

Revisiting the Role School-Regents Played in the Educational Policy of Estado Novo (1930's–1950's)

PAULO GUINOTE

Taking a PhD in History of Education in the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of the University of Lisbon
guinote@gmail.com

ABSTRACT:

Though approached in several texts about the organization of teaching activity during Estado Novo, the figure of the school-regent has barely deserved specific treatment. It was not until recently that the first systematisation of quantitative data concerning their presence in the education system emerged, along with an attempt of analysis about the characteristics of this professional group, reaching far beyond mere enunciation of what legislation states about their role. In the rare specific approaches to school-regents, their creation usually comes embedded in the context of Estado Novo's effort to ensure the extension of teaching-posts' network at minimum costs, while underlining the fact that such creation represents one of the measures symbolizing the academic and professional de-qualification of the teaching staff.

However, that's a partial view of the matter, since describing school-regents either as mere occasional and instrumental tools of Estado Novo's minimalist educational policy or as docile vehicles to a process of social reproduction means drastically reducing the relevance of thousands of professionals, mostly women, who taught the first letters in regions where it would have been impossible otherwise. Without them progress towards alphabetisation in Portugal, always too slow, would have been even more precarious.

KEYWORDS:

School-regent, Education during the Estado Novo, Primary Education, History of the Teaching Profession.

“Children regard school as a punishment and parents regret the time they waste there. And they are right.

What do they learn there? They learn how to read, how to write and how to count, almost always poorly, and with such an effort that the sense they get about the value of their acquisitions is far beyond reality. Science makes them reject farm work in the way their parents do it and where this new knowledge is of no help at all. Learn how to read and to write and so ambitions come along: they want to go to Brazil. They can read now! Yet, what do they read? Lists of crimes, wrong notions of politics, bad books, subversive propaganda leaflets.

What profits did they get from school? Nothing. They won nothing. They lost everything” (*Século*, 5th February 1927, 1).

This is a quotation from a text by Virginia de Castro e Almeida, a renowned author formerly linked to feminist claims, which was published in the *Século* newspaper in 1927. It represents one of the most disappointed insights into the post-republican period, namely in what concerns Education, its role and potentialities. In the presence of the so-called deplorable state of school buildings, lack of competent teachers, an apparent oscillation in moral and ethical values transmitted by school, a step-back seems to be defended towards an illiterate rurality, a mixture of primordial purity and moral reserve from a people who assumed to be crossing History with no defined target.

According to several authors who analysed different features of Portuguese politics during the Military Dictatorship and the emergence of the *Estado Novo*^a, this is a mere example, among many others, of the existence of a strong conservative movement in the Portuguese society that would directly or indirectly lead to the authoritarian governing solution carried out by Salazar and, as far as Education is concerned, to what has been known as a huge step-back in the way school and its social role were envisaged. No wonder *Estado Novo*'s educational policy during 1930's has been regarded as the black period of the Portuguese History of Education, where Education has been left out of executive priorities and compulsory elementary education has been disqualified, since it was shortened down to only three years and its teaching staff undermined, thereafter being regarded as mere docile and a-critical executors of an educational project mainly targeted to society's ideological indoctrination and pacification.

For about three decades the characterization of *Estado Novo*'s educational policy has been following this logic and it has hardly moved forwardly or changed its core features. It seems done and closed History. Now and then another piece is added to the puzzle, which is no longer a puzzle since its outline and final shape are already more than known. Every new study follows a long-settled logic and even when they bring forward some new elements to public knowledge, efforts are soon made to classify them according to pre-existent schemes, without contesting their fundamental premises.

I admit this is no picture of my particular taste, since quietude of acquired truths induces us to intellectual conformism and empties most of an historian's work, which is all the more astonishing as it comes from intellectual contexts that praise scientific inquiry about the absolute value of knowledge or that elect problematization as the core element of any scientific research.

Therefore, because there's no need to go much further than re-reading data available and used by other authors, I'd like to make it clear from now on that Estado Novo educational activity (since the Military Dictatorship was nothing but a moment of mere impasse at this level) will be envisaged not as a sharp break with former policies, in a broader sense, but as break with only some of the republican education practices, in a stricter sense. Considering long-run behaviour patterns, what's at stake here is both Estado Novo's adoption of a traditional behaviour common to all new regimes trying to stay in power and the use of State's ideological tools to attain their own objectives and get the citizens' highest possible adhesion. True rupture mainly happens in the discourse produced by the new regime and its stakeholders who quite deeply criticise the solutions developed by the "republican school", although they are more concerned about changing the contents of the message to be transmitted rather than changing the model or method of transmission.

ESTADO NOVO'S EDUCATIONAL POLICY: FROM RHETORIC TO PRAGMATISM

Let us remind the essence of the prevailing historiographic discourse on this theme. During the Estado Novo regime and particularly in 30's, 40's and even 50's, both Education and School have suffered processes of professional and economic depreciation and dequalification driven from a low level of priority attributed to them — especially to Elementary Education — in the regime's budget policy. On the other hand, on transmitting a generalized message of acceptance of current social and political Order, School became mainly valued as a tool for the inculcation of the regime's ideology, for the neutralization of most population's expectations for

social mobility and for the pacification of the most non-conformist minds.

Although embodied in a range of measures, often contradictory, Helena Costa Araújo identifies as the main features both of the educational policy during the Military Dictatorship and of the break with republican tradition, (i) the end of co-education, (ii) the abolition of Higher Elementary Schools (Escolas Primárias Superiores), (iii) reduction of compulsory education and (iv) Education's ideological consolidation (Araújo, 2000, p. 199).

"Salazarist school was planned to function as a tightly controlled organization. From time to time teachers received circular letters on the most trivial matters whereon they were catechised about their responsibilities, through conferences and even radio programmes" (Mónica, 1978, p. 168)^b.

"Therefore, Education shared a generalized reaction against 'modernization' and supported traditionalist attitudes." (Stoer, 1986, p. 49)

"(...) in 1930-31 a new reform comes into force representing a huge step-back, although in the document words it matches the Dictatorship objectives, i.e., a simplification of public services" (Adão, 1984, p. 136).

One of the most underlined features is teaching staff depreciation, not only evident in the new regime's huge suspicion about teacher education institutions, viewed as stained with the republican ideals and destined to reproduce them in the preparation of the teaching class, which inclusively led to their extinction, but also evident in the reduction of their salary status and in a full range of other measures converging in the purpose of status breakdown, in Sérgio Grácio's words (1986, p. 23).

Although regardless of conjuncture inflections, António Nóvoa provides us with the most complete systematisation of the main trends of Estado Novo's educational policy for several decades. In his opinion, four major perspectives have been adopted: teaching compartmentalization (gender and social segregation); a pragmatic realism that tries to match educational supply to social demand, following a logic of downward equalization even of the core subjects to be taught; an administrative centralization that strengthens the control mechanisms of teachers' activity; and finally, de-professionaliza-

tion of teaching staff through de-qualification of teaching scientific and professional background (Nóvoa, 1996, pp. 286-287).

Apparently shared by almost all the authors, this perspective is not only coherent but it also shows a high rate of congruence with reality. However, since it isn't exhaustive it tends to forget something very important, i.e., inconsistency between rhetoric and real practice. This is the context that has been most often forgotten and which would lead us to regard the pragmatic realism so well identified by António Nóvoa as a counterpoint and a limit to the remaining trends abovementioned.

As a quick example to be eventually explored in further detail later on, let's take the case of the proclaimed end of co-education and of compulsory gender segregation in state schools, which is generally included among the range of measures regarded as symbolic about the settling of a new order in the education system from the end of the Republic onwards.

To what extent was it possible to implement such a rule? Was it possible to put an end to co-education as a common practice?

As the official numbers themselves evidence, things haven't been so easy or quick as one could think of. This is a noticed and recorded fact although not highlighted enough (Araújo, 2000, p. 202, retaking Nóvoa's positions). Very often has it been impossible to have boys and girls in separate classes for lack of pupils, thus making a rule out of an exception. In the school year 1940-41, 2014 out of the 2771 authorized teaching-posts were mixed gendered and it won't certainly be abusive to infer that in most of them lessons weren't gender-determined as they were carried out in low populated areas.

As for schools, if is licit to believe that most schools classified as mix-gendered could be of medium-to-great size with physical division into feminine and masculine sections, it is no less credible to admit that in some of them this hasn't happened this way at least during a variable period of time.

Yet, there are also other no less curious paradoxes as the affirmation not only of the presence of a strict control from Salazarist State over the contents of Education but also of a tight inspection of teachers' activity, even after having noticed a shortage in the number of school inspectors, which raises the need to elaborate on explanations owing more

to wishful thinking than to consistency (Mónica, 1978, p. 166).

Many researchers and authors tend to quite rapidly and a-critically accept the rhetorical and face value of legislative discourse as if it were true reality, while it is well-known there are important inconsistencies between what is postulated in legislation and what is then put into practice, in a process whereby original legislative documents get progressively adapted according to the extent to which concrete circumstances make political will to yield before reality.

That's what happened to several educational policies started during the Military Dictatorship or in the first years of the Estado Novo, as we'll see in the case of the creation of teaching-posts and school-regents. Besides, in their own essence, many of these policies represent a compromise between the political will and the perception of what would be possible to implement in order to achieve the desired objectives.

The truth is, the discourse of the regime's proselytes also showed favourable to this perception of Portuguese school situation in the second quarter of the 20th century. Testimonies are not rare of people who viewed school as a tool at the service of an ordered and conformist society and not necessarily at the service of individual development or construction of more active citizens, more capable of interfering in public life.

“For some time the State has been a great producer of a product that ruined it — literati to become public officers. It is not to multiply this kind of products that schools have sprung up by the thousands. A country where instruction might profusely spill over and where, regardless of the means, education would contribute to better educated artists, more conscious farmers and more able workers would be digging its own grave or at least it would be preparing the ground for severe social and political disorders, since the crisis of intellectual proletariat would then spring up. Therefore, one should bare in mind that school should be concerned not only with instructing but also with preparing for the work in the region where it operates” (Ramalho, 1933, p. 7).

Some sectors would even fight for a return to a situation of Church domination over education and Sate subalternity, which the Salazarist regime

would keep within certain limits, despite its implicit or explicit alliance with the Catholic Church:

“The Mission of Education and therefore that of supervision and inspection — our holy father thus says — are due to Church in the first place, then to Family and to the State in the last place” (Educar, May/June 1933, n° 4-5, p. 1).

Yet, despite the implementation of previous censorship to all materials published, for a long time there have been vehement denunciations to what was considered as disorientation, casuistic orientation or perpetuation of vices in the field of Education during the Military Dictatorship. Where a strong reorganization was expected, there came signs which were hardly consistent and coherent with the announced regeneration goals:

“Definitely, the 28th May Revolution wasn’t carried out to settle the chain of social regeneration to be achieved through elementary school. The men of the 28th May think that people can be guided, educated and strengthened without instruction and therefore they have such an imperfect notion of school that they consider it to be unnecessary in a community like ours so deprived of intellectual and moral development and with such a high illiteracy rate that brings shame on civilized nations” (A Federação Escolar, 1927, 4th phase, n° 35, p. 1).

The period from late 20’s to early 30’s is a period of transition in the Portuguese society, at all levels including Education, with plentiful legislation but little capacity to change current situation, similarly to what had happened in the Republican period.

Although against all traditional knowledge in this matter, I even think that some of the measures tried out during this period are nothing but solutions of continuity in relation to Republican policies, although under a different cover. Before the persistency of so strong illiteracy rates even the most conservative had some difficulty in avoiding to wish that the State should be more effective. Such as the Republic had created the Mobile Schools to try to combat illiteracy among out-of-school age population, so would the Military Dictatorship create the so-called Teaching-Posts, which would be continued by the Estado Novo with progressive adjustments, in a way to extend the school network to the places where the conventional school had been impossible or unviable to settle before.

SCHOOL-REGENTS AND TEACHING-POSTS OR THE VICTORY OF PRAGMATISM

Although the school-regent is mentioned in several texts concerning the organization of Education during the Estado Novo, there’s little specific literature about this kind of teaching agent. It was not until recently that a first systematisation of quantitative data appeared related to their presence in the education system along with an attempt of analysis about the characteristics of this professional group which goes beyond the mere enunciation of what legislation states about their role (Rias, 1997). In the rare works explicitly dealing with the creation of the so-called “teaching-posts” and school-regents, they appear as embedded in Estado Novo’s effort to ensure the extension, though provisional, of a network of teaching-posts at the State’s least cost.

In fact, such as evidenced in 1930 census, progress in the schooling and alphabetisation of Portuguese population continued slow in the early 30’s and with no glimpse of attaining compatible levels with the rest of Europe, including the neighbouring Spain and the remaining South European countries, which by the time had already taken off from a situation of great delay. Following the key-guidelines of the thought of the new regime leader and having budget constraints as a priority, the plea was for doing the best possible with the resources available, while criticising the Republican regime for having claimed great deeds and legislated on them though never putting them into practice. In this context there was the need to provide the national territory with a school network in a good state, repairing schools in bad conditions and building new ones and necessarily providing them with the indispensable staff. The problem was lack of prepared staff in the amount needed. Even some measures taken during the Military Dictatorship, even the most ephemeral, hadn’t been able to revert the situation because the Normal Schools of Coimbra, Braga and Ponta Delgada had been closed in 1928, by decree 15365 of 12th April, and then reopened four months later, besides having suffered successive reformulations related to several aspects of public elementary education enforced by a sequence of legislation which owed nothing to Republican indecisions and contradictions in this matter.

However, people were well aware of the persistence of two problems: on the one hand, steady high illiteracy rates; on the other hand, lack of qualified staff to be allocated to a school network that was considered as insufficient and in need of consolidation. In the decree officially enforcing the reopening of the Primary Normal Schools (*Escolas Normais Primárias*) that had been closed, some reasons were lined up trying to justify this change in previous measure:

*“Considering that illiteracy rates among the population over seven years of age is still higher than 50%, which places us in a situation of manifest cultural inferiority in relation to most peoples of the civilized world; Considering that elementary primary education is due to all and that to teach it to the school-age population the number of existing schools is insufficient as it is the number of qualified teachers; Considering that in each of the last three years the number of graduates by primary normal schools (*escolas normais primárias*) has been lower than the number of appointed primary teachers and that this difference, to which is added the number of teachers definitively dismissed, gradually decreases the total amount of primary teachers available, instead of increasing it as required by the need for the progress of national culture; (...).”*

Considering, therefore, all these and some more evident realities, the government reopened the mentioned schools although their destiny ended up being quite disturbed all along the following decade with their shift into Schools of Primary Teacher Education (*Escolas do Magistério Primário*), which besides had no admissions during several years. The preparation of qualified staff to be allocated to schools, in spite of all restraints imposed to the creation of new school buildings (decree 20 181, of 24th July and published in the *Diário do Governo* on 7th August), would continue to be insufficient and finally led to the institutionalisation of transitory solutions put into practice in several places in the country with no clearly legal coverage and which became structural as time passed by. At that time the “school-regent” legal figure, which many authors attribute to legislation issued in 1936 (decree 25 797), was only in part formalized and regulated, since their presence in the school network dated back to the beginning of the decade. That is, when,

at first, the mobile schools got closed, being replaced by the so-called incomplete schools in villages with a minimum number of 30 school-age children and where the “schoolmasters” could exceptionally be any people who would possess the “necessary intellectual and moral competence” (decree 18 819 of 4th September, 1930) and, secondly, when the so-called *teaching-posts* were created (decree 20 604 of 30th November, 1931) whose teachers were nothing but the above mentioned “school-regents”. This explains the fact that at the time of 1936 legislation they only represented 9% of the total number of the teaching staff (Mónica, 1978, p. 209).

“These posts’ ‘schoolmasters’ were called ‘school-regents’ and would be chosen with the Minister’s assent among people from whom no qualification would be required unless the proof that they possessed the ‘necessary intellectual and moral competence’. So has been done, indeed” (Carvalho, 1996, p. 736).

More than academic education what was required from these teachers or regents was an irreproachable moral behaviour and a full adhesion to the principles that guided the new regime. In its 3rd article, Decree 20 604 stated that “to each post’s regency someone with the necessary intellectual and moral competence would be appointed by the Minister of Public Instruction”. Of course these conditions could be cumulatively found in a good deal of individuals, but not necessarily in the most qualified to teach. Besides, this was a low-remunerated occupation (300\$00 during the months of effective work), which, though eventually attractive to those wishing to get away from unemployment or from physically harder jobs, couldn’t help pushing recruitment down to population strata with relatively modest horizons concerning professional ambitions and financial incomes. That’s why teaching-posts’ regency became an almost fully feminised job, at an even higher rate than in public graduate teaching.

In a partial sample gathered from individual files belonging to the Historical Archive of the Ministry of Education where over a thousand school-regents were identified as having been teaching from 30’s to 50’s, the number of women rises to over 80% (953 in 1132 cases). The global figures available in the statistics produced at that time even show a growing trend in this sense: in 1940-41, 83.6% of the

total group of school-regents were women, but in 1950-51 this percentage rose up to 95.6% and later in the 60's it rose to almost 100%, according to the most recent study available on school-regents (Rias, 1997, II, p. 11).

Admittance to the school-regent's "career" has also evolved. While in the early 30's it was relatively common to find married women or widows or even singular women though above 30 to 40 years of age, as time passed by more and more 16, 17 or a bit older teenagers have progressively entered the system. Moreover, in comparative terms it was more common to find unmarried school-regents (over 80% of the sample) than public teachers, at least while they kept on teaching in the teaching-posts.

Apparently in a good deal of cases, this is a job of transition from adolescence to adult age until they eventually constitute their families. In the analysis undertaken, it was not possible to check the extent to which dismissal requests would have been caused by marriage situations, either because these marriages wouldn't be allowed by the authorities or because their foreseeable living conditions wouldn't allow them to carry on working as a school-regent or they would just have no need of it any longer. Still, when comparing teachers' and school-regents' ages some differences come into light. In the school-year 1940-41, almost 60% of the school-regents admitted to the global office force were lower than 30 years old while in the case of teachers the proportion of 30-year-olds was lower than 10%. Whether it is true that their admittance was more recent and that they were allowed to apply at younger ages, though only until 50, it is also true that the whole group of school-regents was clearly younger than that of teachers.

On the other hand, the number of school-regents would continue to grow which attached more weight to themselves considering the whole teaching staff, mainly because the Schools of Primary Teacher Education (*Escolas do Magistério Primário*) didn't open until 1942. In fact, in the 50's the proportion of school-regents was about 30% (Rias, 1997, II, p. 16) and it would persist with occasional flows (in 1955-56 there's a sudden rise to over 45%) around a third of the total amount of public primary education teaching staff (Lopes, 2001, p. 275) until the 60's when it began to drop down to less than 20% in tune both with a decrease in their own work

force and with an increase in the number of graduates. The geographic distribution of the number of school-regents effectively working allows us to get a better understanding of the role school-regents and teaching-posts played in the effort to spread the school network to otherwise inaccessible places: in 1950/51, in the districts of Lisbon and Porto there were 188 posts and 171 school-regents, while in the districts of Santarém, Leiria, Faro and Braga there were more than 200, though serving much lower community and school-population densities. This same trend is elicited from individual files whereby information about the places where they took their regency-aptitude exam and about the places where they worked easily shows the districts of Guarda and Castelo Branco as taking the lead. Where there is information available about all the teaching agents working in a certain municipality, there is also the possibility to notice that in highly urbanized areas where the school-network had deeper roots and population densities are higher, the number of teaching-posts and school-regents was comparatively lower: take the case of Vila Nova de Gaia, where in 1940-41 there were 157 teachers and only 13 school-regents.

Yet, most authors usually inscribe the creation of this kind of job in a vaster effort of de-investment in Education, de-professionalization of the teaching activity and transformation of school into a mere tool for the inculcation of the State's and prevailing ideology. According to António Nóvoa, for instance, Estado Novo educational policy was based on some features such as the centralization and compartmentation of the teaching activity, reduction of the educational level (by shortening compulsory education and simplifying learning contents to its rudiments) and, finally, de-professionalization and de-qualification of the teaching staff. From his point of view and retaking arguments very similar to those used by Sérgio Grácio to characterize the same process (Grácio, 1986, pp. 22-24), regents' appointment was among all measures the most outrageous attack to teacher professionalization (Nóvoa, 1987, II, p. 633). This conception goes in tune with the opinion of a stream of authors who from 70's onwards have been making tough appreciations of the educational activity of the Salazarist regime in this particular aspect:

“By and large, school-regents were nothing but poor and semi-illiterate individuals, incapable of finding another non-manual job and who managed to get the interest of the preach or any other influential figure thanks to her/his good manners, submissive character and other similar gifts. Their preparation for the function was as can be inferred absolutely null” (Mónica, 1978, p. 208).

Yet, these appreciations hardly ever distinguished (or were concerned about distinguishing), in quite a satisfactory way, the ideological component of educational policy objectives from their concrete outcomes, as well as they didn't distinguish legislative proclamations from their implementation. This distinction would have revealed outstanding nonconformity, though eventually not so significantly as in the I Republic. This means that their disapproval of the regime and its ideological matrix tended to imply, in the decades to be followed, the extensive disapproval of all the regime's policies, particularly those coined by propaganda or ideological inculcation as is the case of education, considering that “education shared the overall reaction against ‘modernization’ and supported traditionalist attitudes” (Stoer, 1986, p. 49).

More recently, retaking some authors such as Ana Benavente and Maria Filomena Mónica, Amélia Lopes also prefers to find in the figure of the school-regent an unequivocal sign of the minimalist educational policy of Estado Novo in the field of alphabetization (Lopes, 2001, p. 275). In almost all cases, arguments forwarded tend to consider that feminisation of the school-regent staff was a consequence of the Regime's depreciation of Education and of a decrease in their social-professional prestige and economic status.

In some passages it even seems as if the school-regent were the utmost symbol of the denounced professional de-qualification of the teaching activity. Yet, not everything points to so negative a direction when information gets more closely scrutinized, shifting to a deeper level of analysis than that of mere analysis of legislation and immediate statistical data: according to different periods, there is a variable proportion of school-regents with a school attendance over the 4th grade who have either passed some individual 9th grade exams or concluded the Lyceum General Course. It may be a minority but cannot be neglected.

On the other hand, though more irregular than teachers' evaluation, performance evaluation carried out by the inspecting body couldn't help but show that their work was not always assessed as satisfactory and in some cases persistence of negative evaluations would lead to dismissal. However, before the evidence of many school-regents' lack of preparation, the State ends up requiring minimum qualifications and from mid-30's onwards they have to go through an Aptitude Exam for the regency of Teaching Posts, which, though very elementary, would put aside many applicants to the available vacancies. It was not until 1935 that, before growing complaints, it would be settled by decree 25 797 (published in the *Diário do Governo* of 28th August) that the proof of moral competence couldn't exempt applicants from a proof of their aptitude for the function:

“For those who don't possess the Primary Teaching State Exam, competence as primary education school-regents can be evidenced by approval in their aptitude exams”.

Implementation of such determinations wasn't immediate, but in 1937, by the regulation act no 8 731, the cited aptitude exams were finally regulated and they would comprise written culture tests consisting of a dictation, a composition and the resolution of six problems. It can be argued, and certainly not without reason, that this means too little as a requirement to be admitted to the teaching activity, however, the practical effects of such a requirement shouldn't be ignored.

An indirect evidence of its practical effects is the dismissal of many school-regents precisely because they didn't take the exam. The widest vague of such dismissals was ordered by a regulation act issued by the Directorate-General of Primary Education on 18th August (published in the *Diário do Governo* no. 192, II Series, of 18th August, 1937, pp. 4264-4268), which reached 174 individuals, 71 men and 103 women, distributed as follows, among the Continent's different school districts: 21 in Aveiro, 3 in Beja, 1 in Braga, 14 in Bragança, 3 in Castelo Branco, 18 in Coimbra, 5 in Évora, 13 in Faro, 17 in Guarda, 14 in Leiria, 8 in Lisboa, 14 in Porto, 7 in Santarém, 3 in Setúbal, 2 in Viana do Castelo, 16 in Vila Real and 15 in Viseu.

Moreover, as evidenced by the exam files (for instance box no. 1439, series 35, of the Directorate-

General of Primary Education with exams dated back to 1939) belonging to the Historical Archive of the Ministry of Education, approval in the so-called regency aptitude exam, although it wasn't a task of high difficulty, contributed to eliminate significant quantities of candidates in different periods. Once again taking a provisional sample of the district reports sent to the central services of the Ministry on charge (box no. 1027, series 11 of the cited Directorate-General) we can find failure rates of about 50% or higher from mid-40's onwards. In 1944-45, 337 women and 11 men passed the exam while 308 women and 37 men failed. In the first quarter of 1947-48, 286 women passed and 287 failed while succeeding and non-succeeding men got even at 20. A decade later, the scenery was even less favourable; in October 1958, only 262 out of 1484 passed the exam, which means 17.6%.

Whether it is true that the application rate to exams was quite high, mainly from women, there's also truth in the fact that admittance to the job was not immediate and that the level of requirements was not so low as sometimes suggested, taking some ever-existing anecdotic examples as a basis. As far as age groups are concerned there were also some constraints, requiring a minimum of 18 years of age for women's entrance and 20 for men and a maximum of 45 for both, as a way to prevent 15— and 16-year-old girls to fill the regency posts as had happened before in this system's early years.

On the other hand, some little books appeared with didactic instructions for the preparation of lessons, not only for primary teachers but also for school-regents, providing precious instructions for the least prepared who would like to improve their pedagogic practice. Estado Novo leaders themselves were well aware of the precariousness of the solution represented by the creation of teaching-posts and school-regents, since in more than one occasion when discussing Portuguese educational situation they stressed the inferiority of such posts and agents, regarded as external to the education system. As early as 1937, Salazar would affirm his opposition to a widespread resource to school-regents to meet school-network needs, by defending “the need to find out a more expeditious but less dangerous process of providing schools with the

necessary teaching staff”, recommending school-regent's appointment only for posts situated in rural areas and concluding his speech with a “God forbid!” (Rias, 1997, I, pp. 73-74).

In 1938 during the debate on the reform of primary education and in response to the MP Álvaro Morna, Vasco Borges would state that “teaching-posts only indirectly — so to speak — have something to do with the school-network. From my point of view, this network is only composed of complementary schools and schools ruled by school-regents” and continued:

“Portuguese school-network is therefore composed of complementary schools and elementary schools ruled by graduate school-regents. These are the schools that constitute this country's geographic network. In this context a map of Portugal will be organized with a mark on all the places supposed to have complementary schools and elementary schools. In such a map there's no place for teaching-posts. Consequently, it seems to me that teaching-posts have nothing to do with the school geographic network. Besides, this is natural and logic since the number of such schools will vary, i.e., it will be what demand requires in response to needs arisen from a progressive knowledge about education, though within financial limits” (Diário das Sessões da Assembleia^c n° 179, sessão de 30 de Março 1938, p. 608).

Some days later, on his turn, MP Diniz da Fonseca tried to categorize what should be meant by school-regents, according to different sorts of school: “Now, to three categories of schools there corresponds three categories of teachers: a school-regent for a teaching-post, a graduate school-regent for a school and a private school-regent” (Diário das Sessões da Assembleia n° 181, sessão de 2 de Abril 1938, p. 636).

According to these legislators, there was no assimilation between teachers and school-regents and even within the school-regents' class there was compartmentation due to a certain hierarchization related to their possession of a diploma or attendance of a School of Primary Teacher Education. In 1952 in the decree-law 38 968 that launches the Popular Education Plan, regents' role is recognised in vacancies' provision in plenty of schools, though many vacancies have been left unfilled. That is, in the case of lack of academically qualified teachers,

regents ended up satisfying the demand for teaching staff.

Evaluation of the outcomes of previous 20 years' educational policy is very favourable and proved by abundant indicators, ranging from an almost duplication of the number of state schools ("teaching-posts" included) and of pupils enrolled from 1926 to 1952 to the results of the campaign against analphabetism, which in the age group of 7 to 11 had been kept steady above 70% until 1930 and has finally dropped down to about 20% in the following 20 years. Data processed by António Candeias for this period and related to analphabetism in children over ten years of age point in the same sense: a drop of about 13% from 1900 to 1930 (from 73% to 60%) and 18% in the following two decades (Candeias, 2004).

In 1960, on trying to improve regents' qualifications, they were given special conditions for their admittance to any School of Primary Teacher Education, such as exemption from the aptitude exam and from school fees (decree-law 43 369 of 2nd December), reinforced in 1962 by the abolition of the age limits previously imposed (decree 44 560 of 8th September) and by the reduction of entrance requirements to a minimum five-year teaching experience classified as *Sufficient*.

During 60's, school-regent posts became completely feminin (in 1964-65 there were only 17 men and in 1970-71 there were 7) and progressively lost their former importance because of a drop in available posts as a result of the ongoing effort to modernize and requalify the education system. In 1973, decree-law no 67/73 enforced posts' replacement by schools, although they should go on operating only in the cases where replacement would be impossible; these posts' extinction and conversion into schools, consequently putting an end to the school-regent figure, would only occur in 1980 as enforced by decree-law no 412 of 27th September.

CONCLUDING...

On a final balance and despite all the critiques that can be made to the emergence of school-regents in the Portuguese education system with a strong pres-

ence during several decades (from early 30's to mid 60's), some questions should be kept in mind when evaluating their effective relevance as a contribution to the expansion of alphabetisation through lots of places in the country at the historical moment of their presence in the system.

For example, if it is true that regents' low academic requirements and economic vulnerability (low remuneration only due to effective working months) do confirm the idea of de-qualification of their role and de-professionalization of the teaching activity, how would it be possible without school-regents to extend the school network and expand schooling, providing minimum literacy to populations of large amounts of inland areas? If teacher education institutions had been given higher financial support and teachers' remuneration hadn't been downward levelled off, then it would have been possible to raise the number of qualified people needed to provide the school network with the necessary teachers. Yet, this is not what really happened. Though a reductionist and minimal solution and often explicitly undesired, school-regents were, therefore, the only option available for politicians to make a difficult combination of a steady expansion of alphabetisation, budget constraints and ideological control of school.

On the other hand, there hasn't been much stress on the fact that the creation of "teaching-posts" is not very divergent from the Republican Mobile School policy, not even in their recruitment conditions: during their first years, among 130 teachers whose qualifications could be identified, 56 belonged to the so-called "free education" (43.1%), 30 of them were graduates from the Normal School (23.1%) 14 held a seminary graduation (10.8%), another 14 held a Lyceum diploma and 9 had completed some Higher Education disciplines; there were other singular cases such as 1 teacher having completed the fourth grade of the cited Lyceum Course, 1 graduate from the Agriculture School and 3 others with a Sergeant Course (Boletim Oficial do Ministério de Instrução Pública, 1916, n° 1: 55). In 1916, the distribution of the identified 244 Mobile School teachers wasn't very different, having as their most representative groups 109 teachers from "free education" (44.7%), 75 graduates from Normal Schools (30.7%), 23 with an incomplete

Lyceum Course and 15 with a Theology Diploma (Proença, 1998, p. 61).

Therefore, regarding school-regents either as mere occasional and instrumental tools of Estado Novo's minimalist educational policy or as docile vehicles of a process of social reproduction means forgetting they represent a solution whose roots date back to a not very far past and it also means disrespect for the relevance of thousands of professionals, mostly women, who taught the first letters in regions where it would have been otherwise impossible. If they hadn't existed, alphabetisation progresses, though very slow, would have been even more precarious. Moreover, teaching-posts' regency was one of the remunerated occupations whereby the affirmation of women's penetration in the labour market got its highest stake during the Estado Novo, although this is one of the activity sectors some authors (cf. Acker, 1995, pp. 101-118)

classify as semi-professional (because they are low-remunerated, require low qualifications and allow for only a limited socio-professional mobility) which in turn would therefore accelerate feminization.

To sum up, without the teaching-posts and the school-regents progresses in schooling and alphabetization, often criticised for being far from reaching the expected results, would eventually be even more precarious. One can always argue in a counterfactual way with the sacred "what if..", yet, in this case we are dealing with facts. Moreover, even if it is true that "quality" has allegedly been sacrificed, it is also true that the construction of mass school during the Estado Novo necessarily progressed from the extension of primary school state-network, only possible with an important contribution both from the formerly transitory teaching posts and from school-regents as State educational agents.

ENDNOTES

1. *Estado Novo* is the name of the Portuguese conservative authoritarian regime installed in 1933 (until 1974) and developed by António de Oliveira Salazar (ruler of Portugal from 1932 to 1968).

2. In this particular, it would be interesting to understand to what extent the *Estado Novo* wouldn't have merely perfected what the republic regime had done before or even what our present democratic regime has now and then tried to implement with the purpose of conditioning teachers' daily activity, in all cases merely varying the ideological contents of the doctrinary inculcation.

3. Parliament Official Report no 179, Debate text for 30 March 1939, p. 608.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES:

Manuscripts:

Historical Archive of the Ministry of Education
Series 11, box 1027.

Serie 33, boxes 2489 a 2500.

Serie 35, box 1439.

Printed Sources:

STATISTICS

Anuário Estatístico (several years)

Censos da População (1930-1970).

Estatísticas da Educação (several years).

LEGISLATION:

Actas da Câmara Corporativa (several years).

Diário das Sessões da Assembleia Nacional (several years)

Diário do Governo (1926-1937).

OTHER MATERIALS

Agenda do Professor Primário e dos Regentes dos Postos Escolares — Ano Lectivo de 1944-45 (1944). Lisboa: Livraria Bernardo.

BACELAR, Luciano de (1950). *Planos de lições e conselhos aos novos professores e regentes dos postos escolares*. Coimbra: Tipografia Atlântida.

Boletim Oficial do Ministério de Instrução Pública (1916), Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional.

Catálogo e Agenda do Professor Primário — Ano Lectivo de 1950-51 (1951). Lisboa: Livraria Enciclopédica de João Bernardo.

FERREIRA, A. Justino (1933). *Legislação do Ensino Primário*. Porto: Educação Nacional.

OLIVEIRA, António Liberato de & GASPAS, José Maria (1963). *Legislação Prática do Ensino Primário*. Castelo Branco: Edição dos autores.

ROSA, Manuel Ferreira (1956). *Indicações didáticas para professores primários e regentes escolares*. Lisboa: Livraria Popular Francisco Franco.

SANTOS, Arménio Gomes dos & ROQUE, Manfredo (1939). *Prontuário escolar: formulário, guia prático e notas de legislação do ensino primário, em vigor, destinado aos professores do ensino primário e regentes escolares*. Castelo Branco: Adelino Semedo Barata.

TABORDA, António Tavares (1939). *Exames de Aptidão para a Regência de Postos Escolares do Ensino Primário Elementar*. Fundão: Tip. Casa de São José.

Studies

ACKER, Sandra (1995). *Género y educación — Reflexiones sociológicas sobre mujeres, enseñanza y feminismo*. Madrid: Narcea.

ADÃO, Áurea (1984). *O Estatuto Socio-Profissional do Professor Primário em Portugal (1901-1951)*. Oeiras: Instituto Gulbenkian da Ciência.

ARAÚJO, Helena Costa (1990). As mulheres professoras e o ensino estatal. *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, 29, pp. 81-103.

ARAÚJO, Helena Costa (1998). Quebrando o Silêncio das Mulheres: As Professoras Primárias e a luta pela igualdade de direitos na vida profissional (1919-1933). *Leitura e Escrita em Portugal e no Brasil, 1500-1970*. Lisboa: SPCE, III volume, pp. 337-342.

ARAÚJO, Helena Costa (2000). *Pioneiras na Educação. As professoras primárias na viragem do século: contextos, percursos e experiências, 1870-1933*. Lisboa: Instituto de Inovação Educacional.

- BENAVENTE, Ana (1990). *Escola, Professoras e Processos de Mudança*. Lisboa: Livros Horizonte.
- CANDEIAS, António, (dir.) (2004). *Alfabetização e Escola em Portugal nos Séculos XIX e XX: Os Censos e as Estatísticas*. Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian.
- CARVALHO, Rómulo de (1996). *História do Ensino em Portugal — Desde a Fundação da Nacionalidade até ao fim do Regime de Salazar-Caetano*. Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2ª edição.
- EVETTS, Julia (1990). *Women in Primary Teaching: Career Contexts and Strategies*. London: Unwin Hyman.
- GRÁCIO, Sérgio (1986). *Política Educativa como Tecnologia Social — As reformas do Ensino Técnico de 1948 a 1983*. Lisboa: Livros Horizonte.
- GUINOTE, Paulo (2003). A Educação no Feminino (1900-2000) — Discursos, Números e Olhares. In *Falar de Mulheres: da Igualdade à Paridade — Actas do I Curso Livre de Estudos sobre a Mulher*. Lisboa: Livros Horizonte, pp. 153-226.
- LOPES, Amélia (2001). *Libertar o Desejo, Resgatar a Inovação — A construção de identidades profissionais docentes*. Lisboa: Instituto de Inovação Educacional.
- MÓNICA, Maria Filomena (1978). *Educação e Sociedade no Portugal de Salazar*. Lisboa: Presença.
- NÓVOA, António (1987). *Le Temps des Professeurs. Analyse socio.historique de la profession enseignante au Portugal (XVIII-Xxe siècle)*. Lisboa: Instituto Nacional de Investigação Científica.
- NÓVOA, António (1996). Educação Nacional. In *Dicionário de História do Estado Novo*. Vol. I. Lisboa: Círculo de Leitores, pp. 286-287.
- NÓVOA, António (1999). Educação, política de. In *Dicionário de História de Portugal — Suplemento*. Porto: Figueirinhas, pp. 591-595.
- PROENÇA, Maria Cândida (1998). A República e a Democratização do Ensino. In *O Sistema de Ensino em Portugal (Séculos XIX-XX)*. Lisboa: Edições Colibri/Instituto de História Contemporânea da FCSH, pp. 47-70.
- RAMALHO, Albano (1933). *A Instrução Primária e a Ditadura Nacional*. F. Foz: Tipografia de “O Figueirense”.
- RAMOS, Rui (1993). O Método dos Pobres: Educação Popular e Alfabetização em Portugal (Séculos XIX e XX). *Colóquio, Educação e Sociedade*, 2, pp. 41-68.
- RIAS, Ana Paula Lopes Andrade (1997). *Regentes Escolares: colaboradores benévolos ao serviço da Educação Nacional*. Lisboa: FCSH da Univ. Nova de Lisboa (dissertação de Mestrado — texto policopiado).
- RIAS, Ana Paula Lopes Andrade (1998). Os Regentes, um instrumento ao serviço da Educação Nacional. In *Leitura e Escrita em Portugal e no Brasil, 1500-1970*. III volume. Lisboa: Sociedade Portuguesa de Ciências da Educação, pp. 343-357.
- SOYSAL, Yasemin & STRANG, David (1989). Construction of the First Mass Education Systems in Nineteenth-Century Europe. *Sociology of Education*, 62, 4, pp. 277-288.
- STOER, Stephen (1982). *Educação, Estado e Desenvolvimento em Portugal*. Lisboa: Livros Horizonte.
- STOER, Stephen (1986). *Educação e Mudança Social em Portugal — 1970-1980, uma década de transição*. Porto: Afrontamento.
- TEODORO, António (2001). *A Construção Política da Educação — Estado, mudança social e políticas educativas no Portugal Contemporâneo*. Porto: Afrontamento.

Translated by Filomena Matos

