

## CHAPTER 4 SOCIOLOGY IN PORTUGAL. FORMATION AND RECENT TRENDS

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### First Steps

To say that Portuguese sociology only really began after the April 1974 revolution is almost a commonplace. But this statement has to be suitably toned down if we are to do justice to the specific long-term movements which have taken place in the history of Portuguese culture, as well as to the complexity of the socio-political processes which preceded and lead directly to the restoration of democracy in Portugal.

In truth it can be said that the developments in the social sciences which were taking place in the core countries found fairly clear echoes in intellectual thought in Portugal from the last quarter of the 19th century onwards.

Thus in 1884 Teófilo Braga, one of the most influential theorists and politicians of republicanism, published a long treatise on Sociology (*"Systema de Sociologia"*) in which Comte, Spencer and in general terms the organicist and evolutionist positivism were the fundamental points of reference.

There are signs that some intellectuals in Portugal were somewhat indifferent, and even hostile, to the trend of positivist thought. As was to be expected, opposition came from those representatives of Portuguese philosophical thought who were more oriented towards metaphysical reflection and less receptive to the currents of opinion circulating in Europe.

In fact certain innovatory epistemological principles associated with a holistic, systemic and determinist vision in the approach to society were present in the intellectual debates which took place around the turn of the century. Moreover Sociology was actually established for a time in the academic world, when in 1901 it became part of the programme of study of the Faculty of Law of Coimbra University. Initially these programmes of study were closely focused on the organic analogy and evolutionist theories, but over time they began to embrace other points of reference, such as Durkheim, Simmel, Tarde, Tonnies and the pioneers of north American sociology. These are the names of the authors who appear in the lecture courses of that time, up to 1911 when the discipline was abolished.

Meanwhile, outside the institutional realm of the universities, History itself was undergoing an important renewal well before the end of the century, opening up to receive input from Economics, Geography, Anthropology and even Sociology itself.

Oliveira Martins, the author of "*Quadro sinóptico da classificação dos conhecimentos humanos na esfera dos fenómenos sociais*" (Summary Framework for Classification of Human Knowledge in the realm of social phenomena), in which he criticises the Comtean idea of classifying the social sciences, started a trend in historiography (which had significant followers in our century) which is very much focused on analysing the structure and workings of the institutions, interests, actions and conflicts of social groups and classes.

The Romantic and Philological-Cultural schools of anthropological research, which developed in Europe throughout the second half of the 19th century, also had a significant impact in Portugal, and led to ethnographic research and local monographs which, for reasons which shall become clearer later in this paper, are today once again in the limelight and are being looked at with close interest by social researchers.

In this first phase of the development of the Social Sciences in Portugal, there was little differentiation between disciplines and the subject was barely formalised at an institutional level. It is understandable therefore that reflections on society during this time were very much subject to the influence of the struggle between competing political and ideological currents and of social movements which existed at that time.

And in fact Portuguese intellectual life saw the emergence of some undoubtedly interesting elements of para-sociological analysis at this time, both in the context of socialist thought, where Proudhon and the "utopian socialists" were recurring sources, much more than Marx and Engels, as well as in the context of Catholic and corporatist reformism, where, through the direct influence of Léon Poinsard and Paul Descamps, the theoretical and doctrinaire principles and the methods of observation of the Social Science School of Le Play gained a significant following. Some of these followers later became the ideologues of the Salazarist dictatorship.

### The Interregnum

The end of the first quarter of the century was a decisive turning-point in the development of the social sciences in Portugal.

We have already seen how at that time there was no intellectual and institutional framework which could have provided the conditions for the various different disciplines involved to develop in a sustained, consistent and professional manner. But it may be added here without much hesitation that up until then the overall political conditions did favour the accumulation of

knowledge on the structures and mechanisms of the ways in which society changes.

From the moment of the 1926 military coup, and for several decades of the dictatorship of the "*Estado Novo*", all sociological thought in Portugal was looked upon by the established repressive apparatus as an activity which potentially threatened state security, and therefore had to be watched, censored and repressed.

So while the complex of knowledge of society in the core countries, particularly in Europe, was being consolidated, and the outlines of the discipline were beginning to become more or less defined - clearly, as we can see now, as a result of specific intellectual legacies and the dynamics of the social institutions involved - , in Portugal, for a period of almost 50 years, even the minimal conditions for scientific output in this area were stifled.

To some extent, up to the mid-fifties, this forced strangulation of social science research corresponded to the actual level of demand for knowledge of society and social processes, which was low. Portugal had still not emerged from an era of "defensive capitalism" and cultural isolation dictated by relatively unenlightened sectors of society which were opposed to progress, and which were still very much attached to the interests and ideological influences originating in agricultural and rural life.

But with the opening up of the economy to the outside world, with the rise in emigration, which reached its peak in the sixties, with many layers of the rural population joining the proletariat, and with increased urbanisation, eventually it was amongst those close to the seat of power that a demand for sociological knowledge began to be felt. In the face of the social disfunctionality and the barriers to economic modernisation which these changes showed up, pressure built up among the technocratic circles in the governing class for a more open approach towards the social sciences. The demands for rationalisation of political action and especially of economic planning are the reasons most often invoked to justify these attitudes.

The truth is that the ideological and repressive apparatus of the regime (censorship, a single party, the political police) never ceased to be guided by principles of action and rationales for maintaining the status quo which were as rigid as they were specific. Against the background of a long drawn out colonial war, there was always an argument to be found for delaying plans for the modernisation and cultural overtire which the more progressive sectors of the state apparatus favoured, and with it the (re)birth of Portuguese sociology.

### A New Lease of Life

Even though, up to the beginning of the seventies, Sociology was not accepted in those university sectors which were potentially more favourable to its institutional development (Economics, Language and Literature, Law), some

efforts were made to bring sociology, by stealth, into the programme of studies of some of the degree courses which, in formal terms, had a very different focus.

Internationally renowned researchers such as the ethnologist A. Jorge Dias and the historian Vitorino Magalhães Godinho were for their part doing an effort to impose, within the *Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Política Ultramarina*, a genuine academic bastion of the regime, a resumption of studies on Portuguese society.

Meanwhile in 1962 a discreet study centre - the *Gabinete de Investigações Sociais* was set up in the Faculty of Economics of Lisbon University. The G.I.S. was founded by a group of economists who had links with the Catholic movement, but it gradually opened up to other groups and influences and, under the effective leadership of A. Sedas Nunes, it started to publish "*Análise Social*". This review rapidly became an important source in Portuguese intellectual life.

It is hardly surprising that the first more extended studies on Portuguese society, and in particular those which questioned the specific nature of Portuguese underdevelopment, carried traces of the doctrinaire involvement of some of their authors. Without systematic and verifiable sociological output from specialised institutions, it was inevitable that certain political and doctrinal guidelines would at that time prevail over more analytical objectives, which are the hallmark of better structured scientific fields.

Even so, it is at the end of the sixties that we see some large-scale studies of Portuguese society being produced. Among these, the body of research carried out at the G.I.S. on social structure and on the education system in Portugal stands out in particular.

With the political death of Salazar and the opening up of the regime, which was to coincide with an intensification of protest movements in the universities, there finally came an opportunity to make introductory social science subjects part of the curriculum of the faculties of Economics and, a little later, to provide at a new school within the university (*ISCTE - Instituto Superior das Ciências do Trabalho e da Empresa*) where systematic teaching of sociology became possible.

Paradoxically (or perhaps not), the dominant theory in these courses at this time was Marxism. This could not fail to have some repercussions subsequently on sociological work developed after the democratic revolution of 1974.

Another feature which distinguishes this phase of rebirth for Portuguese sociology is the enormous investment made by its main protagonists in reflections on methodology and epistemology.

Above all there was a search at this time for arguments which would legitimise the scientific practice of an area of intellectual output which was subject to a variety of attacks: from the right, it was accused of being the precursor or disguise for the great socialist evil; from the left, it was accused of

being subject to manipulation by dominant powers; and at the centre, it was accused of carelessly getting itself mixed up with common sense, or with the not very considered attitudes prevalent in social work.

On the other hand, nearly all the members of this first, informal, community of Portuguese sociologists also had to make a proportionately greater effort to update their academic and professional qualifications: some of them had their basic training in Languages and Literature, others in Economics or Law, others still were Engineers. Their uniform concern was to outline the intellectual scope of their future endeavours.

At an international (and mainly European) level, the end of the sixties was a time when the empiricist model of knowledge in the social sciences was coming in for some criticism. This explains also why the pioneers of Portuguese sociology in these years took a special interest in these subjects.

Thus while attention was to some extent focused on Boudon and Lazarsfeld's "*Le Vocabulaire des Sciences Sociales*" or on Blalock's "*Methodology of Social Research*", and while there were some quite fierce arguments about Popper in the light of Kuhn's intervening heterodoxies, they spent hours on end studying Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron's "*Le Métier de Sociologue*" and patiently underlining Althusser's "*Lire 'Le Capital'*", in addition of course to *Das Kapital* itself, which was surrounded by never-ending controversies, not least of which was the issue of the authenticity of the translations they were using.

Over a period of time a consensus grew up around a model of scientific research practice which we could perhaps call critical rationalism, and this spread throughout this first generation of sociologists and, through them, to the students who embarked on the Introduction to the Social Sciences and Sociology courses. A good picture of how extensively sociologists undertook to reflect on these issues emerges clearly in the debate on the relationship between science and ideology, and in particular from the concern to establish connections between, for example, Weber, Goldmann and Manheim, and also with economists like Myrdal. This concern is clear in the key work of this period, "*Questões preliminares sobre as Ciências Sociais*" (Preliminary Issues in Social Science) by A. Sedas Nunes. Even Linguistics and Semiology were brought into play to justify the systematic critique of the most influential epistemological hindrances and of the various manifestations of empiricism.

Another important feature of this period when the new Portuguese sociological community was intensely involved in building up a stock of basic technical, methodological, theoretical and self-reflective tools was the high degree of acceptance of cross-disciplinary influences.

The authors of the Gulbenkian Commission Report on the reorganisation of the social sciences, published under the title *Open the Social Sciences*, recognise that after a long period of institutional consolidation which extends up to the middle of the 20th century, an effort has been made in the more advanced countries to try to attenuate or overcome the disciplinary barriers

which affect this field of knowledge, and to go beyond strict institutional limitations. But it is also said that this movement has met with some resistance and obstacles of various kinds, so that its progress has been slow and its successes relatively few and far between. This is probably the price which has had to be paid for the progress made earlier through a consistent division of labour and its corresponding institutionalisation at the heart of the social sciences.

As we have seen earlier, this historical path was not followed by Portugal. And this may be one of the strongest reasons why this initial push for sociology in Portugal was particularly favourable to a multi-disciplinary approach to social facts.

But I am sure that our originality in this area is also due to the way the first generation of sociologists was recruited: as already mentioned, they came to plough this new academic furrow with an enormous variety of different disciplines behind them. On top of this they had a strong common desire to adapt, academically and professionally, to the new discipline. So the propensity to interdisciplinary work became second nature in their professional working habits. These habits were passed down to successive generations of students of Sociology with reasonable success, namely by means of the almost exhaustive adoption, for teaching purposes, of the Maussian category of the '*phénomène social total*'.

So the ground had been prepared. The democratic revolution was just around the corner. Let us see what fruits were reaped in the harvest.

### Consolidation

The April 1974 revolution hastened the return to Portugal of a vast number of intellectuals, including quite a large number of sociologists. These helped to open up the small Portuguese scientific community to the influence of the theoretical movements which were current in the core countries at that time, both in the francophone and in the Anglo-Saxon sphere of influence. There was a radical change as far as publications were concerned: new reviews came out, and some of the fundamental works of sociology were translated. Scientific conferences increasingly were being held. The first degree courses in Sociology were created and in various universities new research centres were founded.

Alongside the reorganisation of the whole academic and scientific domain in the area of Sociology, there was also to be a significant increase in research on Portuguese society.

Understandably the researchers involved in these new projects ran into a serious problem, namely the lack of fundamental studies on the country's social structure. This very often required them to invest heavily in "starting studies" in this field, which included restoring the historic dimension to the events they

were analysing. On the other hand there was a positive advantage to this in that, from the analytical point of view, they refused to place the objects of study in artificial isolation. Despite some inevitable instances where there was a temptation to stray into atomistic or pointillist detail, this was a tendency which in its essentials was to be carried forward into the future.

From the outset, the new democratic climate opened up a wide variety of issues of concern to Portuguese sociologists: the state, the armed forces, the educational system, the "high" and "popular" cultures, the arts, rituals and other symbolic practices with reference to microcosms and marginal social groups (emigrants, recurrent migrants, craftsmen, peasants), survival strategies in agriculture and other underground sectors of the economy, and so on. Efforts to establish a specific theoretical classification of Portuguese society as being semi-peripheral or in a stage of intermediate development were a promising sign of the special nature of the Portuguese Sociology which was emerging.

The number of presentations at the three Congresses of the Portuguese Sociological Association which have taken place to date, and their subject-matter, give a good picture of the development of research over the last few years. In 1988 there were 73 presentations, and the three areas most covered were: "The sociology of information, knowledge and culture", "The sociology of urban and rural issues" and "The sociology of the family." In 1992 there were 129 presentations, with special emphasis on "Social Change: new values, new ways of life, new identities," "Education and Work: contradictions and organisational alternatives" and "Socio-spatial realignments and regional and local growth patterns." In 1996 there were 202 presentations, mainly centred on "Family, Gender and the Affections", "Culture, Communication and transformation of knowledge" and "Territory, Environment and regional and local growth patterns."

Up to the end of the eighties there was no apparent standardisation on a particular model or approach in the Portuguese sociological community: Marxist, functionalist and symbolic interactionist contributions co-existed quite well. However, there began to be a tendency to achieve theoretical synthesis, along the lines proposed by Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu.

With regard to preferred methodologies, it can be noted that there is a propensity for a certain creative updating of the structuralist-positivist and phenomenological traditions, by way of fairly eclectic choice of methods of investigation and observation. This has effectively undermined the routines and disciplinary barriers which exist in the predominant professional *habitus* of anthropologists and sociologists. For this reason, many of the concerns of the post-modernist and deconstructivist trends are of little practical application in the new world of emerging sociology in Portugal. If they did find an echo here, it is more because there was a concern to get close to mainline intellectual trends in some of the core countries than by nature of the predominant sociological production in Portugal.

Methodological inventiveness has moreover been encouraged in Portugal by original thinking on the relationship between theoretical investigation, observation (including action research) and the professional practice of sociology. In this context the role of the Portuguese Sociology Association in insisting on and promoting debate on this issue stands out as a healthy break with institutional constraints.

I think it is reasonable to postulate, in the light of very recent developments, that the fragile edifice of sociology in Portugal is currently revealing two new trends: on the one hand a certain withdrawal from heavy theoretical investment at the study object definition stage, which will gradually lead to an increase in the frequency with which practitioners surrender to empiricism. This may actually be a perverse effect of the remarkable increase in official or semi-official demand for sociological knowledge. Secondly, a certain tendency to fragment into schools, each of which tries to justify itself by a deliberate suppression of work carried out outside its own restricted sphere of scientific research. An effort must be made in order to counteract the effects of these more recent tendencies.

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