countries in the Iberian Peninsula) and a conclusion. In the first section, we approach the critical renewal process of Portuguese social work during the 1970s, starting by highlighting, very briefly, education and professional profiles at the time of its institutionalisation during the dictatorship. Following this first part of the article, we identify what we believe to be the main critical expressions of Portuguese social work and the contextuality of its emergence, above all, in the relationship established, at first, with the opposition and resistance movements against the dictatorship, and then with the post-revolutionary social movements and struggles. This section contains the communications with, as well as the influence of the LARM. The second section discusses social work in Spain (its crisis and socio-professional struggles, alongside the contestatory movements against Franco's dictatorship and the struggles for democracy) in its process of seeking

professional recognition for Spanish social workers. In both professional realities, we highlight the particularities of the influence of the LARM.

## **Critical renewal in Portuguese social work in the 1970s**

### *Portuguese social work 1930s–1970s: the transfiguration of a conservative professional project*

In order to understand the critical renewal of Portuguese social work in the 1970s, it is essential to consider the wider socio-historical frames of that time. It is also necessary to keep in mind how the profession evolved in Portugal and its ties to the totalitarian regime that brought Portuguese social work to life. The profession's earliest conservative guise and supposed political neutrality are important aspects to consider when analysing the critical anti-conservative and anti-traditionalist renewal that took place in Portuguese social work in the 1970s.

Established in the context of the Estado Novo dictatorship in the 1930s as an instrument of social control and indoctrination (Martins, 2017), it took three decades for social work to reveal signs of disaffection from the regime's political and ideological project. In Portugal, social work was fully integrated within the corporatist social policy of the dictatorship, and its professionals were called to act as conscious active cooperants of the new conservative, fascist-prone, regime (Martins and Silva, 2019). As such, Portuguese social workers – until 1961, exclusively women – were deemed to become instrumental in the dictatorship's corporatist, charitable, assistance-focused response to the social question (Martins, 2017). Accordingly, a doctrinal instruction based on nationalist, conservative, traditional values and gender roles pervaded social work education (Martins, 2010).

From the late 1950s onwards, and especially following Portugal joining the European Free Trade Association, the country progressively opened its economic policy to foreign capital. While Portugal followed a new capitalist and social development trend, social protection, welfare and healthcare were subject to reforms, confronting social workers with novel professional challenges that demanded higher qualifications and scientific expertise. If the Estado Novo dictatorship initially legitimated social workers to be instruments of social, political and ideological control, in this new stage (1950–60), they were also asked to intervene in the process of economic capitalist growth (Martins and Silva, 2019). It is in this context that community development, socio-economic planning and social policy progressively became dimensions of social work practice and education in Portugal. Despite the changes affecting the profession in the late 1950s and 1960s, with very few exceptions (Martins, 2003; 2017), the complicity between the profession and the dictatorship was not questioned. That was to change in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

### *Portuguese social work's critical renewal amid professional and socio-political contention*

Key socio-political changes happening in the 1960s matched the progressive decline of the authoritarian regime as opposition democratic movements gained momentum and subversive actions multiplied. Resistance against the colonial project and the escalating military conflict between Portuguese forces and liberation movements in the African

colonies drew greater public attention and led to the political and civic participation of larger numbers of Portuguese, including social workers, many of them gathered around the emerging progressive Catholic movements (Martins, 2017). However, it was only in the next decade and still during the dictatorial regime that social work more clearly revealed expressions of critical renewal.

As the movements against the dictatorship accelerated from the late 1960s through the dawn of the 1970s, increasing numbers of social workers became involved, also implicating the structures of the National Union of Social Service Professionals, the only existing union of social workers. In 1970, this structure, framed in the context of the corporatist socio-political organisation of the Estado Novo, was led by a group of progressive, left-leaning younger social workers who, through a rank-and-file process (Reisch and Andrews, 2002), democratically took hold of the union's direction (Martins, 2017), securing a mandate that was admittedly political, progressive and anti-dictatorship (Silva, 2019b). It should be mentioned that social workers were already assuming positions in the Electoral Democratic Commission lists and in its political committee in the 1969 and 1973 general elections.<sup>1</sup> Under the new leadership, the social workers' union converged with the then clandestine national coalition of progressive unions and started the collective negotiation of professional contracts of social workers in the public and private sectors, alongside the demarcation of social work's professional functions in the public administration branch. This turn represented an effort to bring the profession closer to the social and political struggles of that time and a self-recognition of social workers as working-class professionals. It was the social workers' union that, in December 1973, established contact with the LARM, organising clandestine meetings between the Uruguayan academic Herman Kruse and Portuguese social workers (Martins, 2017; Silva, 2019b). The union also backed the participation of social workers in key anti-dictatorship demonstrations, like Lisbon's 1972 Rato Chapel vigil against the colonial war, followed by a hunger strike in solidarity with the victims of war and colonialism. The repression that followed hit, among others, social workers, who were detained and subject to interrogation by the political police (PIDE/DGS), and subsequently expelled from public functions (Martins, 2017).<sup>2</sup>

State repression affected the capacity of Portuguese social work to establish open forums for critical thinking, and censorship impeded the free circulation of literature related to critical, radical and social theorising, especially of Marxist extraction. Nonetheless, from the late 1960s, cooperation between the Lisbon School of Social Work and Brazilian social workers and social work organisations allowed documentation and journals to be received, disclosing to the faculty and student community insights of the LARM's earliest expressions (Martins and Carrara, 2014). In parallel, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Portuguese social work became acquainted with Paulo Freire's pedagogical proposals (Martins and Tomé, 2016). Although explicitly out of social work's education syllabi before 1974, Marxist theory circulated covertly among social work students and teaching staff, and in 1973, *Vertice*, a journal associated with Portuguese neo-realism, published an anonymous article entitled 'Social workers: profession in crisis or crisis of social work?' (Anonymous, 1973).<sup>3</sup> So far as we know, this was the first published piece in Portugal to present a reflection about the profession based on a Marxist stand. The article argued for the recognition of the political importance of social work in the frame of capitalist social relations, and a consideration of the contradictions between institutional and statutory concerns and

the workers' interest, instead of conceptualising the profession as politically neutral (Santos et al, 2018). This debate found affinity with the critical discussions developed by their contemporary radical social work authors in the UK and in the US, though there is no evidence that interlocution between Anglo-Saxon radical social work and Portuguese social work ever existed in this period (Silva, 2019b).

Following the 25 April 1974 coup that ended five decades of dictatorship, social work soon became engaged with the revolutionary fronts, aligning with the ensuing socialist-leaning transition. The Revolution took social work schools by storm and curricula were subject to radical changes, with the inclusion of Marxist thinking in the courses' reading lists. Simultaneously, a shift towards an analysis of the causes of social problems was noted and internship practice began to favour the placement of students in grass-roots organisations, where they were expected to support the needs of social movements (Negreiros et al, 1992). The traditional institutional venues of professional social work intervention, like public assistance institutions and hospitals, were often regarded as strongholds of conservative, palliative and assistance care, which is a reason why preference was given to placing students in cooperatives, workers' movements, neighbourhood residents' commissions and revolutionary programmes (Silva, 2019a). As the social sciences gained weight in academic curricula, critical thinking was promoted, to which the inclusion of LARM publications also contributed, exposing the main tendencies of that social movement, most notably, the Uruguayan, the Argentinian, the Chilean and the Brazilian currents. The changes in academic curricula, in reading lists and in the reconfiguration of internship practice evidenced a sharp intention to break with what were seen as forms of traditional, empiricist, positivist, politically neutral and conservative social work. In this phase, the historical designation of the profession in Portugal, that is, 'social assistant', was challenged and, especially in the academic frame, this designation tended to be replaced by *trabalhador social* ('social worker') or *interventor social* ('social intervener'). It should also be understood as a sign of intent to break away from the traditional image and identity of Portuguese social work (Negreiros et al, 1992; Santos and Martins, 2016; Martins and Silva, 2019; Silva, 2019a).

The reach of the Latin American critical social work movement was magnified by the presence, as political exiles, of the Brazilian social worker and academic Jose Paulo Netto and of the Chilean student Bernardo Alfredo Henriquez. The former, who lived in Portugal from 1976 until 1979, held a teaching position in Lisbon's School of Social Work. Besides his contribution to the education of social workers during that period, he had an essential role in supporting the organisation of the Association of Social Work Professionals (APSS) and in promoting the creation of *Cadernos*, a ground-breaking journal edited by the aforementioned association. Needless to say that this publication stood among the earliest in Portugal to print articles exposing social work critical thinking and analysis. In 1977 and 1978, Netto toured the country, holding meetings with social workers to promote spaces of debate and reflection on capitalist social relations, the socio-political conjuncture and the meaning of social work (Martins, 2019). Until 1980, the APSS organised events featuring prominent LARM authors like the aforementioned José Paulo Netto, Ezequiel Ander-Egg and Natalio Kisnerman, who, like Vicente de Paula Faleiros or Herman Kruse, saw their work published in *Cadernos* (Martins and Carrara, 2014).

Bernardo Alfredo Henriquez completed his degree in 1976 in Lisbon's Higher Institute of Social Work, where he also became a teacher. When Pinochet's coup

occurred in 1973, he was Head of the University of Chile's Students' Association. Along with his Chilean experience of political engagement in the students' movement, he brought to Portugal journals and documents discussing the LARM and collaborated in the organising of Lisbon's Higher Institute of Social Work Students' Association, as well as editing the first issues of *(Pro-)Intervenção Social* ([Pro-]Social Intervention), the association's academic journal (Martins and Silva, 2019).

There is substantial evidence of Portuguese social work involvement in the early hours of revolutionary struggles (Negreiros et al, 1992; Pinto, 2013; Queirós, 2015; Silva, 2019a, 2019b). It represented a strong professional and civic commitment to social mobilisations and progressive initiatives. Working by the side of neighbours' associations, rural cooperatives, labour unions and so forth invited social workers to use their community organisation skills, which was fundamental in building the collective consciousness and solidarity needed to bolster the movements' internal cohesion. The social workers who worked alongside social movements and grass-roots initiatives were also key in finding and co-opting political and institutional allies to the movements' causes, as well as in building and strengthening coalitions and networks between distinct movements. It should be noted that the social mobilisations that multiplied in the countryside, as well as in cities, were simultaneously an ingredient and a by-product of the revolutionary process. Portugal had been living under a single-party regime, and transiting to a multiparty system after the 25 April coup took months, leaving a hiatus during which direct democracy practices and grass-roots collective action became salient. In fact, the wide social mobilisation seen during the revolutionary process (1974–76) represented the strength of popular organisations and the importance of participatory decision-making.

Among the best examples of social work's engagement with social movements was the Mobile Local Support Service, commonly known by the acronym SAAL. It was a state-run construction and rehabilitation housing programme based on principles of auto-construction and direct democracy collective participation (Andrade, 1992; Bandeirinha et al, 2016), active from 1974 until 1976. Social workers were crucial in the creation of the programme, assuming top-level direction positions (the general coordinator was a social worker employed in the Housing Development Fund, the state agency in charge of housing policy implementation) and leading several local interdisciplinary teams – called 'brigades' – which implemented each housing project. These social work professionals and students, far from securing front-line assistance in the form of subsidies or charitable help, assumed coordination tasks and, locally, promoted community organising, adult education, social rights advocacy and the creation of community social services (Silva, 2019a, 2019b, 2020).

The contact with the residents' commissions and partaking in the SAAL programme brought the involved social workers closer to the *urban struggles*, as Downs (1983) called the massive collective mobilisations that ignited in the largest urban and industrial centres in 1974 and 1975. Here, professional involvement was overtly political as social workers took to the front of political demonstrations, upholding the claims and rights of the people, both on the streets and in the venues of political decision-making (Silva, 2019a).

The engagement of social workers and social work students with the revolutionary process, in some cases, overtly joining social and political struggles, took them closer to the key features of the LARM. In fact, the kind of social work expressed by that association with social movements and fronts of political contention represented

a clear statement against traditional social work and a refusal of its conservative guises, as advocated by the LARM. Thus, the Revolution brought about the ideal conditions for social work to align with social and political struggles, and to act in the defence of social rights, that is, as [Iamamoto \(2007\)](#) states, to commit to the radical democratisation of social life.

By the end of 1975 and in the years to come, counter-revolutionary surges and the process of constitutional democratic normalisation brought the revolutionary process to its end, carrying with it the fading of social mobilisations the dismantling of grass-roots progressive initiatives. In the same way, the radical expressions of social work subsided and intentions of rupturing with conservative social work guises were far from having been consolidated, bringing Portuguese social work's critical renovation process into crisis ([Santos and Martins, 2016](#)).

### **Social work in Spain: crisis and socio-professional struggles**

The 1970s left deep marks in the Iberian Peninsula. With the death of dictator Franco in 1975, Spain found itself submerged in the uncertainty of the intentions of the Franco regime's hierarchy to remain in power, as well as in the growing struggles and contestatory movements, in other words, the opposition from the majority of Spanish citizens who wanted to transition to a democratic political system. In this context of transformation, Spanish society was involved in political, social and economic difficulties during many different moments, which generated doubts and fears that democracy would indeed be achieved. We agree with [Sudriá \(2013: 193\)](#) that the success of this process was due to the Spanish population as a whole, rather than only certain individuals.

While neoliberalism gained strength and momentum in the UK in the 1970s, spreading itself to the European continent, in the face of US competition, the Spanish state continued to exercise a great regulatory role, with a high level of protection in its economy. Its financial system benefited from its oligopolistic position in a context of technological and scientific setbacks ([Barciela, 2013: 191](#)), as well as of crisis and the persistence of imbalances after half a century of the country being isolated by the dictatorship. The reflections presented here are the starting point and the end of the questioning regarding the relationship between the profession, social work professionals and the social struggles, contestatory movements and workers' organisations in the 1970s, as well as the possible impacts (or not) of the LARM in Spain.

For the analytical reconstruction of the crisis and the socio-professional struggles of social work, we look into the profession's articulation and internal movement within the dynamics of Spanish society, in view of which the profession expressed itself as a 'specific and specialised response to demands' that were not defined and posed by social work ([Netto, 2016: 71](#), our translation). Our historical investigation takes into account the theoretical-methodological perspective, which captures the macroscopic societal dynamics in their inseparability with the class struggle. The constitution, institutionalisation, development, trends, professional culture and internal movement of Spanish social work in this period under analysis were gathered by highlighting the explanatory foundations of social processes. The investigation was based on two sources of collected data, as well as field research: primary sources include individual memories through interviews<sup>4</sup> ([Aguilar, Colomer, Feu, Domenèch, Marchioni, Salleras, Togores, Rejón](#)); and secondary sources include the documentary-bibliographic



production of the time and its socio-historical contextualisation. The reconstruction of historical processuality was carried out with the critical confrontation (memories and documentary-bibliographic sources) obtained from the analysis of the empirical evidence found, which is presented in the following.

### *Social struggles and contestatory movements in Spain*

From the 1960s, Spain came out of its international isolation and entered a stage of economic growth thanks to foreign aid and investments, which meant advancement in the country's modernisation, as well as important social changes. However, the industrialisation process and the growth in tourism around those years occurred with a remarkable lack of social planning, which caused an important imbalance between the different regions, with a considerable exodus of the population migrating from the countryside to the cities that resulted in their chaotic and disorganised growth, and the emergence of phenomena such as slums and other problems associated with them (Navarro, 1998; Sanz, 2001).

In the 1970s, with the international economic crisis in Spain and with the end of the dictatorship, Molina (1994) recalls that there were a series of events that would turn out to be very significant in the future of the country: the assassination of the president at that time, Carrero Blanco, in 1973; the restoration of the monarchy in 1975; the approval of political parties; the first democratic elections (1977); and the endorsement of the Spanish Constitution in 1978. On the other hand, in the economic field, the Spanish economy during those years presented a worrying situation, with high inflation and unemployment rates that, though occurring during an international crisis period, became more severe in Spain and, as stated by Martín and Montañés (2001), led to the creation of factories in very few cities and coastal areas, causing much ecological deterioration and large territorial inequalities. However, it was exactly this industrial concentration that facilitated the emergence of workers' organisations, which sought, in addition to improvements to their working conditions, to achieve democratic freedom and end Franco's dictatorship.

The appearance of *multiple expressions of the social issue*<sup>5</sup> in the big cities' outskirts and slums showed that people in those locations lacked the minimal living conditions and had been abandoned by the authorities at that time, which thus became the setting for the 'biggest social class fights/clashes' (Martín and Montañés, 2001: 155). A very prominent role in the struggle to achieve better living conditions in those years was played by neighbourhood associations, composed mostly by workers and representing alternative ways of organising the power system and leading important mobilisations in various cities of the country, in a context where political participation was prohibited.

In the 1970s, with the decline of Franco's dictatorship and in a society with no social or political rights, the pro-freedom and pro-democracy movements among workers and students became more intensified. At the end of this decade, trade unions such as the Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT) and the Comisiones Obreras (CCOO) became legal; it is important to remember that with the beginning of the dictatorship, the only legalised and authorised union in Spain was called 'Vertical Union' (also called 'Spanish Union Organization'). It was precisely the trade union platforms launched in those years that created nurseries, which were run by Cáritas and in which social assistants<sup>6</sup> worked at a time when, as Feu (2005: 179) recalls, 'social services were almost nonexistent'.

Navarrete (1995: 125) highlighted that the student movement in the 1960s and 1970s ‘presented itself mostly as an anti-Franco movement ... focusing on the devices used by the regime in the universities’, in reference to the Sindicato Español Universitario (SEU) and the Asociaciones Profesionales de Estudiantes (APE). The considerable increase of university students, as Navarrete (1995) recalls, did not mean that the workers’ sons and daughters had gained access to university; however, they did form an important part of the social mobilisation that fought against the political regime of those times, together with teachers and other new forms of collective action and neighbourhood movements (Casanova, 2013).

### *Social work in Spain: crisis and search for professional recognition*

The 1970s was a decade of great expansion, movements and academic and professional mobilisation for social work, which added considerably to the fight for democracy. The profession sought to renew its bases by presenting trends that expressed itself: the creation of the Basic Method of Social Work, which was built on the process of recognising the need for a specific methodology for their professional practice within the Spanish social reality; and social assistants’ tendency of seeing themselves as ‘*trabajadoras sociales*’, with the role of being an exchange agent as well as a social transformation agent. Charitable actions and the social assistance given by Franco’s dictatorship coexisted with these professional perspectives, which were both developed by social assistants.

During the 40 years of Franco’s dictatorship, Sección Femenina was the organ in charge of performing social action, which was mandatory for Spanish women. With the creation of the Instituto Nacional de Auxilio Social (INAS) in 1937, the workforce of 35 graduated social assistants (Feu and Rubiol, 2014) was not enough to meet the demands for social assistance – during Franco’s dictatorship, termed ‘paternalistic benefit’ – between 1939 and 1950 (Doménech, 1991: 18).

In order to resolve that, the Decree from 7 October 1937 determined that all Spanish women between 17 and 35 years of age should report to the Women’s Social Service and receive a six-month training in the INAS or Falangist delegation institutions. Most of these women did not hold an official degree qualifying them as social assistants issued by one of the two faculties in the country – one in Madrid and one in Barcelona – which were reopened in 1939. The Sección Femenina de Falange left a significant impact on the professionalisation of social work in Spain during the dictatorship period and also during the transition period to democracy.

Another historical example of the political struggle of social work teachers and students occurred in 1975 at the Escuela de Asistentes Sociales del Hospital Clínico de Barcelona. Students from all over Spain called for the end of an exam that was considered obsolete – the revalidation. At the same time, social assistants were joined by teachers to change the law called Nueva Ley General de Educación y Financiamiento de la Reforma Educativa (14/1970, from 4 August) so that social work studies would be recognised/considered.

From an academic viewpoint, between 1960 and 1970, the number of educational institutions offering a social work degree increased: 42 schools were founded, linked to the Ministerio de Educación y Cultura, to the Catholic Church or to private entities such as the Red Cross (*Cajas de Ahorros*). This means that there was already enough educational infrastructure in 1970 to fight for the recognition of the profession as

something that was inserted into the socio-technical definition of labour and no longer a charity or volunteer activity.

The conflict over this new Ley General de Educación was one of the catalysing elements for the professional crisis in the 1970s, together with the strengthening of the opposition movements against the dictatorship and the arrival of Latin American literature of Spanish professionals who were more politically militant about the Latin American Reconceptualisation Movement of social work (Colomer, 1990). They were progressive social workers who also had the opportunity to attend lectures at school, as well as professional training opportunities, with Latin American teachers such as Ander-Egg, Kerman Kruse, Natalio Kisnerman, Nadir Kfourri and Paulo Freire. In 1969, Spanish social assistants had access to the Argentinian magazine *Hoy en el Servicio Social* (later called *Hoy en el Trabajo Social*), edited by a group called Esquema Conceptual Referencial Operativo (ECRO). In this magazine, Freire (1978) published an article that was especially dedicated to social workers, entitled 'The role of social workers in the process of change'. Among other matters, its content defended the idea that it is important to take on the role of 'agents of change' through a demystifying practice of social reality. Another social worker who significantly influenced the work field was Marco Marchionni, a militant member of the Italian Communist Party, with his collective dimension and the introduction of community work in Spain.

At that time, two professional trends stood out: one was progressive, more politicised and committed to the contestatory movements, trade unions and neighbourhood associations under the protection of part of the Catholic Church, especially Caritas; the second was conservative, defended technified work and stood out due to its psychological orientation anchored in the maintenance of traditional charitable practices, rejecting the political dimension of the profession (Domenech et al, 1975: 113; Colomer, 1990). In Spain, a protectionist economy of state interventionism that was not regulated by market forces was still predominant, which caused the attenuation of social conflicts and the strengthening of oppositional movements questioning the principles of the regime, coinciding with the 'French May' (Colomer, 1990: 6).

In 1970, during the conferences held in Palma de Mallorca, a strong internal crisis was evident: the profession's conservative principles were questioned and a reconceptualisation based on social change, structural change and population awareness was demanded (Colomer, 1990; Feu, 2005; Colomer, 2009). Three images of the profession were formed during the debates: static-paternalistic, integrating-promoting and raising awareness of situations of marginalisation and injustice (Colomer, 1990). The Araxá Document (Brazil), though marked by neo-Thomist principles, was referenced during this event.

The Manresa Seminar (Barcelona) – held in 1971 and focused on methodology – was influenced by the news regarding the Reconceptualisation of social work that was taking place in Latin America, which influenced matters concerning the case, group and community methods; here, the Basic Method was discussed and accepted as a methodological reference (Colomer, 1990). In 1972, at the Seminar de los Negrales, the Araxá Document was referenced again.

During the VI Levante Conferences, held in Valencia in 1975, more critical opinions and the commitment to a revolutionary role for social assistants became evident. It was undoubtedly 'the period with the greatest reconceptualising and radical influence in Spain in terms of proposals for social change' (Morán-Carrillo and Díaz-Jiménez, 2016: 200, our translation). During the I National Congress of Social Work in 1976,

the transformation of studies into a university career was demanded; the importance of rethinking professional training was debated, and as a result, the name ‘social assistant’ was changed to ‘social worker’. During the conferences held in Pamplona in 1977, the ‘need–resource’ relationship was considered the basic role of social work, as well as the planning and implementation of ‘social action’. In the 1970s, the profession made a great effort to find its coherence or logic, and the essence of its crisis originated from the need to abandon a structure that was considered inadequate (Estruch and Güell, 1976; Colomer, 1990) in order to recycle and prepare the new possibilities that were foreshadowed by the end of the dictatorship (Domenech, 1989: 29).

## Conclusions

Although prompted by many commonalities – situated in the southern edge of Europe and dominated by conservative right-wing Catholic-influenced repressive regimes – social work in Portugal and Spain, enshrouded in their own historicity, ended up following different trajectories. In Portugal, it is possible to identify glimpses of renewal within social work in line with the social, political and economic transformations – domestic as well as international – that marked the 1960s and early 1970s. This renewal went hand-in-hand with the emerging movements of resistance to the dictatorial regime and its policies, conservative ideological frames and repressive apparatus. Besides the sheer refusal of the old political order and social values, larger numbers of social workers took positions against the Estado Novo while perceiving the inextricable relation between the regime’s status quo and the persistence of widespread poverty, structural inequality and the lack of upward social mobility. These movements of opposition encouraged the circulation of Marxist thinking and literature, allowing social work professionals, students and educators access to materials otherwise forbidden. In the years preceding the 1974 Revolution, Marxist thinking and echoes from the LARM were gradually and covertly disseminated in social work schools, as well as in the single existing Social Work Union. This organisation, historically compliant with the regime’s agenda, became an important catalyser of critical thinking and political opposition to the Estado Novo. The Social Work Union had a key role in the dissemination of the LARM in Portugal before and after the Revolution. The critical renewal of Portuguese social work gains expression with the 1974 Revolution, following a wider and free diffusion of the LARM’s proposals, either through the literature that was incorporated into the schools’ syllabi or directly through the teaching staff and students who came from Latin America. Another expression of that renewal was given by the radical restructuring of study plans and internship training, as well as the selection of alternative fields of practice and types of organisational placement. The idea was to bring the students and teaching staff closer to grass-roots movements and revolutionary collective action, shaping an unmistakable stand against professional conservatism and a refusal of traditional social work formats.

Social work as a profession was impacted by the political and economic transformations of the period under investigation, and it was present in the struggles and contestatory movements, especially the most progressive part of the professional sector. In Spain, the most important influence of the Reconceptualisation process took place in the 1970s and 1980s, and also occurred within the most progressive and politicised sectors of the profession – those committed to the social movements that fought against Franco’s regime and that sought to combine ideological and

scientific elements, incorporating an idea of professional commitment to social change. These were influenced by the Marxist and revolutionary theories of the time that were committed to political change, which arrived in Spain through documents and professional literature from Latin America in congresses and seminars, social workers' association meetings, and training schools. In this period, a crisis in the profession became evident, with discussions about the following aspects as central elements: social workers as agents of change; raising awareness in the population; and the search for a more comprehensive intervention methodology. However, these professional perspectives coexisted with charity work and social assistance from Franco's dictatorship, also developed by social workers, which represented the tension between the professional trends of the time that were expressed and evident in different professional events, areas of training and professional work.

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### **Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> This was a political platform joining distinct opposition groups (from the Communist Party to progressive Catholics) allowed to run against the regime's only party in the 1969 and 1973 parliamentary elections.
- <sup>2</sup> Following this episode and after being refused a grant for professional enhancement, the vice-president of the social workers' union sought refuge in Brazil, where, in 1973, they became enrolled in a Master in Social Work programme at São Paulo's Pontifícia Catholic University (Martins and Silva, 2019), thus contributing to further bridge Portuguese social work and the LARM.
- <sup>3</sup> The author was José Gomes Canotilho, a law professor at Coimbra's Social Work School (Martins and Silva, 2019).
- <sup>4</sup> In order to carry out the interviews, we made initial contact, followed by the presentation of the study, the aims, the guidelines regarding the use of information and images according to ethical standards, and the signing of the informed consent form. A script was developed for the interviews with the following social workers who work in different regions in Spain: Maria José Aguilar, Montserrat Colomer, Montserrat Feu, Rosa Domenèch, Marco Marchioni, Maria Salleras, Rosa Togores and Maria José Rejón Villaverde.
- <sup>5</sup> According to [Iamamoto and Carvalho \(1983: 77, our translation\)](#): 'The "social issue" is nothing but the expressions of the process of formation and development of the working class and their entry in the society's political scene, demanding their recognition as a class from the business community and the State. In everyday social life, it is a manifestation of the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, who started to demand other types of interventions beyond charity and repression.'
- <sup>6</sup> In some parts of the text, we use 'social assistant' to accurately designate the historical professional name change expressing the socio-professional struggle of social workers.

### **Conflict of interest**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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