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Women in the mutual societies of Portugal – from the end of the 19th century to the 1930s

Virgínia Baptista and Paulo Marques Alves

This chapter aims to express recent research on the history of women's work and activism by focusing on women in the mutual societies of Portugal from a gender perspective. The main objective is thus analysing women's rights and the discrimination prevailing in mixed associations (including women and men as members). Another central purpose involves recognising women-only associations as a space for meeting and collaboration amongst working-class women and feminists that attained a voice in the mutualism movement in which their claims on welfare issues targeted both themselves and their children. Furthermore, we seek to demonstrate that only in women's mutual associations did the ideals of democracy and equality, advocated by mutualism, become fulfilled for women. However, in fact, only a few women participated in the mutualism congresses during the First Republic, with some women gaining prominent places in the Assemblies but without any known public interventions according to the sources.

The study period here spans the foundation of the first women-only societies, in the 1880s (towards the end of the monarchy) and the 1933 "Mutualism Week" organized by the Newspaper *O Século*, in which women participated (in the beginning of the dictatorship).¹ Throughout the dictatorship, the entire associative movement – co-operatives, class associations, and mutualism societies – was subject to control and restrictions.

At the end of the nineteenth century, women had entered the work market in different sectors. However, according to the 1867 Civil Code, they were dependent on a man, the "head of the household", who reproduced the subjugation of women's statute in society, in the labour market and in their social activities throughout the whole associative movement. Women were deemed "minors" and only after 1933 did some women, either with secondary or university levels of education or with their own income, had the right to suffrage and to stand for election.

¹ In Portugal, the monarchy regime ended in October 5, 1910, then was the I Republic democratic till May 28, 1926. The dictatorship was till April, 25, 1974. In 1933 began the fascism regime, called "Estado Novo".

Concerning mutual societies, at the national level, we identified men-only mutualist societies (that specifically excluded women from becoming members), mixed societies (that accepted men and women as members) and women-only mutualist societies, (14 such societies on mainland Portugal and the archipelago of Madeira). However, due to civil regulation, which extended to mutualist associations, in both mixed associations and women's associations, married women needed authorization from their husbands before they could be accepted as association members.

We based our research findings on material sources from archives, mutual association statutes, biographies of mutualist men and women, government legislation, and reports and articles in newspapers and various biographies.

Let us begin by noting that in historiography, the concept of mutualism expresses that which is mutual, implying reciprocity and exchange. The Portuguese mutualist Vasco Rosendo explains that Proudhon, a mutualist ideologue, argued that the words “mutual, mutuality, mutation, which have as synonyms, ‘reciprocal’ and ‘reciprocity’, come from the Latin *mutuum*, which means loan (of consumption) and in a broader sense, exchange”.²

As in other European countries, especially France and Britain, mutualism constituted a strong movement of mutual help among members, especially among the working-class, as a strategy for dealing with the difficulties arising over the course of life. Mutual societies aimed to provide a welfare and mutual assistance system for their members who paid fees that gave them rights to different forms of support: in sickness, when sick or otherwise temporarily unable to work, for funerals as well as providing pensions for the heirs of deceased members, healthcare, unemployment, old age and widowhood pensions and, in a few societies, for childbirth.³ Men and women, to be accepted as candidates to mutual associations, had to display good moral and civil behaviours, be in perfect health and subjected to medical inspection.

We consider this research falls within the framework of global, international social history studies, the very purpose of this book as detailed in its introduction. We highlight the book *A Global History of Consumer Co-operation*, one of the forms of expression of the worker's movement, that contains a chapter about consumer co-operatives in

² Vasco Rosendo, *Montepio Geral* (Lisboa: Montepio Geral), 1990, 25.

³ Status of the Mutual Societies in Ministry of Public Works, Trade and Industry Archive, 15 volumes, 1880-1898.

Portugal⁴. Additionally, *Workers of the World*, by Marcel van der Linden, proposes a new area for the History of Work, the transnational and supranational facets, and also includes two chapters about mutualism focusing on the various characteristics adopted by different countries⁵. We are correspondingly of the belief that the present case study introduces a contribution on the perspective of women's involvement and participation to the literature on mutual societies.

We deploy international studies striving for a transnational perspective to understand the specificities of Portuguese mutualism and the influences of mutualist societies from other countries. In Europe, the mutual associations were based on the solidarity ideals of the British Friendly Societies, launched in England in the second half of the 18th century. In Portugal, Social Policy Professor Antonio da Silva Leal argues that the antecedents of mutualist associations may be traced to the maritime commitments of the 14th century, the commitments of brotherhood, of the arts and crafts corporations and of the *Misericórdias*, institutions founded in the 15th century to provide for mutual aid and distribute charity.⁶

Meanwhile, in France, resulting from the Chapelier Act enacted on June 14, 1791 (suppressing corporations and prohibiting the founding of professional associations), mutual associations were later permitted by the decree law of March 28, 1852.⁷ This corresponds to the period in Portugal when associative mutual associations expanded throughout the country, mainly due to the emergence a global associative movement (class associations, consumer co-operatives, and mutual societies) as a result of the impact of the French Revolution of 1848.⁸

In reference to women, we should mention that the French historian, Michel Dreyfus considers Proudhon to be a “mutueliste” and not a “mutualiste”, and for whom the house and the family should be the sanctuary of women⁹. This sexist conception put

⁴ Freire, Dulce, and Joana Dias Pereira. 2017. “Consumer Co-operatives in Portugal: Debates and Experiences from the Nineteenth to the Twentieth Century.” In *A Global History of Consumer Co-operation since 1850*, edited by Mary Hilson, Silke Neunsinger and Greg Patmore, 297-324. Leiden/Boston: Brill 297-324.

⁵ Marcel van der Linden, “Varieties of mutualism” in *Workers of the World. Essays Toward a Global Labor History*, Brill, (Leiden/ Boston, 2011), 81-131.

⁶ António da Silva Leal, comp., *Apontamentos das lições proferidas ao curso do 3.º ano* (Lisboa: Instituto de Estudos Sociais, Organização da Previdência, 1966/67) (Notes on Lessons from 3rd Year Course).

⁷ Michel Dreyfus, Liberté, Égalité, Mutualité. *Mutualisme et syndicalisme 1852-1967* (Paris : Les Éditions de L'Atelier/Éditions Ouvrières, 2001), 41.

⁸ Costa Godolfim, *A Associação* (Lisboa: Seara Nova, 1974), 155-156.

⁹ Michel Dreyfus, *Les Femmes et la Mutualité Française* (Paris: Éditions Pascal, 2006), 21.

forward by a powerful influence on the French workers' movement had long lasting consequences in terms of male domination.

In Portugal, the first decree regulating mutual societies was enacted on 28 February, 1891.¹⁰ It must be noted how this 1891 regulation reflected the pioneering nature of mutual legislation passed in other European countries, especially France and Great Britain. Elsewhere in Europe, legislation on mutual societies was passed on the following dates: in Germany in 1883, in Italy 1886, in Belgium 1894, in Great Britain 1896, in France 1898, in Luxemburg 1901, in Spain 1908, and in 1911 in Switzerland.¹¹

The Mutualist Professor, José Cipriano da Costa Godolphin, who not only participated in International mutualism events but was also vice-president of a Universal Scientific Congress of Welfare Institutions, represents one of the channels bringing the international ideals of mutualism to Portugal.¹² In 1889, he praised Portuguese associationism and declared it simultaneously equal to the mutualism emerging in other European countries where the movement was developing: “The number of associations, the number of members, revenues and capital of the Portuguese associations, in proportion to the population, we certainly do not find any great differences in relation to other countries where these institutions are at their most developed”.¹³ We may furthermore observe the associative movement was very powerful across the Europe of the late 19th century: in 1889, in Great Britain, there were 11.5 million members in mutual societies, in France, on the eve of the 1st World War, there were about 3.5 million mutualists and in Italy, about 1 million members in 1895.¹⁴

This chapter divides into four parts. In the first, we analyse the mutualist movement in Portugal and women's participation in the mixed associations. Furthermore, we identified an important situation emerging in the sources written by men: some

¹⁰Ministry of Public Works, Trade and Industry Archive, Organization of Mutual Associations, approved by decree of October 2, 1891. (Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional, 1891)

¹¹ Michel Dreyfus, “Mutualité et organisations politiques et sociales internationales (1889-1939), *Vingtième Siècle*, 48, (1995), 96.

¹² Mário Branco, *Mutualismo com Jornalistas dentro* (Lisboa: União das Mutualidades Portuguesas, 2010), 10. The author informs us how C. Goodolfim received awards from many scientific, literary and economic societies in Spain, France and Italy. He was additionally the honorary vice-president of the Universal Scientific Congress of Welfare Institutions that met in Paris in 1878, 1883 and 1889. He was also the Honorary Vice-President of the Society of Welfare Institutions of France.

¹³C. Goodolfim, *A Previdência. Associações de Socorro Mútuo, Cooperativas, Caixas de pensões, Reformas, Caixas económicas* (Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional, 1889), 113 (The Social Insurance, Cooperatives, Pension Funds, Retirement, Banks).

¹⁴ Dreyfus, *Mutualité et....*, 96.

mutualists believed women to be causing damage to the societies. What were the reasons behind this position?

In the second chapter section, we observe how, in the mixed mutualist societies, the rights and duties of men and women differed not only based on the general legislation of mutualism but also the statutes of these associations. Why weren't their equal entitlements for women and men in these societies?

The third section deals with the reasons for setting up women only mutual associations in the main cities of Portugal. Did these prove better adapted to the needs of women as workers with large families and the need for social security support during their pregnancy and childbirth as tailored support particularly for women?

In the fourth part of the chapter, we convey how women, although reduced in numbers, participated in the great events of Mutualism in Portugal – the congresses of the first democratic Republic (1911, 1916) and the conferences during the Week of Mutualism in January 1933 just as the dictatorship took power. Despite their participation in these mixed mutualist movement events, men continued to account for the bulk of association representatives and the sources demonstrate how women rarely gained a public voice.

Until recently, studies on the public policy and economic history of mutualism were based on domination and predominance of males and hence the membership numbers of women, their participation and roles in the mutualism societies were left unknown. We here put forward a gendered perspective by comparing the participation of men and women in the mutualism movement in a spotlight that throws light on how women did organize and achieve some of their welfare claims.

Women in the mutualist movement in Portugal

Both men and women participated in the labour market in Portugal as we duly verified in the Population Censuses. As Louise Tilly and Joan Scott have observed, at the end of the 19th century, the extent of their joint participation in the workplace led to more women being registered in these Censuses¹⁵. From the 1920s onwards, in the wake of the

¹⁵ Louise Tilly and Joan W. Scott, *Women, Work and Family* (Holt: Rinehart and Winston, 1978).

First World War, the ideal of a woman being at home grew more prevalent as in the rest of Europe. This situation reflects in the censuses. At the national level in Portugal, women constituted 36.4% of the active population in 1890, dropping to 27.1% between 1900 and 1930 before again falling to account for 22.8% of the active population in 1940.¹⁶ Women worked in agriculture, in factories (textile, tobacco and cork), as maids, and domestic workers, fish sellers, laundresses, seamstresses, in retail and commerce and with some beginning to emerge in the liberal professions.

Simultaneously, throughout this entire period, the Portuguese Civil Code, based on the Napoleonic Code (which entered into effect in 1804) prevailing between 1867 and 1966, contained discrimination against women “on the grounds of sex” and “on the grounds of family”. This Code stipulated married women were to obey their husbands and “the husband was the manager of all the couple's property, including the woman's own possessions and even those she earned from her labours”.¹⁷

In Portugal, mutual associations extended throughout the whole country even if essentially clustering in Lisbon and Oporto and other coastal areas. In Lisbon, at the end of the nineteenth century, there were associations founded in every neighbourhood, in workplaces and with some grouped by professional sector.

In 1889, the mutualist leader Costa Godolphin calculated that there existed about 392 mutual associations and 100,000 mutualists in Portugal, essentially concentrated in the urban areas of Lisbon and Oporto and with women accounting for about 20 percent of the associated members.¹⁸ This percentage seems plausible as, according to the Population Census of 1890, 36.4 percent of women participated in the active population. Hence, female workers perceived the benefits of social security and mutual aid for the popular classes experiencing everyday hardships, whether due to illness, unemployment, old age, disability, child birth, or widowhood, provided by mutual associations.

The mutual movement expanded through to 1921, with 688 associations and 615 000 associates (with the number of women not indicated). Following 1933 and the advent of the “Estado Novo” regime, the number fell back to 527 associations with 587 475 members.¹⁹

¹⁶ Virgínia Baptista, *As Mulheres no Mercado de Trabalho em Portugal 1890-1940* (Lisboa: CIDM, 1999) (Women in the Labour Market in Portugal).

¹⁷ Elina Guimarães, “A mulher portuguesa na legislação civil”, *Análise Social* vol. XXII, (92-93) (1986): 561. (The Portuguese Woman in Civil Law).

¹⁸ Costa Goodolphim, *A Previdência: Associações...* 111-113.

¹⁹ Domingos da Cruz, *A Mutualidade em Portugal* (Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade, 1933), 52.

A report written, in 1901, by Guilherme Augusto de Santa Rita (1859-1905), who worked in the Ministry of Public Works, Trade and Industries, *O Auxílio Mútuo em Lisboa em 1898* (Mutual Aid in Lisbon) contained the objective of reorganizing mutual associations. Although the author recognized that some persons belonged to more than one association, he concluded that women held 31.42 percent of mutualist capital.²⁰

Based on this study, we may verify that, across the four neighbourhoods into which Lisbon was divided at the end of the nineteenth century, there was a large percentage of women in the industrial centres of Lisbon, in the eastern neighbourhood (Xabregas) and in the western neighbourhood (Alcântara), where women made up 39.0 percent and 45.0 percent respectively of the mutualist members. The 1900 Census indicated that women accounted for 25.2 percent of the actively employed women in Lisbon and we may thus conclude that a significant proportion of women mutualists were in the work market while others worked from home, whether doing domestic work, or as seamstresses or washerwomen.²¹

However, both Godolphin and Santa Rita considered women incurred greater costs to the mixed associations as they were more frequently sick than men even if for fewer days. Hence, the formation of male-only mutual associations that deliberately excluded women on such grounds. Additionally, in the case of France, Michel Dreyfus confirmed that mutualists excluded women from their associations because they deemed females fell ill more frequently, albeit for shorter periods than men, which did not fail to contribute to the conviction that women represented a liability to such associations.²²

In fact, we confirmed for Lisbon that, during 1898, women made up the majority of those aided on health grounds, 56.6 percent, and in the eastern working-class neighbourhood of Lisbon, women made up 62.3 percent of mutualist members receiving assistance due to illness.

Therefore, we are faced with a question: were women sick more often than men or was the greater proportion of ill working women associated with pregnancy, childbirth and the need to provide care that particularize women's lives?

²⁰ Guilherme Augusto de Santa Rita, *O Socorro Mútuo em Lisboa* (Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional, 1901), 73-77, 98.

²¹ Censo da População do Reino de Portugal no 1.º de Dezembro de 1900 (Lisboa: Direcção Nacional de Estatística, 1901).

²² Dreyfus, *Les Femmes...*, 20.

The perceptions of men and women associates based on the legislation and association statutes: rights and discriminations

Based on a gender perspective, comparing the rights and duties of men and women, we analysed the statutes of 129 mixed mutual societies from across the country and randomly selected for the period between 1880 and 1898. Our choice focused on 74 associations in Lisbon, 24 in Oporto and with the rest located throughout the country but essentially along the coast.²³

We may correspondingly report that in accordance with the civil legislation, the majority of these associations displayed differences in the regulations for men and women mutualist members. In fact, according to these civil regulations, for married women to become members in the mixed associations (and also in women-only associations), they had to gain the authorisation of their husbands, or of their fathers for women aged under 21. Additionally, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the statutes of the majority of these mixed associations stipulated the exclusion of women from their General Assemblies even though they might gain representation through their husbands or another male person of their choice whenever women related issues were under debate. Thus, the social status of women in mutual societies merely reproduced their social role in society. This law only underwent change during the First Republic; in May 1919 within the scope of the government's approval of social insurances law (that was subsequently never applied with the exception of workplace accidents due to economic and political instability). This new legislation stipulated the compulsory registration of all people, including both sexes, in mutualities. Nevertheless, throughout the period under study, the law on married women requiring authorisation from their husbands for joining any association remained in effect.

Discrimination against women also took their age into consideration at the time of their admission to any society. We conclude based on the articles of the statutes of mutual societies that the average maximum age for acceptance into mixed associations was higher for men: 51.4 years old and 47.3 years old for women perhaps stemming from women attaining longevity but potentially falling sick more often in old age. The principal

²³ Ministry of Public Works, Trade and Industry Archive

forms of assistance were equal for both sexes: health, unemployment, old age, inability (deficiency) and widowhood.

A further form of discrimination incorporated the fees for associations that mostly differed in terms of women paying less than men. Additionally, in the majority of these associations, women were integrated into either a class reserved only for females or another alongside men who wanted to pay lower levels of fees. Therefore, women also received inferior subsidies for health, funeral and any other eventuality. We may explain this difference in subsidies in keeping with the conception of the family societal construct that attributes men with the role of family head and breadwinner while women represented only an auxiliary or supplementary means of income to that of their husbands.

Furthermore, the majority of these associations contained a female focused article or paragraph stating “associated women had no right to aid during normal deliveries but did have the right to aid during any sickness occurring after them”.²⁴ In reality, among the 129 mixed associations studied at the end of the nineteenth century, only 11 associations maintain an expected subsidy for giving birth with the amount ranging between \$480 and 4\$500. In 18 mutual associations, medical aid was eligible during the delivery and with one association emphasizing that a woman had the right to a doctor and medicines whenever there was proof of the woman's poverty. As mentioned above, the assistance for sickness received by working-class women was greater than their male peers in 1898 Lisbon. We must also remember the long daily working hours in factories in addition to all the housework carried out by women while also caring for the entire family.²⁵

We believe that many of the subsidies awarded due to the illness of women interrelate with sickness resulting from birth related complications with the majority occurring in the houses of parturients, frequently without privacy, sanitary conditions and medical or midwife assistance.²⁶

Thus, we conclude that Costa Godolphin and Augusto Santa Rita simply did not understand that a significance proportion of the greater frequency of women falling ill

²⁴ In the vast majority of mixed associations, the statutes stated that women would not receive any cash benefit on the occasion of childbirth.

²⁵ Virgínia Baptista, *Proteção e Direitos das Mulheres Trabalhadoras em Portugal 1889-1943* (Lisboa: ICS, 2016, 57-80).

²⁶ We must note that the first Maternity Hospital, the Dr. Alfredo da Costa was only founded in 1932. In Lisbon, women gave birth at home, accompanied by midwives or older women or in modest hospital infirmaries.

stemmed from the deliveries and consequences of childbirth which particularized women's lives.

Female mutual associations: equality between women

Although the civil legislation attributed women with a limited status in society, they did play roles in the job market, participate and have political agency in associative movements. Furthermore, women founded families, were mothers and had young children.

Perhaps due to the incidence of illness among women, their rejection by male-only associations or the discrimination encountered in mixed associations, we have verified that women-only mutual associations were set up in the cities of Coimbra, Funchal, Lisbon and Oporto after 1867. We were able to ascertain that some were established by mutualist men while another was launched by a pharmacy in Lisbon. Between 1867 and 1919, we identified 14 women associations in the sources at the national level: seven in Lisbon, three in Oporto, one in Coimbra and three in Funchal on the Archipelago of Madeira as duly detailed in table 1.

Insert Table 1

We were unable to identify in detail the respective professions of these women mutualists. However, on the basis of sources on mutual congresses, we do know that some were teachers, and journalists, one was a shoemaker while others were housewives.²⁷

We also analysed the case histories of these associations. The oldest association was the Conimbricense Association of Women formed in 1867, eligible only to women living in the city of Coimbra. We also identified how that this association was launched by Rui Fernandes who had already founded other mutualist associations in Lisbon before moving to Coimbra in 1854. At the beginning, this association had 467 mutualist women

²⁷ First National Mutuality Congress held in 1911: Theses, minutes of sessions and documents. (Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional, 1911); Second National Mutuality Congress held in 1916: Theses, minutes of sessions and documents (Lisboa: Imprensa Africana de A.T. de Carvalho, 1918).

members. At the time of admission, members needed to be between 14 and 35 years old. Regarding this association, we may also trace the number of associates over a 32-year period: in 1876, there were still 467 mutualist women while that number rose to 506 in 1899 before falling back to 411 in 1903 and 395 in 1908 with the 14 to 35-year age criteria prevailing throughout this period.

In 1908, we may note how the association's accounts, drafted by its Fiscal Council, were signed by three men in representation of three women and hence by law, the husbands, fathers or guardians of these women.

Probably due to the difficulties experienced by its members – the needs of their families, difficult working conditions or perhaps a general indifference to associative life –, led to a lament, from the Association's Board in its 1908 report on the lack of associate attendance at General Assemblies:

“...Compelled almost always to sacrifice ourselves for the well-being of yourselves, administering with good-will the revenues of our association, it is a pity that we do not see just who is interested in what we shall do, leaving the sessions of the general assemblies, to which you are all invited, almost deserted”.²⁸

The Protective Association of Women and Children, of Lisbon's accepted women aged from 15 to 50 years of age as well as children between 2 and 14 years of age.

The Lisbon Protective Association of Our Lady of Help was founded on the initiative of the Philanthropic Pharmacy located in the city. The mutualists were to live in the parishes within the city walls with women accepted as mutualists between the age of 14 and 50 alongside children aged between 2 and 14.

The Mutual Fraternity of Ladies Association was founded by António Martins dos Santos in 1887. We were not able to ascertain just who he was. The ideal behind launching the association interrelated with the prevailing conception in that epoch regarding women as being dependent on a male, as head of family and that portrayed women as forever prone to illness. These feature among the reasons stated when announcing the association's founding:

“Most associations are today doing the admission of ladies.... experience has shown that the female sex associated with the male causes serious damages to the associations. With ladies naturally being more delicate and of a susceptible complexion,

²⁸ *Conimbricense* Mutual Association of the Female Sex Olímpio Nicolau Rui Fernandes, General map of revenue and expenditure for the year 1908, in Ministry of Public Works Archive... .

in most cases raising a greater contingency in diseases, with more time delayed in convalescence and the numerous ailments and slight inconveniences that among men always pass as if given to nature itself, but which among ladies bring about a constant sucking of medicines from associations and an increase in the work of doctors”.²⁹ He added that the associative system for women differed to that of men. He concluded by saying that ladies in general do not need pecuniary allowances as such as men dictated the very nature of society. The associates might be children aged from 1 year old to 13 years old and women up to 65 years old.

The founder of the association furthermore elaborated the statutes that he presented at the first meeting on February 1, 1887, at which 32 associates were present. In 1912, the association intervened in the campaign promoted by the *Liga Republicana das Mulheres Portuguesas* (Republican League of Portuguese Women) in defence of the law approved by the Parliament prohibiting the sale of alcohol and tobacco to minors which opens up a glimpse into their participation in social matters. By 1933, at the conference given by the feminist and journalist Sara Beirão, in the Association headquarters, the speaker was presented by Gertrudes Amarante who also was a feminist activist in the National Council of Portuguese Women, advocating feminist’ positions between 1929 and 1945.

The Lisbon located Autonomous Mutual Association of Ladies was founded in 1893. That year saw several members, including Angelina Vidal, (writer, journalist, republican, socialist, feminist and a single mother), sign the statutes³⁰. The associates included children aged from 2 to 12 and women up until the age of 50. In the aforementioned statutes regarding health care, associates could receive treatment either by the association's physician or by physicians chosen by women although in such cases there were no subsidies either for medicines or consultations.

The Fraternizer Mutual Association founded in 1895 also catered for women and children. According to information from Augusto Santa Rita, in 1898, there were 322 enrolled members, including minors of both sexes, but this number then declined to 249 in 1901, according to the association’s management report of 1902.³¹

²⁹ Mutual Fraternity of Ladies Association (1887-1902), Presentation to the General Assembly, 1st session held on March 24, Lisboa, 1887, in Ministry of Public Works Archive

³⁰ Mário de Campos Vidal, *Angelina Vidal: Escritora, Jornalista, Republicana, Revolucionária e Socialista* (Parede: Tribuna da História, 2010).

³¹ Santa Rita, *Mutual Aide...*, 61-67.

Regarding the Oporto Female Mutual Association, we discovered a letter dated July 3, 1900 informing the Ministry of Public Works that the number of mutual members stood at 603 in 1899 and with that number increasing to 641 in 1904.³² These associates were between 14 and 40 years of age.

The Female Emancipation Mutual Association, also from Oporto, had sent two delegates to The National Mutualists Congresses held in 1911 and 1916 – Maria Rosa da Silva Nerves, a shoemaker, and Maria Emilia Baptista Ferreira, a member without any declared profession. The number of associates increased substantially between 1887 and 1901, surging from 231 to 1,580 women members.

The Female Association of Protection and Instruction of Funchal, was set up in 1875, in Funchal, on the initiative of the Civil Governor, Doctor João Leme Homem de Vasconcellos. The association contained 775 members in 1876. The 1879 statutes were signed by 29 women members, of whom 13 were authorized by men. This meant that the remaining women were single and of legal age and so did not require the permission of their husband or parents. Eligibility for association membership covered those aged between 2 and 50 and living in the city of Funchal. They might be older than the latter age whenever the association board did not find any inconvenience in this.

The Women's Mutual Aid Association, started out on September 15, 1901 also in Funchal, with Queen Amelia d' Orleães serving as an honorary member. In 1905, the association had 616 women members with President Virginia Cândida Rego Martins acting as delegate to the First Mutualist Congress in 1911.

Rights and protection for women in female associations

Throughout the period studied, married women did not have any legal influence over mutual associations prior to 1919 and the legislation on compulsory social insurance and, in practice, until the legislation enacted in 1931 and 1932 and implemented under the dictatorship.

Early in the twentieth century, the Lisbon Professor of Law, José Lobo d'Ávila Lima, one of the discordant voices regarding this precept, commented about the

³² Ministry of Public works Archive....

backwardness of Portuguese legislation. The 1896 law on mutual societies, which imposed restrictions on married women, reflected a principle of retrograde civil legislation in the face of mutualism which “proclaims the need for the free co-operation of women” and “where there can only be advantages to mixed associations or exclusively composed of feminine members”.³³

In these women-only associations, based on the statutes, the average age was 50 years old, thus higher than we enrolled in the mixed associations. Therefore, women were enrolled in associations at an advanced stage in life due to the average life expectancy being shorter than today.

Although wives needed authorization from their husbands to join associations, they did hold the right to participate in the General Assembly to elect and be elected to social positions in the association. Younger females could be represented by their mothers or any other women authorized for that purpose. Thus, this demonstrated how the women's democratic participation in mutual societies, and equality between women, that is implementing the mutualistic ideal, was attained only in meetings among women.

Through the accounts of expenses and revenues of association's boards, we now know the main benefits granted to members: subsidies for childbirth and illness, to access fresh air, thermal baths or the sea and medical consultations. Some associations required the obligatory administration of a vaccine to infants. Allowances were provided to members unable to exercise a profession or do domestic work due either to their incapacity or to the death of their husband. This also extended to provisions for medical emergencies. Some associations proposed promoting the well-being of members and their children, as well as orphans and especially children who had lost their mothers.

The Funchal Female Association of Protection and Instruction was set up to provide both health protection and female education (it is important to recall that in 1878 illiteracy stood at 79.4 percent in Portugal). This association stipulated that associates had to enrol dependent children aged between six and nine in primary school, before sending them to the association's school between the ages of nine and twelve. Penalties were foreseen for those associates who failed to comply. In the Association school, they were taught domestic work and tasks deemed useful to housewives. In the 1870s, this association maintained both primary education for girls as well as training for domestic activities alongside its social security system.

³³ José Lobo d' Ávila Lima, *Socorros Mútuos e Seguros Sociais* (Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade, 1909), 223-224.

In Lisbon, at the end of the nineteenth century, according to Augusto Santa Rita's report, disease accounted for the most social security payments to women in the three women's associations he describes: 20.1 percent in the Fraternizer Mutual Society, 37.7 percent in the Daily Tobacco Workers Mutual Association and 56.8 percent in the Queen Amélia Mutual Association. Thus, we once again find that sickness benefits were granted to a greater extent in women's only associations.

We may also verify from the sources on the period between 1898 and 1902 that four associations, – Queen Amélia Society, Fraternity of Ladies Society, Fraternizer Association of Mutual Help, and the Female Association of Mutual Help – that the highest association expenses were on medicines, probably due to the difficulties of female working conditions, and illness following childbirth or even abortion³⁴.

From this analysis of women's mutual societies, we must highlight their importance from the gender and a cross-class collaboration perspectives as women owned these association contexts and were constituted both by working-class women (for example, from the industrial areas of Lisbon) and by prominent feminists, such as the journalists Angelina Vidal and Sara Beirão and the teacher Maria Veleda (the last ones belonging to the Portuguese Women Council), who signed statutes that challenge the perception of the male domination of mutualism. Women in these associations acquired voices by participating in General Assemblies, voting and getting elected to the management boards of associations. They could also claim social security payments for themselves and their children. Simultaneously, they held rights to subsidies for delivery and mothers received assistance during childbirth from a midwife or doctor.

Additionally, in the case of France, Nadine Giraud demonstrates that during the 19th century the men of mutual societies perceived women as “minors”. It was specifically the issue of maternity that led French mutual women to set up maternal mutual societies at the end of the nineteenth century.³⁵

Despite the limitations of female participation in mixed associations, some women delegates from women-only associations participated in mutualism congresses and events, which does demonstrate that women were able to confront male domination in the mutualist field.

Participation of women in the great mutualist events: The 1911 and 1916 Congresses and the 1933 Mutualism week

³⁴Rita, *Mutual...*, 61-64, *Mutual Societies in Ministry of Public Works Archive...*

³⁵ Nadine Giraud, “Avant-propos”, to Dreyfus, *Les Femmes...* : 21.

During the period under study there were three national mutualism congresses: two during the Republic, in 1911 and 1916, and another at the beginning of the Salazar dictatorship in 1934. Women represented a reduced presence in the two mutual Congresses and did not make any speeches.

In the 1911 Congress, four theses were presented by mutualist men about protecting women's during work and motherhood. For example, doctor Estevão de Vasconcelos, who became Minister of Development in November of this same year, presented the paper "The role of mutuality in accidents at work - state action in the work of workers in general- protection laws for minors and women, especially during pregnancy"³⁶. He went on to question the legislation of 1891 prohibiting women from working before and after childbirth. He explained this by stating that the low wages received by men and with the cost of basic needs in terms of food and clothing, a working family could not dispense with the wages of women and children even with all the health risks working posed for them. He concluded that due to the poverty in which they lived, the workers themselves were the first to attempt to circumvent such laws. The legal ambiguity prohibiting women from working during the four weeks after childbirth without granting a salary was thus quite simply utopian. The other theses presented were entitled "On the mutuality of assistance to widows and orphans"; "On the actions of School Mutuality Associations – school canteens; the role of social security in schools: the savings banks; and "On the actions of maternal and child mutuality. The founding of Maternity Centres and Childcare Dispensaries – the milk dispensaries".

In the Second National Congress of Mutuality (considered an extraordinary meeting), the great mutualism and maternity related development stemmed from the approval of two draft laws, on the proposal of the General Secretary of the Congress José Ernesto Dias da Silva. The first stated: "For admission, married women do not need the authorization of their husbands, and those under the age of 18 do not need the authorization of their parents". This would not be enacted into legislation until January 29, 1931. The second stipulated that "during normal childbirth, members shall be regarded as sick for the purpose of receiving the allowance corresponding to the days on which they do not work".³⁷ Similarly, maternity leave would not actually be passed into

³⁶ Estevão de Vasconcelos, Thesis IV "The Role of Mutuality in Work accidents at Work- Laws for the protection of minors and women, and especially in pregnancy", 54-65.

³⁷ Draft law already submitted by the Minister of Development António Maria da Silva to the parliamentary session on 25 April 1913 (drafted by the mutualists nominated in 1911 by the Minister of Development Estevão de Vasconcelos). 141-142.

law until 1937. Associations would also be left to decide whether or not to include maternity insurance in their statutes.

Although women had a reduced presence in the two Mutual Congresses and with no speakers at either event, three female associations sent delegates to the meetings.

In the 1911 congress, five women served as delegates for their associations. From Lisbon, the Fraternity of Ladies Mutual Association sent two representatives: the teacher Maria Adelaide Ferraz da Ponte Ortigão and Albina Martins da Cunha. The Oporto Female Emancipation Mutual Association sent the shoemaker Maria da Rosa da Silva Neves. From Funchal, the Female Sex Mutual Association of Funchal established on September 15th 1901 sent two delegates: Virgínia Cândida Rego Martins and Amarina Rego Martins d' Araújo. We know from congress reports that at the fifth Plenary session, the shoemaker mutualist from Oporto was one of the secretaries together with a mutualist man.

In 1916, four women participated in this congress: two delegates from the Fraternity of Ladies Association – Maria Veleda, a teacher and feminist from Lisbon who belonged to the Portuguese Republican Women's League, and the industrial worker, Albina Guilhermina Martins da Cunha. The Oporto Female Emancipation Mutual Association sent the shoemaker Maria da Rosa da Silva Neves and Maria Emília Baptista Ferreira without any registered profession but who was a feminist sitting on the National Council of Portuguese Women (that existed between 1914 and 1947).

It is important to note that in the Second Section of the Congress, the feminist mutualist Maria Emília Baptista Ferreira served as secretary and Albina Guilhermina Martins da Cunha was assembly vice-president.

The participation of women in the Congresses and the existence of two women secretaries and a vice-president in the Assemblies probably demonstrate the negotiation of an agreement between mutualists women and men, who constituted an overwhelming majority and responsible for organising the congresses. It should be noted that some women belonged to feminist organisations, with important roles at the national level and furthermore maintaining contacts with women's councils from other countries. In addition, during the First Republic, there were connections and support among Republicans, some politicians, and some feminists, even though this did not amount to conferring the right to suffrage.

Cross-referencing certain sources, we must underline that José Ernesto Dias da Silva, the General Secretary of these Congresses, was a socialist typographer. In 1902, at

a General Assembly of the Sociedade de Instrução e de Beneficência A Voz do Operário (Society of Instruction and Beneficence of the Worker's Voice), founded by the Class Association of Tobacco Handlers in 1879, there was disagreement because Ernesto Dias da Silva did not agree that women comrades were not allowed to vote (due to the general national law in effect and which ruled the association).

In 1934, the third National Mutualism Congress took place, the year after the “Estado Novo” dictatorship was proclaimed. In a time of great political uncertainty, mutualists aimed to come up with solutions to the crisis experienced by the mutualist movement. It is known only from the press coverage that 'a few ladies' attended the inaugural session, but the theses presented do not include any titles addressing the issue of mutualism for women.³⁸ In the following year, law no. 1884, of March 16, 1935, was enacted to define the structure of the social security system with the mutualist associations integrated into this new social security structure. Henceforth, there have been two types of parallel insurance: voluntary or open membership of mutual associations and the compulsory social insurance system.

However, the previous year had seen a major event designed to boost the role of mutualism, “The Mutualist week” that was held across the country in January 1933, thus at the very beginning of the dictatorship, on the initiative of the *O Século* newspaper and featuring the participation of some prominent male and female mutualists.

These events received widespread coverage in the press with the participation of a considerable number of mutual societies with the objective, according to mutualist José Francisco Grilo, of advertising and raising awareness about organized mutual insurance, “preparing the evolution towards compulsory social insurance for disease”.³⁹

In this event in the early 1930s, more women took part in the conferences. Some focused on mutualism and protection to women. The conference given by Sara Beirão (writer, journalist and feminist member of the National Council of Portuguese Women), took place at the headquarters of the Fraternity of Ladies Mutual Aid Association (founded, as seen above, in 1887) under the title “Woman in mutualism”. She began by considering that “the typical Portuguese woman was generally indifferent to the associative spirit, perhaps because of the altruism that leads her to give herself up for her

³⁸ *O Século*, 9 de Dezembro de 1934: 4. Mutualism week took place between 13 and 22 January 1933.

³⁹ *O Século*, 15 de Janeiro de 1933: 1.

family”.⁴⁰ She recognized the double function of women; as workers to boost the household income and as a mother in the home caring for the family.

She referred to mutualism as “welfare and shelter against the evils that the future can bring, such as invalidity or old age,” and therefore correspondingly defended women's mutual aid associations “where women could find what is not customary in other associations”. Furthermore, she argued that women should support each other, maintaining their importance in society and advocated social security for women (which was so important at the time) at various stages in their lives. She also pointed out the importance of mutualism to women during pregnancy, the puerperium period and when breast feeding. She went onto explain how the correct care and assistance provided to women during pregnancy and puerperium bring great benefits to the future health of their children. She proved that, based on statistics, high percentages of infant mortality stemmed from inadequate assistance for women. She ended her conference by complaining that the Fraternity of Ladies Mutual Society, which played such an important role, had been unable to expand further.

Doctor Laurinda Alembre was also a speaker on January 22, 1933 with a speech entitled “Mutualism and its modalities” at the Trade Employees Mutual Aid Association in Lisbon. She focused on mutualism from the perspective of protecting women, especially in the puerperal period.

Her ideas were based on the legitimate need for modern women to contribute to the household budget, while accepting the idea (current at the time) that female physical abilities were probably lower than those of men, and with women thus requiring greater amounts of assistance.

“Hence the importance of mutuality in this area: it is said that nothing is more solemn, more noble and more religious than work. ... And I will add: and than maternity. Faced with this delicate symbiosis of working women, as a new life develops in her womb, do I ask whether it is really, really or only very little that which is done for working woman?”⁴¹

She ended by appealing to women to join up to the mutualist idea that would then be able to go further in work of relevance to all of society.

⁴⁰ Sara Beirão, “A Mulher no Mutualismo”, *O Século*, 18 Janeiro (1933): 6.

⁴¹ Laurinda Alambre, “O Mutualismo e as suas modalidades”, *O Século*, 22 Janeiro (1933): 6.

Some women members of mutual associations presented papers. The issues all related to working women and their needs for membership of female associations for reasons of welfare security during sickness, maternity and old age.

Conclusion

This case study, in Portugal, seeks to contribute to the field of study on women's work and activism and in this specific case, on mutual societies. This also aims to better understand the international mutual movement by comparing the situations faced by Portuguese mutualist women with those in other countries and thus from a transnational history perspective.

In Portugal, women participated in the work market, founded families, with many working with very young children and with mutual societies their means of gaining access to means of social security. The period of study was one of slow expansion in a country with a high rate of illiteracy with the list of mutual aid associations reflecting how the idea of social insurance emerged more strongly in cities than in rural areas.

As we have already seen, in the late nineteenth century, authors such as Costa Goodolphim and Augusto Santa Rita, according to the prevailing vision, perceived women essentially as sick persons, suffering from the pathologies of their own sex and correspondingly causing losses to mutual associations.

Given their exclusion men's mutual societies, in mixed associations women faced age discrimination at the time of admission and only rarely received benefits on account of childbirth. They were also unable to participate in assemblies, vote or be elected to board positions.

The statistics presented for the period under study, demonstrate how women worked outside the home, with most belonging to the working-class, as we observed for Lisbon, but with a minority of women in tertiary labour market professions (nurses, pharmacists, teachers, telegraphers, typists, and in bank, trade and insurance businesses).

Women faced discrimination under the civil law in effect over this period and which reflected in the statutes and laws both of the associative movement generally and mutual societies in particular. The latter were free and optional for their members, but were mostly undemocratic environments for their women members. These legal regulations remained in practice until 1931 when new legislation restructured mutual societies. However, throughout the period of study, women received lower benefits than

those of male members with only a few associations recognising maternity as deserving of any subsidy, which particularized their status as working women and mothers.

On the one hand, mutualism reflected the subordinate role held by women both in the family and in the work market – to a large extent, protectionist labour market laws and the concept of mutualist rights linked their wages to subsidising the household budget and their needs only as dependents of the “male head of the family”. As a result, women’s subsidies and payments were almost always less than those received by their male peer members.

Hence, the proposal to launch women only associations, with some founded by men. The freedom and mutualist democracy ideals only ever occurred among women who were members of these societies where they could participate in assemblies, vote and be elected to the board. Nevertheless, even for such associations, wives still needed the permission of their husbands prior to obtaining membership. There is no doubt that women-only societies constituted a space able to give voice to their welfare claims within a gendered perspective. There also was cross-class collaboration between working-class women and the feminists, who held prominent roles in the national associative movement and maintained contacts with international feminist groups and participated in congresses, as well as being close to the republican governments. It is also relevant to note that one mutual society in Madeira incorporated the word “feminist” into its name: the D. Filipa de Vilhena Mutual Association of Feminist Disability of Madeira.

Furthermore, some women also represented their associations at National Congresses where they were awarded a certain level of profile by the mutualist leaders and appointed as assembly secretaries or vice-presidents. The sources do not report any woman speaking at such events. These women, probably either shyly or in transgression, were only beginning to enter the public associative space hitherto male dominated. Females would later present conferences on women and mutualism in 1933, after social changes caused by World War I.

This study seeks to lift the veil to demonstrate this was when women began participating in mutual societies, and the male domination they also confronted along the way, in Portugal.