

# Women under Salazar's Dictatorship<sup>1</sup>

Anne Cova and António Costa Pinto

## Abstract

This article addresses Salazarism's attitudes towards women and women's organizations, providing some elements that may be used in comparisons with the other dictatorships (e.g. Italian Fascism) that inspired, to some extent, some of the Portuguese New State's institutions.

If the southern European dictatorships of the inter-war period have anything in common, it is their attitudes towards women (Bock and Cova 2003). Initiated during a period of democratization, of the emergence of feminist movements, and the significant increase of women in the labour market, all of these dictatorships paid homage to 'women at home', and glorified 'motherhood' and the family in its primordial function (Offen 2000; Bock 2001). These dictatorships were at the same time confronted with the 'problem' of the integration of women into politics. Some elevated this function to a nationalist goal and an important means of mobilizing their regimes.

## The family: the cornerstone of society

The Portuguese Constitution of 1933 provided for the equality for all citizens before the law, and denied all privileges acquired through birth, nobility, sex or social status. However, it also noted that 'women's differences result from their nature and their duty towards the good of the family' (article 5). The 1911 Constitution, and the Republic's family laws, which were drawn up on 25 December 1910, contained no such provisions.

Salazarism thus used female 'nature' to deny women complete equality with men. The idea of 'nature' derived from the old discussion of culture versus nature, in which the public dominates the private. Salazarism was deeply rooted in the traditional idea that women were situated on the side of 'nature' while men were on the side of culture. In this way, Salazar's New State remained faithful to the messages repeated by the Catholic Church in the encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), which claimed that 'nature' intended that women were destined to stay at home, to bear children and to devote themselves to housework. Indeed, based on the assumption that men and women do not possess the same physical strength, *Rerum Novarum* stated that: 'There are tasks less suited to women, whose destiny, by nature, is to work at home.' *Quadragesimo Anno*'s message was similar: 'The duty of mothers lies, above all, in the home and in housework.' According to the laws of 'nature', women were conceived to be mothers, to which Salazarism added that the female was the pillar of the household.

*Economia Doméstica*, a publication produced by the National Propaganda Secretariat (SPN) in 1945, compared the art of running a home to that of running the State, illustrating the tenuous character of the boundaries between the public and the private (Belo 1987). In fact, women could enter the public sphere by demonstrating that they were very good at taking care of their

## Keywords

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2 In 1933, the birth rate was 29 per thousand inhabitants in Portugal; 23.8 in Italy; 27.7 in Spain; 16.2 in France; and 14.7 in Germany (Barata 1985: 24; Bock and Thane 1991: 17).

families and were therefore fit to hold public office, based on the fact that the State was nothing more than a conglomerate of families. The New State, however, preferred to maintain the established ideology of 'the natural difference' between the sexes, which paid an implicit tribute to the difference between and the complementary nature, of male and female roles. These roles were not the same, but rather, they were complementary, which was consistent with the principles outlined in the encyclical *Casti Connubii* (1930). This encyclical stated that women have a different temperament and that within the family the 'husband is the head and the wife is the heart'. The New State was equally interested in viewing the complementary role of spouses as a guarantee of family stability, which always had priority over individual rights. If the mother was glorified, it was because of her important role within the family. Her mission was to take care of the home and be its guardian. Her beneficial influence was not only limited to her children: it concerned the whole household. She had to ensure her husband's peace of mind and maintain harmony within the family group.

The slogan 'Women for the Home' received particular importance during the economic crisis of the 1930s. In many European countries, women who worked outside the home were the subjects of much attention because they were taking men's jobs. The 'solution' was for women to stay at home. The situation in Portugal was different, however, given that its unemployment rate was very low, and its insistence that women should stay at home had no direct connection to the economic crisis of the 1930s (Rosas 1986).

This vision of the mother occupying the whole space within the family was a simplification, since it was the father who, both in law and reality, had the power. The 1933 Constitution stated that the husband was head of the family and that it was he who wielded authority while the wife fulfilled her role as mother, devoting herself entirely to her home. As both head of the family and father, the man's task was to guide his children's upbringing and education; to look after, defend and represent them, even before they were born. This emphasis on the role of the father within the family should not conceal the fact that, for Salazarism, the most important institution of all was the family, which it was the State's duty to defend. The family was 'the source for the preservation and development of the race' and 'the foundation of all political order'. The family ensured society's proper functioning and its 'regeneration'.

*Rerum Novarum* proclaimed the primacy of the family over civil society. However, only legitimate families were sanctioned: 'the constitution of the family is based on marriage and legitimate children'. Marriage, as both the origin and foundation of the family, assumed a transcendent significance with procreation as its purpose.

This emphasis on the legitimate family is not peculiar to Salazarism, and should be seen in the context of Portugal's high number of illegitimate births, which at the beginning of the twentieth century stood at about 12 per cent. This phenomenon continued until, by the end of the 1950s, Portugal had the third highest illegitimate birth rate in Europe (Cascão 1986: 158; Rodrigues 1983: 910).

Declining birth rates was another characteristic phenomenon in the New State, although they remained higher than in other European countries – even those of southern Europe.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, Salazarism participated in the

recurring debate over the birth rate, which was related closely to the 'mystique of the nation' that was particularly visible in countries such as Germany and Italy (Ipsen 1996). Demographic obsession was not the monopoly of fascist regimes, however: France, for example, shared the same concern (Cova 1997).

The 1910 family laws considered marriage to be a contract between two people of different sex that was entered into for the purpose of establishing a legitimate family. Salazarism altered the First Republic's concepts on marriage: under the earlier regime, to state an example, a woman could not be forced to return to her conjugal home. This clause was abolished by the Civil Code in 1939.

In accordance with legislation introduced on 3 November 1910, the civil contract of marriage could be dissolved. This law authorized divorce, giving both parties equal treatment in respect of grounds for divorce and their rights regarding any children. This legislation was a very real subversion of tradition. Up until the 1940s, divorce was an essentially urban phenomenon: in 1930, 51 per cent of all divorcees were city dwellers, with the largest proportion in Lisbon and Oporto (40.7 per cent) (Cascão 1986: 161). There were some differences between the two cities; while the majority of those suing for divorce in Lisbon were female, the opposite was the case in Oporto. This divorce law remained in force for a further 30 years, before being abolished in 1940. After that date, people who had been married by the Catholic Church were not allowed to divorce.

With its law on the defence of the family, introduced on 12 October 1935, the New State sought to safeguard the 'constitution and ... defence of the family in its function as the source for the preservation and development of the race'. In order to protect and preserve the family, the New State established a number of priorities; not all of which were respected. As far as the protection of motherhood was concerned, maternity leave was halved to one month under Salazarism, and employers had the option to pay compensation at their discretion. The Law of 10 March 1937 entitled women to 30 days' subsidized maternity leave provided 'her employer could prove that she was not worthy of such a subsidy, or did not need it' (Beleza 1990: 198).

Similarly, the New State's expressed desire to promote the adoption of a family wage – a demand dear to European social Catholics, and which would contribute to the rehabilitation of the family, was never realized. Other goals of the Salazarist regime were also never to be achieved. The government saw fit to promote propaganda actions like 'Family Mothers' Day', however, and founded a national organization called 'Defence of The Family', whose president, António de Sousa Gomes, was from the Catholic movement. The importance of moral conduct, and the promotion of moral virtue was constantly acclaimed in official speeches: the basis of the family is morality, and it falls to the State to promote the moral unity of the nation.

Inspired by social Catholicism, the New State followed the various Papal encyclicals and reinforced ties with the Church through the Concordat of 1940. In Salazarist ideology, women had to play various roles within the family: wife and mother; woman dedicated to the house; and, upholder of the family's morals. This glorification of the woman's mission in the domestic sphere was a long way from the real lives of women who began to work outside the home. According to official statistics, female participation in the labour force was 17

per cent in 1926; by 1950, this had increased to 22.7 per cent (Rodrigues 1983: 910–24). The proportion in Italy was similar, at 23 per cent, while in the same year, France had already reached 36 per cent, the same proportion as in Germany in 1933 (Bock 1991: 195; Lagrave 1994: 510).

During the New State's *longue durée*, a significant part of the active population, many of them women, was working in the primary sector. It was only after the 1960s that there was a real explosion in the tertiary sector. During the 1960s, the proportion of female workers in this sector was already estimated to be 33.9 per cent, while 26.2 per cent were employed in industry. At the end of the Salazar era, the majority of women in paid employment were not married: 53.7 per cent were single, 9 per cent were either divorced or separated, and under 1 per cent were widowed. Only 36.3 per cent were married. The number of women working as unskilled labour was considerable: more than half of all employed single women were involved in unskilled or manual labour.

The majority of women lived in the countryside, as did over half of the active population, with 55 per cent working in agriculture in 1930, declining to 52 per cent in 1940 and 51 per cent in 1950. After the 1950s, Portugal experienced a significant drop in the number of people working in agriculture as a consequence of the emigration of rural labourers. This trend also affected the female workforce: in 1950, women represented 20.6 per cent of the active population in agriculture, while ten years later they accounted for only 9.1 per cent. This remarkable decrease was a result of the practice of only taking women wage-earners into consideration in the compilation of the statistics, which left out the many housewives who worked in the fields. From the 1960s on, there was a marked increase in the number of working women, mainly because of both the male emigration that peaked during this period, and the colonial wars. A marked feminization of the agricultural workforce followed: in 1970, 24.2 per cent of the active population in this sector was female (Mateus 1986: 336). These cycles of female employment in Portugal did not necessarily coincide with those of other European countries. For example, the Second World War did not have the same impact at the time that emigration and the colonial wars had in Portugal during the 1960s.

High illiteracy rates were a characteristic of the Portuguese New State. In 1930, 61.8 per cent of all people over the age of six were illiterate. Thirty years later, this had been reduced by half, although it continued to be fairly high: 31.1 per cent in 1960. Women were particularly prone to illiteracy: in 1930, 69.9 per cent of women were illiterate, while the rate for men was 52.8 per cent. In 1960, these proportions were 36.7 and 24.9 per cent respectively. While the difference between men and women had decreased, it remained significant.

Portuguese society was strongly dualistic and had low urbanization rates. There were important differences between the rural majority and the urban-based social, economic and political elites. Large disparities existed between those women living in the countryside and the urban elites, from which the militants of the various women's and feminist organizations were recruited.

In spite of its 'Women for the Home', women continued to enter the labour market throughout the New State regime. While a law was passed in 1966 that sought to address gender equality in salaries, women continued to

receive lower pay than their male counterparts in all sectors of the economy. As a consequence of emigration and the number of men fighting in the colonial wars, the feminization of certain branches of industry (e.g. textiles) continued apace during the 1960s. On the other hand, strong social stratification and a more restricted elite resulted in a degree of reduced educational and professional discrimination against women in the upper middle class (Ferreira 1998).

Compared to Salazarism, the First Republic was a period of freedom and legislative innovation for women, especially with the new family legislation, and the divorce law in particular. However, the Republic excluded women from participation in the political arena, while Salazarism opened a limited number of doors.

### The New State and women's movements

Inspired by the Freemason and the republican and socialist movements, the first Portuguese feminist movements appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century. This was the case for the Portuguese Feminist Studies' Group (Grupo Português de Estudos Feministas – GPEF) in 1907, and the Republican League of Portuguese Women (Liga Republicana das Mulheres Portuguesas – LRMP) in 1909. With the proclamation of the Republic in 1910, relations between the republicans and this latter organization was complicated by the republicans' refusal to grant women the right to vote, although innovative family legislation gave women some new rights. Between 1910 and 1920, these organizations went their own way, although they remained dominated by republican and Masonic influences.<sup>3</sup>

The National Council of Portuguese Women (Conselho Nacional das Mulheres Portuguesas – CNMP), the longest surviving of all Portuguese women's organizations, was founded in 1914 by one of the country's leading women's rights militants and gynaecologist, Adelaide Cabete.

Cabete had already participated with Ana Castro Osório in the creation of the LRMP in 1909 (Esteves 1992). This movement had connections with the Republican Party and helped to bring down the constitutional monarchy. The League's first leaders, like Castro Osório and Cabete, were members of various women's Masonic lodges. Cabete, for example, was Master of the Human Rights Lodge (Costa 1981). These women belonged to the upper-middle classes, and were active within the republican movement.

According to the statutes of the LRMP, its objectives were to 'guide, educate and instruct Portuguese women along democratic principles' (Esteves 1992: 29–32). The League had between 400 and 800 members during its ten-year existence, before it was dissolved in 1919. Although it had sections in the countryside, the overwhelming majority of its followers lived in Lisbon, with the majority of its members being schoolteachers (Esteves 1992: 136). During the first years of the Republic, the League supported the new power, and was particularly supportive of the new family legislation, and declared itself in favour of the new divorce law. However, disagreements over women's participation in politics soon emerged within the League. Some leaders wanted their list of demands to emphasize female suffrage, while others were more inclined to stress social and economic rights. These were the reasons that led Ana de Castro Osório to leave the League.

3 According to one pessimistic report on female associations from 1916, the following organizations existed: Associação de Propaganda Feminista (1911); Liga Republicana das Mulheres Portuguesas (1909); União das Mulheres Socialistas; Círculo Feminino Português; Fraternidade das Mulheres; and Recreação Post-Escolar das Raparigas. cf. 'Relatório de Clara Ferreira Alves', published in the *Boletim Oficial do Conselho Nacional das Mulheres Portuguesas*, 8, November 1916.

Without waiting for women to obtain the right to vote, a female doctor and militant advocate of women's suffrage, and founder of the Association of Feminist Propaganda (Associação de Propaganda Feminista – APF), Carolina Beatriz Angelo, exercised her right to vote on 28 May 1911, claiming to be the 'head of the family' since she was a mother and widow. However, the republicans soon closed this loophole, and on 3 July 1913 they introduced legislation that restricted the franchise to literate men.

The CNMP formed the Portuguese section of the International Council of Women (ICW), which was founded in Washington DC in 1888. The Portuguese Council established special ties with its French partner, the Conseil National des Femmes Françaises (National Council of French Women – CNFF), through Adrienne Avril de Sainte-Croix, who was secretary-general of the CNFF and vice-president of the ICW. The CNMP's statutes, which were approved in April 1914, described this organization as 'a women's institution not following any philosophical, political or religious school or faction' (Lamas 1995: 38). Its goals were to form a federation of women's – not only feminist – associations which 'deal with women and children', and to 'co-ordinate, direct and stimulate all efforts towards dignifying and emancipating women'.<sup>4</sup> Another of its objectives was to 'advocate everything concerning the improvement of women's material and moral condition, especially those of the female worker' and equal pay for equal work. Like similar movements, the CNMP tried not to use the word feminism, and proclaimed itself apolitical, as it tried to incorporate various philanthropic movements into its activities. This organization also represented the International Alliance for Female Suffrage in Portugal.

The military dictatorship that was established in 1926 did not ban the activities of women's movements; it even opened the political sphere to a small female elite. The New State did nothing to change this; however, this modest opening took place in an atmosphere that was hostile towards those women's social and civil rights that had been conceded during the First Republic.

In respect of political citizenship, Portuguese women were given some restricted rights by laws passed during the dictatorship. On 5 May 1931, while the government sought to organize elections (which were not held), women aged 21 and over with a secondary-school or university diploma were to obtain the franchise. Here, the new regime followed the example set by dictatorships, like that of Primo de Rivera's in Spain, which gave women 'heads of family' a limited right to vote (Grand 1976; Nash 1995).

The right to vote was extended to women under very restricted circumstances: limited to widows, divorced women, married women with husbands overseas and women with a secondary or university education. When the New State's first legislative elections were held in 1934, those women whose names were on the electoral rolls were allowed to exercise their vote. This right was extended to married women in 1946. It was not until 1968, after Marcello Caetano replaced Salazar, that all women were given the right to vote. A memorandum of the Corporatist Council stressed the advantages of this change, stating that 'women were more conservative than men' (Cruz 1988). Nevertheless, the right to vote still did not apply to municipal elections where only 'heads of family' could cast a ballot. Besides,

these political rights were granted under a single-party regime which allowed a controlled opposition to emerge in 1945, and which rigged elections and *restricted the suffrage*.

The União Nacional (National Union – UN) was a party of notables that was dependent upon the State, and which was well established in the provinces where it retained close ties with the local administrations. The number of women in the UN remained very low throughout the New State period: on average, they formed 3.7 per cent of the total membership (from the foundation of the UN until the end of the New State 44 years later) (Cruz 1988: 246). After Salazar's removal from power in 1968, his successor extended female suffrage and promoted their admission into the single party, which had since been renamed National Popular Action (Acção Nacional Popular – ANP).

It was during Salazarism's first National Assembly on 11 January 1935, that three female deputies set foot in the Portuguese parliament building for the first time. While never very numerous in the New State, their arrival was welcomed by those sections of the press that were linked to what was left of the feminist movement of the 1920s. Salazar announced this fact as 'a novelty' when he was preparing to choose the first deputies of his regime: 'ladies will be part of both the National Assembly and the Corporatist Chamber, which does not mean that the State or the women have converted to feminism' (*O Século*, 19 November 1934: 1).

While the first three women deputies were conservative, single and practising Catholics, they did not come from either the single party or the small fascist movements. Maria Baptista dos Santos Guardiola, 40 years old and principal of a girls' secondary school in Lisbon, played a central role in the creation of women's organizations during Salazarism. Domitília de Carvalho, aged 64, was a doctor and teacher, and had headed Lisbon's first girls' secondary school. Maria Candida Parreira was a teacher and a lawyer (Sousa 1986: 427–44). Their speeches in the National Assembly mainly concerned education and proposed the introduction of secondary-school courses on general hygiene and child care and called for the reform of the school system to ensure that it was guided 'by the principles of Christian doctrine and morals, [that are] traditional to the country'. Guardiola, who had a long career in the service of the New State, defended the introduction of a single history and philosophy textbook. Of the three, it was she who had the greatest political influence.

### *Salazarist women's organizations*

The regime's official women's organizations were created within the framework of the nationalist and Catholic reform of the educational system. The New State had an ideological obsession with education. Control of teachers, single schoolbooks and the decoration of classrooms all reflected the ideological 'ideal type' of Salazarist ideology: 'God, Homeland, Family, Work' (Mónica 1982). Christianization was its other official obsession.

More than any combative, imperialistic mystique, it was the values of resignation, obedience and, above all, an acquiescent 'organic society' on the one hand, and the reservation of politics to a paternalistic elite that was led by Salazar on the other, that characterized primary education.

It was in this framework of educational reform, particularly in an area of growing labour-force feminization (in 1940, 76 per cent of primary-, and 33 per cent of secondary-school teachers were women), and at a time when the government was beginning to separate the sexes in secondary schools, that the Ministry of Education founded its official women's and youth organization (Nóvoa 1992: 455–519).

On 15 August 1936 the New State established, within the Ministry of Education, the Mothers' Work for National Education (Obra das Mães para a Educação Nacional – OMEN). This was followed, in 1937, by the creation of the Portuguese Female Youth (Mocidade Portuguesa Feminina – MPF) (Pimentel 2000). Most of OMEN's leaders were the same as those of the MPF. Maria Guardiola, national commissioner of the latter, remained the MPF's leader for 30 years, until 1968.

The inspiration for OMEN came from the least politicized of Italian Fascist organizations, the Opera Nazionale per la protezione della maternità e dell'Infanzia (ONMI), which had been created within the Interior Ministry in 1926. The law creating ONMI stressed the protection of motherhood and childhood through the introduction of scientific hygiene, and formed part of the fascist regime's pro-natalist policy (Saraceno 1991; Grazia 1992). To coordinate the several agencies that aided Italian mothers, ONMI celebrated the 'Day of the Mother and Child': possessed of a much larger assistance network than its Portuguese counterpart, and was initially headed by men. Of all Italian Fascism's family-oriented groups, ONMI was the least political and was not a mass organization. Its Portuguese counterpart never grew to be very large, and had few pretensions towards political mobilization.

Dependent upon the Ministry of Education, OMEN incorporated a small group of women devoted to Salazar and his regime (Pimentel 2000). Its patrons and leaders were mainly Catholic figures from Lisbon's social elite. The law creating OMEN described it as an association that would 'stimulate the educational influence of the family and ensure cooperation between family and school'. Its regulations defined the organization's goals: 'to guide Portuguese mothers in the raising of their children', instilling in them the principles of hygiene and childcare in order to stimulate 'a family upbringing' to promote 'the beautification of rural life and the comforts of home as an educational environment', to organize the girls' section of the Mocidade Portuguesa (Portuguese Youth – MP) and to promote 'the nationalist education of youth' (*Decreto-lei* 26893, 15 August 1936).

A few years after the creation of the MPF, OMEN, which had initially been linked to the area of education, turned its attentions to assistance, where it would not be very active: granting 'awards' to large families and providing support for mothers. OMEN, which mainly focused its attention on rural areas, cultivated the image of the happy, Catholic and domestic countrywoman. Its goal was not far from the ideal image of corporatist society that was being conveyed within the 1930s' school system. Nevertheless, OMEN was never very close to rural society, and nor did it grow much beyond its small core of leaders. Delegations were established in the large cities, but their activities were predominantly ideological, providing courses in communities and *casas do povo* (public community centres).

After the establishment of the MPF, which was one of OMEN's main goals,



it officially remained as an autonomous organization. In addition to supervising the MPF, it maintained functions such as the organization of the annual 'Mothers' Week' and other such events with the regime's official youth movement. District delegations organized information sessions and gave awards to large families; those with more than five children and who had been married by the Church. The awards were normally given by the provincial clergy who eliminated those candidates who did not live according to Catholic morals. OMEN survived until the 1970s: when Marcello Caetano came to power, it went from lethargy to paralysis before being abolished soon after the overthrow of the regime in 1974.

Without any organic links to its male counterpart, the MPF was intended to incorporate all young women; however, it only interacted with school-age girls, for whom membership was compulsory up to the age of 14 and voluntary after that. Its founding leaders came from OMEN, and the influence of Catholicism was strong (Barbas 1998). Education in 'love for God, the homeland and the family' was the first motto of the MPF's statutes: its aim was to train 'Christian Portuguese women'. As its most senior leader was to declare in 1941, moral education was most important and, in this, '... the elevation of home life, love for the family and the acceptance of the duties it imposes ...'. Only after that came the body: the MPF's regulations banned 'all sports ... harmful to the female's natural mission ...' or 'which offend women's decency' (*Mocidade Portuguesa Feminina: organização e actividades*, n.d.: 6-7).

No matter what typology one adopts for the analysis of fascist youth organizations, the MPF will always be closer to those in which the presence of Catholicism and the traditionalist family mystique was strong: like its counterparts in Franco's Spain, for example (Gallego 1983; López 1990). Nationalistic education, which was evidently more important in the male sector, was here almost totally replaced by the cult of the Portuguese medieval queens like Queen Leonor, the founder of charitable organizations, and by the worship of the Virgin Mary. 'Home economics', principles of hygiene, nursing and 'the science of mothers, the most useful of all sciences for the family and the homeland', were fundamental to their training. For those members who were in contact with the male organization, the propaganda pamphlets did not leave any doubt that, while born of 'the same great patriotic thought,' and 'while the boys' youth movement uses its political and social education to prepare active collaborators for our statesmen; the girls' movement prepares them for work at home within the family, which their love, work and Christian spirit will turn into the solid basis of the New State' (*Mocidade Portuguesa Feminina: organização e actividades*, n.d.: 60-61).

Although its most important activities were limited to secondary schools, which in 1940 were attended by 14,600 girls and 21,800 boys, the hypothesis that the MPF was intended principally to control girls from the urban middle classes on the grounds that they were more susceptible to dissident influence, seems sound (Moreira 1994: 224). However, with the important growth in the number of secondary-school pupils – especially girls – dating from the 1950s, the MPF was probably and 'paradoxically much more progressive (as the Catholic youth often was) than the rest of a backward-looking society' (Belo 1987: 269). Most girls attending secondary school prior to the 1960s went to private schools: schools in which the Church played a central role.

5 See its founder's testimony, in José Freire Antunes (ed.) (1995), *A guerra de África, vol.I: 1961*, Lisbon, pp. 421-34. According to Cecília Supico Pinto, the MNF had united 28,000 women in Portugal and Africa.

Some of the women who stood out on the Corporatist Council or in the universities during the regime's final years had held positions in the MPE, although they retained their parallel Catholic militancy. Portugal's first woman prime minister, Maria de Lurdes Pintasilgo, was one such.

The National Women's Movement (Movimento Nacional Feminino – MNF) was the last women's organization created under Salazar. Launched in 1961, its objective was to support Portuguese soldiers fighting in the colonial war which was then starting in Angola, and which would quickly spread to Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau (Santo 2003). The MNF was founded by Cecília Supico Pinto, the wife of one of Salazar's ministers.<sup>5</sup> Its initial manifesto, which was signed by 25 women, described the MNF as an association created to unite all Portuguese women who were interested in giving 'moral and material support to those who are fighting for the integrity of our homeland's heritage'.

This organization, which was sponsored by the Ministry of the Interior and Overseas, as well as by businessmen with interests in the colonies, represented an attempt at the political mobilization of women for the regime's last battle on the African front. Some of its promoters worked with Catholic charities, and its initial network was based on that of the Vicentinas (the Order of St. Vincent). The MNF organized events throughout mainland Portugal to show solidarity and raise funds, arranged visits to the African fronts (especially at Christmas), and organized the 'war godmothers'. The regime's media, particularly the State television broadcaster, gave the MNF's activities a great deal of coverage throughout the 1960s. Shortly after the fall of the dictatorship, Portugal's military involvement in its former colonies ended, and the MNF was abolished.

### *Female Catholic organizations*

Although the 'Catholicization' of institutions was an important aspect of Salazarism, the Church feared the totalitarian tendencies of some State organizations – particularly those that were inspired by fascism – and the possible 'forced integration' of its youth organizations into those created by the State (Cruz 1992). These fears proved to be unfounded, and never became a reality: rather, to the contrary, from the early-1930s the regime 'granted' the Church an important role in shaping the symbolic and ideological framework of large sectors of society – those closest to traditional rural society in particular, and provided it with a social space for its own organizations. When Salazar institutionalized the New State he also abolished the Catholic Centre Party so as to integrate it into the single party. He then gave the Church the task of 're-Christianizing' the country after decades of republican and liberal secularization.

Portuguese Catholic Action (Acção Católica Portuguesa – ACP) was created by the Episcopate in 1933. For a long time, this was to be the Church's guarantee of collaboration with Salazarism and its institutions – mainly the corporatist ones – from a position of relative autonomy (Ferreira 1987; Fontes 1994). Relying strictly upon their hierarchy, and with links to some government organizations, these Catholic institutions formed a powerful instrument of conservative socialization, although there were some sporadic dissident elements after 1945. The powerful presence of the clergy

within the movement's nucleus helped prevent tensions with the regime on the part of more 'social' sectors, although some tensions did, nevertheless, emerge (Rezola 1999).

In the field of women's organizations, the ACP inherited experiences from the liberal Republic, but its organizational structure dated from 1934, and grew at a remarkable rate until the end of the 1950s. The Women's Catholic Action League (Liga de Acção Católica Feminina – ACF), which was sub-divided into socio-professional sectors, organized married women over the age of 25 and those who held university degrees. The Female Catholic Youth Organization (Juventude Católica Feminina – JFC), was also divided into specific organizations for university and secondary-school students, as well as rural and industrial workers. As well as these, there were other Catholic organizations, such as the Noelist Union (União Noelista), which considerably developed its activities in teaching the catechism and provided social assistance during the 1940s and 1950s.

The number of women in the ACP was very high throughout the long Salazarist period. In 1960, 76 per cent of the members of all ACP organizations, which at that time had a total of 95,000 members, were women. The high level of female membership was particularly evident within the organization's youth sector, which always had more female than male members: representing 77.5 per cent of the total (Rezola 1992: 233–41).

The north and centre of Portugal were the areas where the Catholic women's movement was most strongly represented: these areas being the most religious in Portugal. In the south of the country, in regions such as the Alentejo with its *latifúndia* system of land ownership, membership of Catholic organizations was minimal. The autonomous Catholic apparatus probably possessed an implantation network that 'challenged' the official one, especially when it came to young people, because other girls' movements, the Catholic Girl Scouts, for example, had always coexisted with the official organizations, and were particularly strong in private schools.<sup>6</sup>

No research has yet been carried out into the activities of these Catholic women's organizations. In the ideological and educational field, the JFC press, at least until 1945, did not show any major differences with the official State organization, with the former insisting more on Christian morality than the latter (Moreira 1994: 225). On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that some female Catholic leaders were also leaders of OMEN and MPF.<sup>7</sup>

This complementary relationship that existed between State and Church activities was particularly evident between the 1930s and 1950s, and was not merely a coincidence of names. The area of 'family and assistance' provides a good example whereby OMEN, MPF, ACP, and other organizations, like the Social Service Institute, that were inspired either by the State or the Church, embodied an ideological commitment that is less apparent in other dictatorships, particularly Italian Fascism and German National Socialism (Pollard 1985; Helreich 1980). It was only from the 1950s, and always in minor deviations from the hierarchy, that tensions arose – mainly in the university sector.

### *The survival of reformist feminism*

Although its activities were severely limited – practically reduced to the publication of its bulletin – the National Council of Portuguese Women was

6 Which in 1940 took care of the education of 56 per cent of all students at secondary schools, 60 per cent of whom were female (Nóvoa 1992: 462).

7 Maria Luisa Van Zeller, assistant commissioner of the MPF, was leader of the Juventude Católica Feminina and later of the LICF. Maria Joana Mendes Leal, editor of the MPF's newspaper, *Menina e Moça*, also came from Catholic Action.

8 The government justified the closure of the CNMP by saying that its objective was 'completely vague', and that State organizations existed, OMEN and the Instituto de Assistência à Família in particular, 'which had as their objective the protection of mothers and children'. The CNMP 'competed' with State organizations, and could function only if its statutes were approved, which never happened.

9 Realized in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1939.

10 In 1934, the deputies were described as three 'real feminists' in *Alma Feminina*, 9-10, September-October 1934.

11 The creation of OMEN and the MPF was applauded in *Alma Feminina*, 11, March 1944.

not outlawed by the New State following the creation of its own official organization. The CNMP survived until after the Second World War, being abolished on 28 June 1947.<sup>8</sup> In addition to the CNMP, the regime allowed the creation of another organization: the Portuguese Womens' Association for Peace (*Associação Feminina Portuguesa para a Paz – AFPP*), which was founded in 1936 and dissolved in 1952.

The CNMP had an inconspicuous life during the 1930s, during which time it published its newspaper, maintained a small network of followers (200 in 1933, a figure that corresponds to the number of subscribers to its newspaper, *Alma Feminina*), and managed to participate in the last international congress before the outbreak of the Second World War.<sup>9</sup> Adelaide Cabete left in 1930, and was replaced by young professionals, including writers and journalists like Maria Lamas and Elina Guimarães.

The CNMP's strategy during the first years of the military dictatorship and New State consisted of petitions and protests addressed to the government and National Assembly. Some of these protests were against the abolition of co-education in primary schools; the restriction of the right to vote; or opposition to the 1933 Constitution's assertion of sex differences as a fact of 'nature'.

With little room to manoeuvre, the CNMP did not antagonize the official women's organizations, and described the entry of the first Salazarist women deputies into Parliament as 'a notable step in the march of women's demands'.<sup>10</sup> It also supported some of the proposals made by these deputies in the National Assembly, such as the prohibition of child prostitution that was introduced by the MPF's leader, Maria Luisa Van Zeller.<sup>11</sup>

By the end of the 1930s, CNMP activity had been almost reduced to the irregular publication of its bulletin. Nevertheless, the Council experienced a revival in 1944, and significantly expanded its organization. Maria Lamas was elected president in 1945, and a group of young anti-Salazarist university students joined the association. International contacts were taken up again and socio-professional nuclei were created to expand the association's social basis. The 200 associates of the 1930s grew to 2,000 in 1944, with delegations opening in several provincial districts. After an international exhibition of 'books written by women', that was organized at the National Society of Fine Arts in January 1947, the dictatorship finally abolished it. The Catholic and government press both denounced the CNMP's dissident character in a wave of articles that accused it of being 'a disguised instrument of communist propaganda' (*Novidades*, 26 January 1947: 1). Maria Lamas and other members had, in the meantime, enrolled in the youth section of the Movimento de Unidade Democrática (Democratic Unity Movement – MUD), an anti-dictatorship electoral front.

The Portuguese Women's Association for Peace was born at a time of radicalization within the regime: a radicalization that was caused by the Popular Front's victory in Spain. It seems strange that this association, which was created by a group of women who did not support Salazarism, was allowed to exist, even although its programme of activities were moderate. According to some sources, it never had more than 600 members (Lamas 1995: 123). Its objective was women's dignity and their participation in the struggle for peace. They organized courses teaching

reading, writing and needlework. During the Second World War, they coordinated the shipment of food to refugees. Some of the movement's members, including Maria Lamas, were also members of the CNMP. The decisive influence of militant communists was becoming increasingly visible during the organization's final phase between 1945 and 1952, however. Its close relationship with the peace movement during the first years of the Cold War served as the pretext for the government to order its closure. The real reason for the dissolution of both these organizations, however, was the new political situation after the war, which was characterized by the defeat of fascism in Europe and by the emergence of a stronger opposition, both legal and illegal, to the New State. Deluded by the new international situation in 1945, part of the opposition believed that the regime's fall was imminent. Salazar announced that there would be elections 'as free as in free Britain'. Some women from the CNMP and the Association for Peace appeared in public to support the democratic opposition's candidates, and would later suffer from repression because of it. Maria Lamas participated in the democratic opposition, and was arrested several times (Fiadeiro 2003).

The structure of the underground opposition to Salazar changed markedly after the 1930s. The old anarcho-syndicalism that was dominant during the First Republic disappeared as a political force. After the defeat of the military conspiracies at the end of the 1920s, the republican movement fell into a state of lethargy, and the small Partido Comunista Português (Portuguese Communist Party – PCP) became the main force of underground resistance to the regime. During the 1940s, the PCP was already the main force of organized resistance, and had large numbers of student and intellectual followers. Several young women, working with the two women's organizations, supported the Communist Party: one of these was Alda Nogueira, who was a member of the Party's Central Committee.

Although small at first, the number of female political prisoners grew. These women were associated with the PCP and the demonstrations, strikes and protests over which the Communist Party exerted considerable influence. Between 1932 and 1945, over 400 women were imprisoned for political reasons. Their numbers only began to be significant after 1935: growing from 14 between 1932 and 1935 to 204 between 1935 and 1939 (*Comissão do Livro Negro sobre o Regime Fascista*, 1981–82).

Although the 'woman question' had always been included in the political programmes of both the legal and the underground opposition, until the end of the 1960s its importance was always secondary. In 1969, the Democratic Women's Movement (Movimento Democrático de Mulheres – MDM), which was associated with the PCP, appeared. Immediately following the publication of *New Portuguese letters* in 1972 – a book written by three women who criticized marriage and the dominant morality, it was banned; inspiring a movement of international solidarity (Barreno, Horta and Costa 1975). Known as the period of the 'Three Marias', it marked the beginning of the rebirth of Portuguese feminism during the 1970s: the development of which was an indication of the process of democratic transition that had been initiated by the military coup of 25 April 1974.

## Fascism, Catholicism and women

European fascism was characterized by the contradiction of both mobilizing women and trying to keep them at home. The Italian case is particularly enlightening in this respect (Grazia 1992; Wilson 1996). After its initial heterodoxy, and once it had assumed power, Italian Fascism returned to a conservative discourse that limited women's political rights and even forbade them from entering certain professions (mainly in secondary schools) that were already strongly feminized. This did not happen in Portugal. On the other hand, the 'demographic battle', and the more totalitarian wave of the 1930s, imposed female mobilization and led to efforts designed to subordinate the 'family' to the State (Ostenc 1983: 174).

Immediately prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, Italian Fascism had many women's organizations – in addition to ONMI – which were either run by the Party, or by the State or corporatist apparatus. In 1939, about 3,180,000 Italian women – 25 per cent – of all women over the age of 21 – were members of Fascist organizations through the youth movements that were made compulsory for all students at State schools (Grazia 1992: 265). Observing the various types of organizations, and social influence of the most important ones, the difference from the Portuguese case is obvious.

The first organization that was directly linked to the Fascist Party, was the *Fasci Femminili*, which was targeted primarily towards middle-class women. When it was founded in 1920, it met with distrust and even hostility from the regime's hierarchy. Following a tense period, it was reorganized at the end of the 1920s, becoming a mass voluntary organization (Grazia 1992: 247): It had 750,000 members by 1939. The *Massaie Rurali*, which was founded in 1933, was directed towards rural housewives and farm workers. It was led at first by the rural Fascist unions, before its management passed into the hands of the *Fasci Femminili* in 1934. *Massaie Rurali* was also a voluntary organization, and had 1,480,000 female members in 1939. *SOLD* (*Sezione Operaie e Lavoranti a Domicilio*), which was created in 1938, included women factory workers and the wives of male factory workers. It had 500,000 members in 1939, and kept growing, particularly once women had entered the wartime economy. The *Picole Italiane* (for girls between the ages of 8 and 12), and the *Giovani Italiane* (for girls between the ages of 13 and 18), were first placed under the *Fasci Femminili*'s control; however, both organizations were transferred to the Ministry of Education from 1929 until 1937, when they were re-absorbed into the Party.

Salazarism shared one fundamental principle with the other dictatorships: the ideology of 'Women for the Home' (for France see Bordeaux 2002). This was not particular to fascism, however, for it was accompanied by more conservative elements in the political sphere: especially by the Catholic Church, which provided Salazarism some of its basic premises. Since the Portuguese New State did not experience the same totalitarian tensions as German National Socialism or Italian Fascism, Salazarism did not attempt to mobilize women, and therefore had no need for the same extent of organization (Pinto 2000). The repression of moderate feminist organizations in Portugal was not linked to the creation of official movements in the 1930s; rather, it was part of the repressive aftermath to legal resistance following the

Second World War, a time when the New State was trying to get rid of any image of its association with the 'age of fascism'.

Another important comparative dimension, one that is central in the Portuguese case, is the significance of the Catholic organizations. In Italy, women's Catholic organizations simultaneously formed a collaborating alternative and a focus of resistance to the totalitarian temptations of the Fascist State. The Church supported many of the measures designed to ensure 'the protection of the family' and the discourse that went with them. Militant Catholic women helped to implement these measures from within official organizations. However, tensions became more pronounced from the 1920s, while attacks on, and the limitations of Catholic Action's autonomous activity were growing, thereby imposing new and unstable compromises (Koon 1985: 120–42).<sup>12</sup>

At the beginning of the 1920s, the women's organizations of the Italian Catholic Action had much larger memberships than their fascist counterparts (Giorgio and Cori 1980). When Mussolini met the Fasci Femminili in 1927, he advised them to 'control the sacristy': but both organizations shared a large common nucleus. It was only in the mid-1930s, that the Fascist organizations began to outstrip the Catholic ones, and tensions began to be expressed more openly (Grazia 1992: 243). The campaigns for the mobilization of women during the Abyssinian War and the totalitarian wave of the 1930s – while Italy prepared to participate in the Second World War – were reflected in the reinforcement of the monopoly of Party organizations, as well as by a new wave of repression that resulted in the abolition of several civil society organizations. Some of the associations, many of which, like the National Council of Italian Women, had become lethargic – despite their collaboration with the regime – were dissolved, while Catholic Action's organizations came under attack once more. Some of these groups were obliged to close, while others were forced to accept the imposition of severe limitations on their organizations.<sup>13</sup>

In the case of Salazar's New State, it seems clear that Catholic Action not only maintained and developed its autonomous associations, but that it was also part of the female Catholic elite that formed the fundamental nuclei of official organizations. Like OMEN, these organizations remained small and elitist, and, like the MPF, they were Catholicized, expressing their commitment to the Church, which was reinforced by the Concordat of 1940.

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12 According to John F. Pollard, '[Pius XI] then discovered that fascism was not such a permeable conservative power, [that] he, the fascist clergy and even the liberal supporters of the regime thought it was', (Pollard 1985: 191–92).

13 The National Council of Italian Women was abolished in 1938.

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