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# Critical and Radical Social Work

## The radical turn of Portuguese Social Work during the democratic transition (1974-1976)

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## **The radical turn of Portuguese Social Work during the democratic transition (1974-1976)**

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## Introduction

This paper looks into the experiences of Portuguese social workers during the 1974-1976 revolutionary period which began with the military coup, on April 25, 1974, overthrowing the fifty-year old conservative dictatorship, and went on up to 1976, when Constitutional democracy was reinstated. Particularly, it focuses on their' experiences during the above-mentioned period and the ideas underlying radical social work and seeks to understand to what extent Portuguese social workers' and students' activist and progressive leaning during the Revolution constitute a form of radical social work.

Puzzlingly, or paradoxically to say the least, the relationship between the Portuguese experience and radical social work ideas lies on the notion that there is no evidence of such rapport. In fact, Portuguese social workers did not acknowledge their practices during the revolutionary stage as *radical social work*. And although Portuguese studies

1 actually refer to a turn in the profession after the 1974 Revolution (Negreiros, Andrade  
2 and Queirós, 1992; Branco and Fernandes, 2005), it has not been so far described as  
3 *radical social work*. The same happens when professionals talk about their Revolutionary  
4 experience. For them, the radical feature of some of the activities undertaken was  
5 attributed to the existing political and ideological context, rather than the result of an  
6 assumed theoretical stand.  
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10 Radical social work in the United Kingdom (UK) and in the United States of America  
11 (USA) grew in a completely different context of service disposal, policy and statutory  
12 frames, not to mention a largely different socio-political and economic background. Yet,  
13 the communalities between the radical proposals of the 1970's literature (Table 2) and  
14 Portuguese Social Work during the revolutionary period present striking similarities.  
15 Despite the fact that it is not possible to establish a link between Portuguese social work  
16 and 1970s UK and USA radical theorizing, a careful reading of their proposals may  
17 provide valuable coordinates that will help understand Portuguese radical  
18 experimentation that took place in the aftermath of the 1974 Revolution<sup>1</sup>.  
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26 Following a brief presentation of the methodological approach supporting this article, a  
27 short contextualisation of Portuguese social work in the revolutionary process will be  
28 provided. The influence of Latin-American critical social work movements in Portugal will  
29 be addressed before focusing on the radical content of Portuguese social work in the  
30 revolutionary period.  
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### 35 **Methods, data and data analysis**

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37 This article offers a dialogue between two different aspects: the extensive literary  
38 production of radical social work in the first half of the 1970s in the UK and in the USA  
39 and the actions of their contemporary social workers in Portugal, gathered through a set  
40 of interviews with some of their protagonists. A strange dialogue, indeed, given that, at  
41 the time, Portuguese social workers were not aware of such production.  
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46 The approach was based on the extensive literature feed produced by radical social work  
47 in the 1970s. This process allowed detecting general trends but also variations within a  
48 movement that can hardly be considered as single minded. On the other hand, a set of  
49 10 in-depth interviews with Portuguese social workers was chosen, taking into  
50 consideration their participation in the Revolutionary process, namely their involvement  
51 in a wide range of initiatives associated with the radical imprint of the period. Interview  
52 collection occurred almost simultaneously with literature reading; nevertheless, while  
53 preparing the scripts and conducting the interviews, special care was taken to avoid  
54 using labels and references drawn from the literature.  
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1 The semi-structured interviews had a strong biographical imprint. As they were being  
2 collected, everything was done to avoid directing the interviewees to qualify their  
3 experience in accordance with pre-established categories (whether coming from radical  
4 social work literature or not). The main bibliographic sources that were used are identified  
5 in Table 2 and the panel of interviewees is presented in Table 1.<sup>2</sup>  
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8 The qualitative nature of the research did not imply great concern about the  
9 representativeness of the units of analysis – the interviewed subjects. However, there  
10 was an effort to select informants whose experience could cover the heterogeneity of  
11 situations characteristic of the revolutionary process.  
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16 Accessing the subjects was done through snowball sampling and the panel used in this  
17 article was extracted from a larger set of informants of an ongoing research focused on  
18 documenting this particular period in the history of Portuguese social work. The criteria  
19 used to select the 10 interviewees relied mostly on how the subjects' experience in the  
20 Revolution paralleled the principles of radical social work, as referred to in the literature.<sup>3</sup>  
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25 In the coding process, categories and subcategories were extracted directly from the  
26 interview transcripts and later compared to the key tenets identified in the radical social  
27 work literature produced in the UK and in the USA. At any time, coding depended on or  
28 was directly influenced by the theoretical and conceptual categories found in radical  
29 social work.  
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36 TABLE 1 HERE  
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### 43 **The Revolution and the opening of political opportunities for the emergence of 44 radical social work in Portugal**

45 It is quite clear that the radical turn in Portuguese social work very much results from the  
46 structural opportunities opened by the political transition following the military coup of  
47 April 25, 1974. The influence of the political context on social workers' capacity to  
48 exercise radical forms of intervention was in due time pointed out by Statham (1978),  
49 referring to the case of Chile under Salvador Allende's government. Bearing some  
50 resemblance to its Chilean contemporary case, the Portuguese 1974 Revolution staged  
51 a socialist turn that was to be eagerly embraced by the most progressive social workers  
52 and students. Simultaneously, the new political *status quo* contributed to ensuring  
53 structural political backup to progressive policies, revolutionary programs and radical  
54 forms of practice.  
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1 Reisch and Andrews (2002: 19) claim that radical ideas and radical agency do not grow  
2 unless times are right for it; as a matter-of-fact, the Revolution ploughed a fertile soil for  
3 Portuguese radical social work to nurture. In 1974, the political opportunities opened by  
4 the Revolution were just too obvious to go unnoticed and social workers either became  
5 involved (or co-opted) in the mobilisations that appeared right after the military coup, or  
6 became, by their own right and initiative, agents of those movements (Negreiros *et al.*,  
7 1992; Silva, 2018). It was the right context for setting in motion the idealistic principles  
8 that both Reisch and Andrews (2002) and Wagner (1989, 1990) showed to be prominent  
9 in the forging of radical social work.  
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12 If the widespread collective mobilisation that marked the revolutionary period was a  
13 product of structural opportunities, it was also the result of broad social and political  
14 unrest within large sectors of society. Much has been written on the interaction of social  
15 movements with higher-level political forces during the revolutionary period (Cerezales,  
16 2003; Downs, 1980; Silva, 2014; Varela, 2014). As it has been suggested by some  
17 authors (Tarrow, 1992; Cerezales, 2003; Silva, 2014), by observing the rise of social  
18 movements, it is possible to see how local actors, operating at the micro level, end up  
19 presenting political opportunities to the agents and actors that operate in the upper  
20 social and political structures. Thus, like an hourglass turning on its axis, micro level  
21 collective action and macro level structural forces act interchangeably, both nurturing  
22 and feeding on the political opportunities they provide each other. Accordingly, both the  
23 social movements that emerged in the aftermath of the Revolution and the social workers  
24 who endorsed them can be seen as agents that, from the micro level of social action,  
25 provided political opportunities for the forces operating at the higher levels of political  
26 action.  
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29 The revolutionary initiatives carried out by State authorities during the 1974-1975 period  
30 drew popular involvement and, simultaneously, endorsed grassroots collective  
31 mobilisation. These did not just emerge as an epiphenomenon of major structural political  
32 transformations; they also constituted a key ally of radical revolutionary forces, playing a  
33 fundamental role in the construction of the latter's social and political legitimacy.  
34 Discussing whether social work developed into a social movement itself (Thompson,  
35 2002) in the context of the April 25 Revolution, though tempting, will be out of this article's  
36 scope. However, it should be pointed out that the revolutionary experience in Portugal  
37 has made the interconnection between social movements and social work more visible.  
38 Far from being just another component of the complex revolutionary process, social  
39 mobilisation was, indeed, a key element of socio-political change in Portugal and a  
40 prominent vehicle of social work agency (Silva, 2018), as it will be addressed later.  
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## **A door ajar to radical engagement: the influence of Latin-American critical renovation movements**

The influence of the Latin-American Reconceptualisation that emerged in the second half of the 1960s in such countries like Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and Colombia, to name but a few, reached Portugal in the early 1970s (Branco, 2009; Martins, 2017). This critical approach, considered by Ferguson, Ioakimidis and Lavalette (2018) as a radical social work movement, strongly rooted on Marxist grounds (Ammann, 1988), sought to reconfigure concepts, methods and the fundamental philosophical and ideological principles of what was then deemed as traditional social work (Servio, 2014). Underlying this task was the notion that social work would not be able to challenge the social and economic problems of Latin-America, nor help these societies overcome the internal relations of domination and dependency toward foreign powers (ALAESS, 1971: 1-2), unless it broke with imported features.

The Reconceptualisation Movement defended the rejection of professional political neutrality and proposed that, rather than being involved in assistance and adaptive intervention (Netto, 2013), the social worker should become an agent of social change, willing to commit to the dispossessed masses (CELATS/ALAESS, 1976).

In Portugal, the Reconceptualisation Movement reached mainly left-wing social workers and, in the years that followed the democratic turn, its dissemination grew, coinciding with the presence of exiled Latin-American social workers and guest-academics (Martins and Carrara, 2014; Santos and Martins, 2016). In this process, professionals and students became acquainted with alternative critical formulations of social work.

It was possible to attain the Reconceptualisation Movement's main purposes in the context of the Portuguese democratic transition of the 1970s. Among the principles underlying that transition was the need for social workers to break with bourgeois autocracy (Netto, 2005) and engage in social movements regarding which participation and conscientisation of the public were pivotal (Faleiros, 1994). Theoretical discussions and the conceptual frameworks pointed by the Reconceptualisation Movement provided alternative arrangements for social work practice in such contexts as Portugal, which had been deprived of liberty and were still afflicted by social and economic inequality.

In the next pages the experiences the Portuguese social workers during the revolutionary period will be addressed (Table 1), based on a set of key tenets retrieved from UK and USA radical social work literature of the 1970s (Table 2).

TABLE 2 HERE



## **The radical content of Portuguese social work in the 1970s**

### **Renouncing professional political neutrality and backing up socialist transition**

Unlike the neutralist stance of traditional social work in the years that preceded the Revolution, the post-dictatorship fully undraped the left-wing political involvement of social workers. That engagement in opposition movements dated back to pre-revolutionary times (Ferreira, Couto, and Bizarro, 1992), when many social workers had been involved in the *Comissão Democrática Eleitoral* (CDE) (Democratic Electoral Commission), either in charge of organisational tasks (like interviewee F3) or included in the electoral lists (like interviewee F7, whose candidacy in the 1973 elections costed her her position as a social worker in a private industrial company).<sup>4</sup>

The Revolution and the ensuing context of liberty as well as the emergent model of multi-party democracy paved the way for an overt political co-option of social workers. Let us keep in mind that engaging in left-wing party politics was then defended by key authors like Corrigan and Leonard (1978). Drawing from Gramscian concepts, these authors asserted that such involvement could turn social workers into the organic intellectuals of the working class rather than of the capitalist system (a condition they associated with mainstream social workers).

Either as formal members or as mere followers, Portuguese social workers became involved in the activities of political parties: interviewee F3 was a member of the Portuguese Democratic Movement (MDP) and often used the party's alliances and organisational resources to bolster the effectiveness and reach of her community-related interventions; interviewee F4 reported her approach to the Popular Democratic Union (UDP) and F9 became a Communist Party member in 1975. One of the most striking examples of political involvement in this lot of interviewees is given by interviewee F2. Once a member of the Proletariat's Revolutionary Party – Revolutionary Brigades (PRP-BR), she later abandoned it for disagreeing with the organisation's intention to keep carrying out armed actions after the Revolution. Her decision to leave the party coincided with the beginning of her work in the Setúbal branch of the Institute of Family and Social Action (IFAS), where she organised residents' associations and community social services.

Even when not engaged in a left-wing party, the inquired social workers recognise the existence of close contacts with left-leaning party structures in the scope of their professional intervention. Regarding this matter, interviewee F1 mentioned the establishing of coordinated efforts between the Institute of School Social Action (IASA),

her public employing entity, and neighbourhood associations coxed by the Communist Party in the district of Setúbal.

Taking an anti-capitalist stance, engaging in structural socio-political change, endorsing socialism while denying the political neutrality of the profession and supporting left-wing political forces was a distinct mark of radical social work in the 1970s. For Lichtenberg (1976), politics and social work were inevitably entangled and the practitioners that relinquished the radical way would be doomed to befall under the politics of conservatism. Subsequently, Langan and Lee (1989b: 4) claimed that in the 1970s, radical social work urged professionals to become involved in “socialist political action”, recalling authors like Galper (1980), who blatantly addressed radical social work as socialist social work. Radical social work authors claimed that the political commitment of social workers could be attained through either practice, party politics or both (Reisch and Andrews, 2002), as illustrated by the Portuguese case.

### **Engaging in professional activism and taking the front-line of participatory democracy**

A major sign of radical change in Portuguese social work following the revolutionary events was given by the schools, since they underwent a profound restructuring of educational and practice training curricula (Instituto Superior de Serviço Social de Coimbra, 1985; Negreiros, Andrade and Queirós, 1992). The new study plans were meant to prepare students to engage in transformative collective action and to promote class emancipation. The changes introduced students to theories on the production of social inequality and put them in close contact with the subordinated masses, their ways of living and movements.

The radical redesign of academic curricula asserted the collective subject of social work’s intervention, resembling what radical social work authors had been envisioning for social work: opposing the forces and causes of social oppression, actively committing to changing the power balance in society and socio-economic inequality (Rein, 1970). Activism, conscientisation, advocacy and service-user co-option were considered instrumental to attain those ends. The point was to redirect social work’s intervention towards a restructuring, “at the roots, of the dominant social order” (Pearson, 1975: 17) so that the different origins of societal oppression might be suppressed (Lichtenberg, 1976).

Bailey and Brake (1975b) pointed out the need for social workers to acknowledge the legitimacy of their clients’ right to dispute, disapprove or even reject the solutions presented by social workers. In the SAAL programme,<sup>5</sup> the *brigades*, as the

1 interdisciplinary task teams were called, interacted with the residents according to those  
2 values. In that initiative, building houses was not the ultimate purpose; as interviewee F3  
3 recalls it: “It was about a process, a philosophy that put people in the centre. [What did  
4 matter] was the resolve to make people participate, partaking of the whole process”.

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7 Indeed, the involvement in the organising of resident movements symbolises the  
8 proximity between social workers and the public. Such participation went beyond  
9 advocating the rights of the less affluent people, since social workers contributed with  
10 their expertise to the development of collective mobilizations and helped legitimise acts  
11 of civil disobedience and breaking of legal rules, like occupying houses.

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16 Squatting of private and State-owned property was also in the menu of post-revolutionary  
17 social work action. Both interviewee F1 and F5 referred to their involvement in two  
18 distinct actions. In 1975, the former, in her capacity as a social worker of the Institute of  
19 School Social Action, was asked to support the creation of a cooperative of parents of  
20 handicapped children, who did not benefit from support services at the time. What started  
21 as an institutional request soon evolved into an activist plea that led her to the squatting  
22 of an abandoned private touristic facility in the municipality of Seixal. In this process,  
23 besides establishing contacts between different State services and political intervenors,  
24 this particular social worker contributed to organising parents around a cooperative  
25 project. She also participated in the surveillance watches of the occupied premises, while  
26 taking part in the improvement works of the building, a process that relied on auto-  
27 construction and on informal solidarities.<sup>6</sup>

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36 The latter evoked her participation in occupying a building belonging to the National  
37 Institute for the Use of Leisure Time (INATEL) in Porto, right after the April 25 coup.<sup>7</sup> This  
38 professional, then working in the Porto branch of the Institute of Family and Social Action  
39 recalled what could be associated with the service-user co-option loudly advocated by  
40 the radical social work literature of the time (Knickemeyer, 1972; Cloward and Piven,  
41 1975; Cohen, 1975). In the months that followed the Revolution, new legislation was  
42 passed awarding social subsidies to people over 60 years of age and reliant on State  
43 welfare; the Porto local Institute of Family and Social Action structure, then under self-  
44 management, needed to inform the potential beneficiaries of those new social measures.  
45 Fearing that communication by mail might not reach everyone, she took the initiative of  
46 inviting the elderly of a “then already problematic Porto neighbourhood” to come to the  
47 premises of the Institute of Family and Social Action on a given date so that they could  
48 be informed of this recently acquired right. On the scheduled day, “they took the bus [to  
49 come to the Institute of Family and Social Action services] and when they arrived, a  
50 colleague burst into panic: ‘They are here to occupy the building! There’s a group of old  
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1 people coming to occupy the service!' [...]. 'Why did you do it? Why so many people?  
2 [...] Where will you speak with them?' 'In our meeting room' [the interviewee replied]".

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4 As a member of the Institute of Family and Social Action staff, this social worker also  
5 volunteered to collaborate with the Armed Forces Movement in the Cultural  
6 Dynamization and Civic Action Campaigns in Porto's urban perimeter.<sup>8</sup> These  
7 campaigns, like the SAAL programme, stood as flagship initiatives of the revolutionary  
8 period, as an embodiment of direct participatory democracy (Almeida, 2009; Silva, 2013,  
9 2018; Varela, 2014).

### 10 11 12 13 **Taking the peoples' side – transformative professional practice through social** 14 **movements engagement and community organising**

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17 The involvement in social movements was another key feature of the radicalisation of  
18 social work. As stated earlier, the Revolution prompted the ideal conditions for collective  
19 mobilisation to occur and social movements started all over the country. Closely  
20 connected with this widespread mobilisation was the agrarian reform movement,  
21 particularly intense in the South, where hundreds of rural estates were occupied by  
22 workers.  
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25 Interviewee F6, then a high-profile member of the Institute of Family and Social Action,  
26 in Setúbal, directed institutional efforts and staff, including herself, to support occupations  
27 and to establish cooperatives, in articulation with the Ministry of Agriculture and  
28 Fisheries. Recalling that experience, she assumed that her commitment to those  
29 movements, "more than anything, was a question of giving people a voice and a chance  
30 to really take the land they farmed into their own hands".  
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33 The experience of interviewee F4 also reveals a close interaction with the cooperative  
34 movement, this time, the Torre Bela estate occupation - another salient event of the  
35 revolutionary period. What started as a first-year social work study assignment, soon  
36 became an experience of complete immersion in that grassroots initiative, as she had  
37 lived in the estate for about four years.<sup>9</sup>  
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40 This commitment to support collective mobilisation was clear in radical social work  
41 literature in the 1970s (Statham, 1978; Powell, 2001; Reisch and Andrews, 2002).  
42 Establishing alliances with social movements was considered a means to reinforce the  
43 political dimension of social work practice (Cloward and Piven, 1975). Some defended  
44 that such involvement should also be part of the social workers' private life (Statham,  
45 1978). For Lichtenberg (1976), taking part in larger movements granted social workers  
46 an opportunity to boost their political capacity and to incorporate it in their professional  
47 agency. A clear example of this is the participation of Portuguese social workers in the  
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1 *urban struggles*, as Downs (1980) called the massive urban social mobilisations in  
2 demand for dignified housing; these struggles were frequently marked by widespread  
3 housing occupations.  
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5 The SAAL programme represents the political commitment of social work to the  
6 revolutionary flow. In short, this programme was intended as a vehicle for a different  
7 housing policy, bypassing construction lobbies and bureaucratic State administrative  
8 procedures (Portas, 1986; Andrade, 1992). The motivation that led this programme  
9 showed wide resemblances to Cloward's and Piven's (1975) criticism, who denounced  
10 housing policies in the USA as being at the service of market interests and real estate  
11 agents that parasitised the public sector.  
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17 The testimonies offered by Portuguese social workers involved in SAAL's rehousing and  
18 urban rehabilitation projects in the city of Porto (Queirós, 2015) as well as those collected  
19 during the current research (interviewees F2, F3, F8 and M1) provide a good image of  
20 how professionals viewed the housing problem, its endemic structural causes and the  
21 radical intervention options, in a stand that holds many parallels with the radical social  
22 work literature of the time. In the case of SAAL, social workers did not limit their  
23 intervention to local groups; they were also involved in turning local informal associative  
24 clusters into wider national alliances, forging networks of residents' associations.  
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31 In fact, coalition building with grassroots mobilisations was an essential part of social  
32 work radicalising, as interviewee F3 puts it: "after the 25th April [Revolution] we saw huge  
33 movements in the neighbourhoods and we [SAAL team] [...] went straightaway to meet  
34 the people, to seek the movements". Another interviewee, M1, remembered his *brigade*  
35 taking part in the *Houses, yes. Shacks, No!* movement and in public demonstrations "in  
36 favour of the SAAL project and of [that] housing policy".  
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42 Not surprisingly, community social work approaches and, more specifically, community  
43 organising have surfaced in the majority of the interviews that were collected. In the  
44 course of their partaking in the SAAL programme, F2, F3 and F8 highlighted the  
45 extensive use of community organising in their work with the residents. By that time,  
46 Corrigan and Leonard (1978) were suggesting community intervention as a privileged  
47 means to intervene with claimant organisations and other local or national organisations,  
48 stressing how essential it was for social workers to move from the back seats of  
49 community meetings to the front ends of community politics. This was something that, in  
50 1974, Portuguese social workers were beginning to do.  
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57 In 1977, Young (quoted by Langan, 2002: 211) came up with a formula for radical social  
58 work in which community organising played a chief role. In his proposal, by assuming a  
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1 radical approach, social workers were expected to focus on “decentralised organisation,  
2 [...] participatory democracy”, emphasising “do-it-yourself direct-action politics”,  
3 believing in “organising all the poor” and “building counter-institutions”. To achieve these  
4 goals, community intervention was set as the ideal instrumental approach to overcome  
5 oppressive practice. In Mayo's (1975) viewpoint, once community social work had gotten  
6 rid of the problematic developmentalist and paternalistic forms, social workers would be  
7 able to circumvent statutory constraints and to intervene beyond the restrictions of  
8 casework.  
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10 Promoting community intervention was often associated with criticism of the  
11 overwhelming influence of casework on social work. The literature on radical social work  
12 and movements like *Case Con* and *Catalyst* have explicitly denounced welfare services  
13 (and the social workers implementing its intervention protocols) as agents of control with  
14 little concern about addressing the structural causes of social injustices and inequality  
15 (Reisch and Andrews, 2002). Both situations, according to Bailey and Brake (1975), were  
16 rooted in social work education system, which they accused of reproducing a vision of  
17 the profession that was indiferent to political struggles and to the scrutiny of power  
18 differentials in society.  
19

20 In Portugal, the changes that were introduced in social work academic curricula during  
21 the period in question reveal that, in addition to a clear change in the political and  
22 ideological imprint of the educational project, individualised, palliative, casuistic practice  
23 standards were being challenged. Changing the curricula and the organisation of  
24 internship training also revealed hostility towards the institutional settings and services  
25 that had historically lodged social workers, seen as numbing and alienating venues of  
26 professional conservatism (Negreiros, Andrade and Queirós, 1992).  
27

28 In what regards social sciences, the academic curricula of Social Work was initially based  
29 on Leplaysian sociology; after 1974, they included Marxist theory (Martins and Tomé,  
30 2016) in an attempt to prepare students to make their own “class rupture”. Students were  
31 led to take work placements in “popular organisations”, where they were expected to  
32 learn and put “the instruments of ‘bourgeois science’” at the service of the “proletariat”  
33 (Lisbon's school of social work 1975-1976 study plan quoted by Negreiros *et al.*, 1992:  
34 83).  
35

36 Interviewee F4 recalls: “back then, [...] the observation internships privileged contexts  
37 where students could experience [...] social struggles, grassroots organisations and, in  
38 more institutional contexts, like hospitals, they were instructed not to interact with *social*  
39 *work*”. According to this interviewee, it was part of a combined effort to urge students to  
40 do their “class rupture and their breaking with traditional social work”.  
41

1 Regarding this issue, interviewee M1 remembers the hardships he endured during his  
2 observation practices in a farm South of Lisbon, where he watched and joined, under a  
3 scorching sun, the workers in the tomato harvest. Later, he became involved in a SAAL  
4 brigade, where, besides organising the residents, directing neighbour assemblies,  
5 developing animation activities, diagnosing collective needs and mediating contacts with  
6 public entities, he also laying pipes during the construction works.<sup>10</sup>  
7  
8  
9

10 Unlike the diverting of students from institutional placements proposed by Portuguese  
11 schools of social work in 1974 and 1975, radical social work advocated the continuity of  
12 professionals in those services, so that structural change could be made from within  
13 (Rein, 1970; Cloward and Piven, 1975; Corrigan and Leonard, 1978). Pearson (1975)  
14 urged professionals to turn into a mass of resistant practitioners, determined to bend the  
15 rules and to advance solutions outside tailored protocols, resembling what Scott (1985)  
16 called everyday forms of resistance. Borrowing the concept from Eric Hobsbawm,  
17 Pearson (1975: 38-39) depicted radical social workers as a sort of “pre-political primitive  
18 rebels” guided by utopian promises, as “noble robbers”, whose undisclosed resistance  
19 activity would corrupt the foundations of institutional power and the political system, in  
20 what roughly sounded like a messianic venture.<sup>11</sup>  
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### 28 **Rank-and-file activism in social work trade unionism**

29  
30 In Portugal, the first half of the 1970s was a period of high adhesion to trade-unionism in  
31 social work (Ferreira, Couto, and Fernandes, 1992; Martins, 2017). It coincided with the  
32 already mentioned changes in the political leaning of the Union of Social Work  
33 Professionals, as a new board of younger social workers was elected in 1973 (Martins,  
34 2017). The changes in the Union’s leadership were symptomatic of a general sense of  
35 disconnection from traditional social work and the regime’s political *status-quo*. It was  
36 “clearly a project of rejection of the Estado Novo” (The New State or the Second  
37 Republic, Portugal’s corporatist authoritarian regime prior to 1974), stated interviewee  
38 F6, who was then a union leader.  
39  
40  
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44

45 Though discontinued after 1976 (when its members gradually joined vertical union  
46 structures), the Union of Social Work Professionals played an important role in the  
47 process of conscience raising of Portuguese social workers, in fighting professional  
48 political neutrality and, in some cases, initiating politicisation trajectories, like the one  
49 pursued by interviewee F3: “I was going to clandestine meetings [with representatives of  
50 the *Intersindical* Movement (The General Confederation of the Portuguese Workers)].  
51 [...] Maybe it was then that I was introduced to the Democratic Electoral Commissions  
52 [and] turned leftwards”.  
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1 In this article, it is not possible to address neither the activity of the Union of Social Work  
2 Professionals during the revolutionary period, nor the motives for its dissolution;  
3 nonetheless, it is worth pointing out trade-union activity in social work in Portugal is yet  
4 another dimension of radical agency, an attribute also pointed out by radical social work  
5 authors in the UK and in the USA at that time and afterwards (Wenocur, 1974; Cohen,  
6 1975; Corrigan and Leonard, 1978; Joyce, Corrigan and Hayes, 1988; Langan and Lee,  
7 1989; Duarte, 2017).

## 11 **Final remarks**

14 When doing the history of the participation of social workers in the Portuguese Revolution  
15 of 1974, there is no ignoring this important, yet relatively short, period of professional  
16 experimentation. Describing and understanding what social workers did in the turmoil of  
17 the Revolution not only contributes to a better-informed view of the profession's history  
18 and its inherent political ontology (Duarte, 2017), but it also provides knowledge about  
19 the complex interconnections practitioners established with a variety of social and  
20 political agents. A view that may contribute to provide an image of social workers as  
21 committed critical professionals, rather than mere tools of social policy, social  
22 engineering or charity. This particular experience can showcase how practitioners and  
23 students contributed to go beyond the social justice rhetoric (Spolander, Engelbrecht and  
24 Sansfaçon, 2016; Reisch, 2018) by putting in place interventions underpinned by  
25 participation and committed to enhance emancipatory values.

34 The experiences of Portuguese social workers, rather than being left in the past or  
35 musealised as an object of professional heritage, can offer a valid input to contemporary  
36 debates on the politics of social work and the claims for social work as an “inherently  
37 political activity” (Ferguson *et al.*, 2018: 3). As seen previously, that experience may  
38 provide a window into: (i) the way professionals coped with complex political, economic  
39 and social change and its outcomes; (ii) the way technical devices were placed in  
40 unusual intervention contexts and circumstances; (iii) the way social workers managed  
41 to interact with publics who, often enough, saw them as agents of social and political  
42 control, and how they were able to re-negotiate and rebuild new power-balanced  
43 relationships with those publics.

51 From 1974 to 1976, Portuguese social work did, indeed, experience a radical turn and  
52 was able, under a politically favourable context, to achieve what UK and USA radical  
53 theorists claimed social work should *be* and *do*. However, if in the UK and in the USA it  
54 can be argued that radical social work took the form of a movement (Reisch and  
55



Andrews, 2002; Ferguson, 2009), the same cannot be said of the Portuguese experience.

The Portuguese radical turn in social work was more a contextual phenomenon rather than a coordinated movement insofar as it did not follow one or more identifiable theoretical leads. In fact, there were no platforms where professionals and students converged to discuss and reason their radical experiences and no radical statements were made – not like the ones that emerged in the UK (e.g. *Case Con*), in the USA (e.g. *Catalyst*) or in Latin-America (e.g. *Reconceptualisation Movement*) in any case. If seen in the light of the ample literature produced in these parts of the world, it seems clear that the Portuguese experience did conform to radical social work; yet, its emergence was conditioned by and depended on social workers' willingness to seize the structural political opportunities open to them by the Revolution, rather than to rely on a collectively coordinated stand.

The radical social work turn in Portugal did not continue. Fostered within and by a context of radical political change, as soon as political opportunities vanished and the socio-political radicalisation gave way to *democratic normalisation* the Portuguese radical social work experience faded.<sup>12</sup> The protagonists - as it happened throughout the history of radical social work in other parts of the world - were a loud minority (Powell, 2001; Payne, 2005; Lavalette, 2011), who added their voices to the revolutionary choir. Their volume and echo were to gradually dim during the ensuing transition to a constitutional democracy. In the process, social movements, radical initiatives and the most progressive programmes were dismantled, while collective mobilisation collapsed and direct democracy practices were silenced. At the same time, Portuguese social work has resumed the institutional path as its professionals have become gradually incorporated in the evolving welfare State edifice as well as in the thriving third sector.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the testimonies analysed by Amaro (2015), Portuguese social workers tend to classify the alternative forms of professional action of the 1970s as ideologically driven rather than theoretically supported.

<sup>2</sup> It is worth mentioning that, for the time being, there is no evidence of radical social work literature from the UK and the USA having reached the Portuguese milieu in the 1970s. In 1992, Negreiros *et al.*, in their analysis of the bibliography used in Lisbon's school, could not identify any reference distinctively connected with radical social work in the 1970s.

<sup>3</sup> Social workers' participation in State and private companies' worker's control was intentionally left out of this survey.

<sup>4</sup> The CDE (Democratic Electoral Commission) was a political opposition movement that was allowed to participate in the 1969 and 1973 parliamentary elections.

<sup>5</sup> SAAL is the Portuguese acronym for Local Mobile Support Service, an unconventional national housing programme (1974-1976) that combined State, municipal and residents' resources (see Andrade, 1992; Portas, 1986).

<sup>6</sup> From 1974 until 1979, grassroots organisations were responsible for the creation of 60% of the existing social support facilities to the handicapped (Negreiros *et al* 1992).

<sup>7</sup> INATEL replaced, in 1974, the FNAT (Portuguese acronym that stands for National Foundation for Joy in Work), founded in the 1930s according to fascist models (Taboas, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> The Armed Forces Movement was the self-proclaimed denomination of the military movement, mostly composed of mid-rank officers, responsible for overthrowing the dictatorial regime.

<sup>9</sup> Galper (1980) considered enlarged political and life commitment with projects and communities as an attribute of radical social work.

<sup>10</sup> This interviewee acknowledged having been involved in adult education and in animation-related activities before entering social work, following Paulo Freire's method.

<sup>11</sup> The messianic drive associated with radical social work activity was deconstructed and criticised by Iamamoto (1999) in the case of the Latin-American Reconceptualisation Movement. Stoic, hero-like positioning, seldom found in British and USA activist social workers was also the subject of Statham's (1978) criticism.

<sup>12</sup> Democratic normalisation is a term often used to coin the evolution of constitutional democracy after 1976, associated with the ideological ascendancy of counterrevolutionary positions (Varela, 2014).

<b>Table 1: Interviewees' participation in the revolutionary period</b>		
<b>Int.</b>	<b>Occupation (1974-1976)</b>	<b>Relevant activities (1974-1976)</b>
M1	Social Work student; social worker	Involvement in Social Work students' mobilisation; Member of a SAAL brigade; involvement in community organising, participation in political rallies
F1	Social worker	Supporter of the CERCIS movement; involvement in the occupation of private property and in housing cooperative services for the disabled; coalition building among users
F2	Social worker	Backing up SAAL initiatives and residents' movements; promotion of community-based services; community organising
F3	Social worker	SAAL programme area coordinator; community organiser; promoter of social movements' coalitions; involvement in housing occupations; board member of the Union of Social Work Professionals (USWP); organisation of public political rallies
F4	Student	Involvement in agrarian reform/rural occupations; rural cooperative member and activist
F5	Social worker	Involvement in the occupation of public facilities; participation in the Cultural Dynamization Campaigns held by the Armed Forces Movement; active in promoting service users' rights; local delegate and social work union activist
F6	Social worker	Involvement in agrarian reform actions supporting rural occupations and cooperative organising; board member of the USWP; as head of regional welfare services branch, promoted State institutional support of residents' movements
F7	Social worker	Trade Union activist; professional intervention in workers' union structures
F8	Student	SAAL brigade member; involvement in community organizing, collective conscientisation, socio-cultural animation; assumed membership of the community for over a decade
F9	Social worker	Social work Union activist and board member; involvement in the agrarian reform (support of rural occupations and cooperative organizing); Communist Party militant

<b>Table 2: Portuguese radical manifestations and corresponding UK and USA Radical Social Work tenets (1970s)</b>		
<b>Portuguese post-revolutionary radical manifestations in Social Work</b>	<b>Tenets of Radical Social Work</b>	<b>Key references*</b>
Participation in left-wing political organisations; involvement in cooperative and collectivist initiatives; involvement in the agrarian reform; participation in urban/rural grassroots mobilisations.	Anti-capitalist stance, denial of professional political neutrality; endorsement of socialism.	Cannan, 1975; Corrigan and Leonard, 1978; Galper, 1975, 1980; Lichtenberg, 1976; Pearson, 1975
Post-revolutionary educational curricula aligned with socialist values; students' engagement in transformative collective action; Participation in initiatives based on socialist principles	Opposition to forces & causes of social oppression & commitment to redistribute societal resources & power	Bailey and Brake, 1975a; Cloward and Piven, 1975; Lichtenberg, 1976; Rein, 1970
Organisational support of direct democracy practices; involvement in public rallies supporting residents' movements and housing occupations; active endorsing of service user involvement; technical support to agrarian reform	Social Work agency through activism, advocacy, conscientisation, and service user co-option	Cloward and Piven, 1975; Cohen, 1975; Knickmeyer, 1972
Framing and steering national coalitions of resident movements; Social Work student movements	Involvement in social movements	Lichtenberg, 1976; Statham, 1978
Full embracing of community organizing methods; promotion of community-based services; promotion of community participation in services delivery and decision-making	Emphasis on community intervention & criticism of community development	Cloward and Piven, 1975; Corrigan and Leonard, 1978; Jones and Mayo, 1974; Mayo, 1975
Social Work curricula promoting training and observation outside traditional settings; internships as a means for student socialisation with grassroots movements and <i>class rupture</i> as part of educational aims	Resistance to organizational standards; identification of institutional work settings as venues of professional conservatism	Bailey and Brake, 1975b; Cloward and Piven, 1975; Corrigan and Leonard, 1978; Knickmeyer, 1972; Pearson, 1975; Rein, 1970
Rank-and-file Union activism; political alignment of Social Work Union with progressive forces	Professional mobilization through rank-and-file movements and labour unionism	Cohen, 1975; Corrigan and Leonard, 1978; Leighninger and Knickmeyer, 1976; Wenocur, 1974
Community organizing in the SAAL programme; clear resistance to do casework in public services	Resistance to mainstream practice standards and individualized therapeutic approaches (casework)	Bailey and Brake, 1975b; Cloward and Piven, 1975; Corrigan and Leonard, 1978; Galper, 1975; Pearson, 1975; Rein, 1970
* Overviews of Radical Social Work in the 1970s can be also found in Reisch and Andrews (2002), Wagner (1990), Langan and Lee (1989), Withorn 1984, Payne (2005)		