



RECENSÃO

Sociology in Portugal. A Short History,
de Filipe Carreira da Silva,
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For those unversed in the history of Portuguese sociology, the reading of the last two works on the topic, issued in English, might prove somewhat confusing. In a 2014 article by Garcia *et al.*, the narrative goes on for the last three centuries, from the mid-1800s to today. In a short book published this year, on which I will focus, Filipe Carreira da Silva (FCS) summarizes the same story to a little more than five decades.

The mismatch could of course be only apparent and due to different approaches, which are manifest and deliberate. Garcia *et al.* (2014, p. 357) explicitly oppose what they consider to be the “cesurism” underlying the majority of studies on the subject, which assume an interruption in the development of sociology, corresponding to the *Estado Novo*, and thus preclude the very possibility of searching “in the worlds of education and culture for modes of thought, initiatives or figures that might be granted the status as

precursors or practitioners” of that kind of knowledge. The book by FCS, *Sociology in Portugal. A Short History*, puts forward a more elaborate methodological approach. In opposition to an intellectual history that reduces disciplines to contexts and to the detriment of an “internal” history that takes disciplines as natural categories, the author sets out to specify the epistemic strategy and the epistemological project that lie behind the emergence and development of sociology in the country, from the 1960s on. More specifically, FCS tries to recover the shared aspiration to a form of knowledge, among the relevant actors (Adérito Sedas Nunes and the group assembled around him), and the “discursive formation” (in Michel Foucault’s sense of the term) that sets out the boundaries of their scientific activities.

Thus summarized the two approaches are far from being contradictory and may well be complementary and even

converging. Indeed, we are perfectly aware how disciplinary undertakings as such usually succeed against contending ones, often forgotten but not irrelevant, whether for the results they may have achieved or for what the competition between them might tell us about the choices made by their respective proponents. And we also know how epistemological projects typically borrow from other cultural elements to which they relate. This is at least how I interpret Foucault's words when he refers to the need of determining for a given discursive formation how is a science part of, and how does it work in the field of knowledge. And this is why I believe that within a history of disciplines it does make sense to look in the worlds of culture and education, among others, for antecedents and forerunners of sociology, as Garcia *et al.* do. But it is FCS himself that disqualifies the alternative, stating that this and other "continuist" studies incur two of the basic pitfalls of the history of ideas: the fallacies of anticipation and influence. As FCS pertinently explains, "Rather than showing a direct causal relationship between the scattered intellectual interventions of the turn of the century and the processes of academic institutionalization of sociology in the late 1960s and early 1970s, they have limited themselves to juxtaposing, as opposed to providing textual evidence that connects, the two" (p. 7).

Whether the works mentioned – among them, my own – do or do not incur the said fallacies is a matter of a side debate which for now will remain open.

FCS does not document the synthetic effects he ascribes to the aforementioned apposition nor the subjective disposition, among the authors he cites, "to find an illustrious early Portuguese sociology", to which he imputes the above said paralogisms. What seems to be certain is the formal inconsistency of the successive steps taken by FCS to demonstrate at the outset of his book what he declares to be one of its basic claims: "the trajectory of sociology in Portugal is characterized by a fundamental historical discontinuity whose primary cause was a change in the nature of the political regime, that is, the transition to democratic rule that took place in 1974–75 as a result of a leftist military coup" (*ibid.*).

Indeed, to state that "None of the continuist studies (...) has been able to conclusively demonstrate the influence of early intellectual sources on more recent institutional developments" does not stand as an "empirical reason" (*ibid.*) to insulate the process of disciplinary formation in question. Not necessarily because the absence of proof cannot be taken as proof of absence, but because it would then be necessary that the linking between the two terms had been deliberately sought for by the authors he cites – if it had not been found, it would surely not have been suggested – and mostly because FCS himself sets out to examine the said process and the ulterior disciplinary development by means of an analytical framework that goes beyond the history of ideas and explicitly covers "social agents, ideas, instruments, institutions and contexts" (p. 8). To be sure,

besides the textual connections which the author refers to and while still focusing on agents and ideas (the process of disciplinary formation, as defined), there could well be instruments connecting disparate ideas, agents connecting distinct ideas or institutional settings, and common contexts to different places and persons. In turn, the lack of connections between “the scattered intellectual interventions of the turn of the century and the processes of academic institutionalization of sociology in the late 1960s and early 1970s” around Sedas Nunes and the ‘Gabinete de Investigações Sociais’ (GIS) certainly does not turn the end of the dictatorship and the transition to the democracy, in 1974-75, into the “primary cause” (or even accessory) of a “fundamental discontinuity” (p. 7) in the history of the discipline, be that as it may.

Naturally, there could be evidence in the remainder of the book of what is fallaciously presumed in the introduction. This is not the case. If the idea that, with the change of regime, Portugal turns to Europe – and that this is decisive for the history of sociology – offers no dispute, only by insulating the process of disciplinary formation around Sedas Nunes is it possible to say (in an already equivocal manner) that at the time of the revolution “there was virtually no sociology degree” and that “Marxism had been a central reference point since the late 1960s” (p. 26). As it is known, a Sociology degree existed at the time in the privately held Jesuit ‘Instituto Superior Económico e Social de Évora’ and a Social Sciences degree existed in the former Colonial

School, at the time ‘Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas’. Marxism, of course, was far from being dominant in these two institutions (assuming that it was in any other). In turn, and in the author’s own terms, the idea that “Similar to what happened in the political domain (...), the change of political regime in 1974-75 offered Portuguese social scientists a once in a lifetime opportunity to create training courses and research centres in sociology almost from scratch” (p. 28) conflicts with the very fact that such central places as the ‘Instituto Superior de Ciências do Trabalho e da Empresa’ (ISCTE, where in 1974 would be created the first public Sociology degree) and GIS were themselves created before the revolution. Finally, the claims that “the few incipient institutional initiatives discussed (...) were developed under extremely difficult political, economic, and moral conditions” and that the “lack of antecedents” (p. 26) favored the institutionalization of sociology have at least to be qualified in the light of the observation made by FCS himself that “following the political death of Salazar” GIS was supported by three governmental agencies (besides the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the Congress for Cultural Freedom, in the meantime denounced as a CIA “apolitical façade”) and that “fearful of being politically associated with the fascist regime, all its research staff resigned a few months after the revolution” (p. 21). Moreover, and in line with what FCS requests from “continuist” studies, it is certainly not negligible to say that after the revolution “there is virtually

no reference to past sociological works except for those undertaken by Sedas Nunes and his cluster in the 1960s” (p. 31) – the only worth mentioning, according to his own argument.

It is not at issue the choice of taking the first public sociology degree as a criterion of disciplinary institutionalization, not to speak of the regime’s resistances to social sciences or its opposition to free thought at large. And it is also true that the revolution precipitated a theoretical and institutional plurality in this area hitherto unparalleled. In a way, it is even possible to say that sociology in Portugal only begins in 1974 or, more aptly and as suggested by Estevão Ferreira (2006, p. 34), in 1972, when a Labor Sciences degree was created at the newly-established ISCTE (turned into Sociology, two years later). In either case, however, to boil down the history of this knowledge to the action of Sedas Nunes and the group gathered around him, in GIS, raises historical and genealogical problems.

In the case at hand, the adoption of a strict disciplinary criterion forces FCS to simply omit such important occurrences as the academic penetration of positivism in the Coimbra University Faculty of Law, in the late nineteenth century, or the propagation of Le Play’s Social Science, that goes well beyond the stay of the Belgian sociologist Paul Descamps in Portugal, to which the author refers. Alongside the passage through Portugal of other social scientists from the same lineage, such as Joseph Durieu or Léon Poinard, it is necessary to mention the curricular penetration of Leplaysianism

at Coimbra and Lisbon Law Schools, in the early twentieth century, the creation of a short-lived Portuguese Society of Social Science in 1918, and the more or less incidental but successive application of Leplaysian scientific methods by the Ministry of Work, between 1916 and 1919, by the faculty and students of the School of Agriculture (ISA), from then on, by Ministry of Agriculture agencies, from the mid-1930s, and by the students of Social Work schools, between then and the 1960s. Such initiatives, by the way, are far from being only “scattered intellectual interventions”. Despite the need for further research, it is possible to assert the existence of two parallel lines extending from the Ministry of Labor to the Ministry of Agriculture, through ISA (Ágoas, 2013), and from Law schools to Social Work and Public Health schools, through the aforementioned scientific society (Kalaora, 1989; Martins, 1993).

The omission of these sources has obvious historiographical consequences, particularly for the evaluation that might be done about the late development of sociology in Portugal. But the same silence also impinges on the process of disciplinary formation, even if indirectly. Indeed, it is precisely as a sub-inspector of Social Assistance that Sedas Nunes starts his professional career. The significance of the fact lies in the objective connections he maintains, on that basis, with one of the main champions of Social Science (José Lopes Dias) and the associated intellectual milieu in a Committee for Health and Rural Assistance of the Sub-secretariat of Social Assistance and,

more generally, in the topics he addresses from then on and on the same basis in a significant part of his published works that during the 1950s will lead him from corporatist studies to sociology, focused on workplace social work and industrial relations. In parallel, it is also worth mentioning the close intellectual relationship between GIS members and the heirs of ISA's rural sociology and agricultural economics, through a Rural Economics Research Center (CEEAA) also supported by the Gulbenkian Foundation.

More importantly, GIS creation is not reducible to the will of a group of Catholic economists led by Sedas Nunes, the patronage of Pires Cardoso (director of a former Center for Corporatist Studies, GEC, where the group met) and the consent of the Minister of Corporations, which issued the decree (p. 20). Instead, it must be included in a set of similar initiatives developed within a concerted effort to revive corporatism and instituted – like GIS itself – under its political and legal framework, the 'Plano de Formação Social e Corporativa' (1956). Moreover, the "transference of GEC to the Technical University of Lisbon" (to cite GEC's journal), as GIS happens after the failed attempt by Sedas Nunes to turn one of that Plan's instruments – the 'Centro de Estudos Sociais e Corporativos' of the Ministry of Corporations, of which he was the director between 1957 and 1959 – into the research center which he longed for since his first GEC stay (Ferreira, 2006, p. 168). ISCTE itself corresponds to the "conversion" (to cite the law that created it) of the

'Instituto de Estudos Sociais' of the Ministry of Corporations – another instrument of the Plan, where Sedas Nunes taught throughout the 1960s – and should be integrated in the 1972 Reform of Higher Education that, alongside ISCTE Labor Sciences degree, created the same degree and a Social Sciences degree in the former Colonial School (ISCSP), at a time when sociology chairs abounded in Portuguese universities (cf. Almeida, 1968).

All this is relevant, I think, to understand not only the development of a shared aspiration to a form of knowledge or the constitution of the body of knowledge in which sociology will emerge as a discipline, but also the role that public administration, alongside the Church, played in the discursive and institutional development of this socio-scientific field, as António Barreto rightly points out in chapter 5, which presents excerpts from previously released interviews by Portuguese sociologists. More generally, this broader approach allows us to consider the epistemic action of state officials, as such, or others speaking in its name, as those mentioned, and relate the emergence of this "industrial and development sociology", as it was once called (Cruz, 1983), to the governmentalization of state power in specific domains, with analogous outputs within the colonial bureaucracy. Actually, the above said Social Sciences degree, in ISCSB, can be seen as the culminating point of a "colonial sociology" with which GIS would have to struggle for institutional supremacy in this area before having its

epistemic project sanctioned by the new regime. Irrespective of their separate merits, one might even go so far as to say that if there were evidence of discontinuity, it would be the interruption of that competing (if not institutionally prevailing) strand, after the revolution, while ISCTE and GIS would go on to dominate the field, on the basis previously established (Ágoas, 2012). And if I go at such lengths to briefly reconstitute this larger context, it is because it also impinges on subsequent developments, as synthesized by FCS.

Indeed sociology's post-revolutionary field structure, theoretical-methodological approaches, research themes, and institutional environment are not reducible but decidedly not unrelated to these past events. In its inception, New University "historical-comparative" and Coimbra's 'Centro de Estudos Sociais' "critical" sociologies are not just "alternatives" to a GIS/ISCTE and Oporto "modernist" sociology" (p. 30) but also competing intellectual projects to a development sociology which contextually is simply not ascribable to the "political openness" of Marcelo Caetano's rule (1969-1974), as implicitly suggested, and that will still be prevalent at the first Portuguese Association of Sociology Congress (1988), as the author points out (p. 37). The schism separating this "modernist pole" from the "postmodernist Coimbra cluster" ("the most durable and significant distinction in Portuguese sociology") also reflects this, as it does of course the matching "intellectual interventions" by protagonists of both poles or, less

evidently, the "relatively minor status of the historical comparative strand", to which the author refers (p. 31).

In turn, the "central place" of opinion surveys (and statistics) reflects not only international tendencies or the "analytical priority given to social economic factors as the explanatory variables of social practices and representations of a segment of a *developing society in transition to democratic rule and free market*" (p. 33, italics my own), but also a long-standing "modernist aim of providing the state administration and the public in general with quantifiable sociological knowledge", as implied in the comparative evaluation made by FCS of mid-1960s (not late 1960s or 1970s) and 1985 *Análise Social* issues (p. 41). The same holds true for the thematic recurrence of the "state" during the 1980s and 1990s, also not reducible to the late development of political science (p. 40) and itself taken from radically different perspectives by each of the three poles. Moreover, and as Madureira Pinto (2013, p. 698) recognizes in a 2013 interview, the initial prevalence of local communities studies (and specifically Pinto's *Fonte Arcada*, cited by FCS) also has deeper intellectual and institutional roots, namely in agrarian studies. Finally, this long term approach seems to add up to the acknowledgement that "the institutionalization and consolidation of sociology in Portugal between the late 1960s and the 1990s is an overwhelmingly public [i.e. state] affair" (itself at odds with the discontinuity thesis) and certainly puts in perspective the alleged "reinforcement

of the policy orientation of public university”, as reflected in the creation of a number of “observatories” from the late 1980s on (pp. 55-56) and, more recently, in the rebranding of ISCTE-IUL School of Sociology and Public Policies or the fade out of the historical-comparative strand at New University, along the same lines.

In all, and for its very breadth and ambition, *Sociology in Portugal* fails to address all recent contributions on the subject and, in my view, falls short of its genealogical and contextualist pledges, notwithstanding each chapter’s bright international contexts. That said, FCS’s contribution does offer a very interesting and unparalleled overview of the discipline’s institutional development and internal diversity that throws open the debate on its historical roots and the relationship of its past and present condition, and that for the first time puts it on the trail of a global history of sociology.

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