

MINIMUM SOCIAL POLICY IN PORTUGAL: A READING BASED ON MICHEL FOUCAULT

Assoc. Prof. Dra. Jacqueline Marques
University Lusófona, Lisbon, Portugal

ABSTRACT

This paper reflects on the relationship between Michel Foucault's analysis of power and Portugal's social minimum policy (social insertion income- RSI) and the role of professionals who work with it. This paper presents a theoretical analysis of the correlation between Michel Foucault's power analysis and the policy of social minimums, specifically the social insertion income program in Portugal, and the responsibilities of professionals working in this field. Based on the author's conception of power, as well as the technologies of power, the aim is to reflect on the RSI as a regulatory technology, and biopolitics that states incorporate to guarantee well-being through reproduction and social regulation.

Keywords: Portugal's social minimum policy, power analysis, Michel Foucault, normalising power, social intervention

INTRODUCTION

This essay aims to present a reflection based on a Foucauldian reading of social intervention in the application of the social insertion income (RSI) measure. The aim is not to analyse or evaluate the effectiveness of the right to the RSI but rather to understand the power inherent in the social intervention developed within the scope of this social policy. The basis for this reflection is Michel Foucault's analysis of power since it is a conception of power that breaks with traditional analyses of power. It is considered that the RSI policy allows the poorest citizens access to a benefit, but at the same time, it presents itself as a strategy of the normalising society to apply and enforce normalising power. When carrying out their duties, the professionals who operate social policies must reflect on the implicit objectives of normalisation involved in the social policies and measures they implement and on the power they wield, which gives them legitimacy to represent the state and apply the pre-established norm.

BRIEF NOTES ON POWER IN MICHEL FOUCAULT

In his analysis of power, Foucault presents a series of ruptures with traditional conceptions of power. The author's first challenge is to abandon the question "What is power?" to focus on analysing and determining its mechanisms, effects and devices and their relationships at different levels, fields and extensions. To this end, Foucault (1999) [1] starts from the consideration that "Power is not given, nor exchanged, nor taken back, but it is exercised and only exists in act

(...); power is not primarily the maintenance and conduction of economic relations but in itself primarily a relation of force" (p.21). This is a break with the traditional view of power based on the juridical model, which sought to explain the genesis of the state and considered power to be an original right that is ceded and legitimised through the law. The perspective of power as an action that was fundamentally based on and expressed in its negative aspects and discourse of prohibition is another idea that Foucault abandons. As the author points out, from the classical jurists to the present day, power is presented as essentially negative and based on the existence of a figure whose role was to prohibit and a subject who had to, in some way, obey that prohibition. This idea of a single figure as an instance of power results in the consideration of the existence of a type of "homogeneous power at any level and/or domain - be it the family, the school or the factory - and which allows power to be reduced to a law of prohibition there is an act of speech" (Foucault, 2001a, p.95-96) [2]. In his analysis, the author does not start by criticising the powers of domination and the subjects who develop them, but rather the power relationship itself and understanding how the law - understood not only as the set of laws but also as the apparatuses, institutions and regulations that apply the law - conveys and applies the relations of domination and the elements it affects. It is not a question of analysing the domination of one over another, of one class over another, but of the multiplicity of power relations that are exercised within society. In this way, Foucault inverts the focus of analysis, no longer centred on the figure of the subject who dominates (or the king in his central position), but on analysing the multiple subjections that occur within the social body (of the subjects in their reciprocal relationships). This involves moving from the problem of sovereignty and obedience to that of domination and subjection, in other words, analysing the "fabrication of subjects much more than the genesis of the sovereign" (Foucault, 1999, p.52).

Not considering power as a homogenous phenomenon and as something analogous to the good that some have and others don't is another of the characteristics of Foucault's analysis of power. For the author (1999), power "must be considered as something that circulates, or rather, as something that only works in chains" (p.35), so power relations must be conceived as a particular type of relationship existing in the social body. Power is thus no longer conceived as a good, a property of a few individuals or organisations, but as something that works and is exercised in a network. It is a power that only exists in/on relationships and that works throughout the social body, in the interconnection between different social relationships that are dynamic, mobile and sometimes contradictory, thus involving various forces that clash and oppose each other. In other words, power is not a property that is conquered or acquired, but a variety of strategies, manoeuvres and techniques that are exercised within a network of relationships where forces meet on both sides. This consideration of power implies a re-dimensioning of the readings of the state as the centre and only instance with power. The centralism that traditional political analysis guaranteed the state, by considering it the originator of power relations, is transformed in Foucault. This does not mean, however, that the author neglects the power of the state, but he

does present a displacement/redimensioning of its role in conventional analyses. Rather than denying the power of the state and its institutions, the author believes that the consolidation of national states has led to the state capturing areas of power, transforming them into the most important and centralising form of exercising power. The expansion of the functions and centres of power on the part of the state did not happen because power relations derive from the state itself, but because the state hegemonically took control of many fields and areas of social life, setting up a series of agents and institutions to exercise the various powers. As Foucault (1992) [3] points out, "power is more complicated, much denser and more diffuse than a set of laws or a state apparatus (...) there is, therefore, an 'apex'; but this 'apex' is not the 'source' or the principle from which all power derives as from a luminous focus (...) the apex and its lower elements of the hierarchy are in a relationship of reciprocal support and conditioning; they 'sustain' each other" (p.221). According to this perspective, even when a power claims to be hegemonic, we can't just consider the existence of one power, but of powers, since "a society is not a unitary body in which only one power is exercised, but in reality it is a juxtaposition, a liaison, a coordination and also a hierarchy of different powers which nevertheless persist in their specificity" (Foucault, 1999a, p.239) [4]. In Foucauldian "language", it is a "microphysics of power" that exercises control, surveillance and correction of individuals through a network of micro-powers - institutions and agents - that act on individuals or the community.

Another of Foucault's characteristics of power concerns the need to understand that ideologies are not formed at the base, but rather effective instruments for the production of training and the accumulation of knowledge. Methods of observation, recording techniques and surveillance procedures are devised to create a system of knowledge. In this way, power is exercised based on the formation and organisation of knowledge, which in turn enables the exercise of power - an intrinsic relationship where power is exercised based on the knowledge it generates. When power is exercised over individuals, knowledge is extracted about them by observing them, classifying them, recording and analysing their behaviour and comparing them. It is therefore knowledge that accumulates and allows new forms of control to be exercised. The author (1999b) [5] emphasises that the very exercise of power can create objects of knowledge "It makes them appear, accumulates information, uses them" (p.310), so power creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge produces effects of power, i.e. power is not exercised without knowledge and knowledge does not exist without producing power. For Foucault, there were two mutations in the technologies of power in Western societies during the 18th century. These transformations led to the emergence of the "disciplinary technology of power" and, at the end of that period, the emergence of a "regulatory technology" that did not replace the former, but utilised it and worked simultaneously with it. The first technology - disciplinary power - instead of focusing on the land and its products, focuses on bodies and what they do. This is exercised daily through a web of surveillance (and not through tributes/obligations or the physical existence of a sovereign). It

is a power essentially centred on the individual body to control the body, its spatial distribution, organisation and activity through disciplinary techniques and procedures. It is an individualising technology of power that is exercised directly on bodies, without brutalising and/or enslaving them - an anatomy power (Foucault, 1999a, p.245). The individual body begins to be seen as a machine on which disciplinary technologies act directly to make bodies useful and submissive and to develop their capacities to the maximum. This new power seeks to control the social body by controlling each of its constituents, so one of the "first great operations of discipline is the constitution of 'living frameworks' that transform confused, useless or dangerous crowds into organised multiplicities (Foucault, 2001a, p.124) [6], not to implant or fix them in place, but to distribute them (in an organised way) and make them circulate (with a logic) in the network of relationships so that they can be observed and controlled. Disciplinary power can therefore be seen as differentiating rather than standardising; rather than tying forces together, it interconnects them, multiplies them and uses them as a whole.

The success of this disciplinary power is due to the instruments and techniques it uses, which Foucault (2001a) calls "surveillance" ("hierarchical gaze"), "normalising sanction" and "examination" (which is a combination of the above in one procedure) (p.143). These techniques make it possible, based on an analysis of each individual, to establish the joint norm that must be followed and, at the same time, to define the differences allowed within it, in other words, the deviations that must be corrected and transformed to fit in with the norm or normalisation. Discipline thus allows the Power of the Norm to emerge.

As mentioned above, the other revolution in the technologies of power took place at the end of the 18th century, with the emergence of a new non-disciplinary technology. It is a technology that does not exclude the disciplinary one but integrates, modifies and utilises it. The object of this technology shifts from individuals in isolation to considering them as a whole - the population. As Foucault (1999) points out, "Discipline tries to govern the multiplicity of men, insofar as this multiplicity can and must result in individual bodies that must be watched, trained, used and, eventually, punished. And then, the new technology that is being installed is directed at the multiplicity of men, not insofar as they are summarised in bodies, but insofar as they form a global mass affected by overall processes that are typical of life. These are processes such as birth, death, production, illness, etc." (p.289). After a technology that operates through individualisation comes another that, instead of acting individually, massifies, which, instead of targeting the "machine-man", invests in the "species-man". A set of processes is thus discovered, such as birth and death rates, production rates and states of health, which can be instruments for reproducing and regulating the population, so that it can be used as a "machine to produce wealth, goods and other individuals" (Foucault, 1999a, p.246). After the discipline exercised over the body - anatomy-power or anatomy-politics" - biopolitics or bio-power is born. The importance of the emergence of this new technology of power is because it introduced a new "character" unknown to classical theories and disciplinary

technologies: the population, considered simultaneously as a political and scientific problem and as a biological and power problem. In addition to introducing this element, bio-power made it possible to consider the nature of phenomena, since its interest lay in collective phenomena that impact the masses and cause economic and political consequences. These phenomena are individually unpredictable and random, but when considered on a collective level, they can be predicted (Foucault, 1999, p.293).

Another innovation of this technology of power is the introduction of mechanisms with functions that differ from disciplinary mechanisms. These functions are mainly predictive, statistical estimates, etc. which, although they have no impact on isolated phenomena or a specific individual, make it possible to intervene at the level of determining collective phenomena. In this way, regulatory mechanisms are created that allow a certain balance to be established in a population. Control will thus be exercised not over the individual body, but rather "through global mechanisms, to act in such a way as to achieve global states of equilibrium and regularity" (Foucault, 1999, p.294). Both powers over individuals and power over populations are based on mechanisms of normalisation that make it possible to establish a distinction between individuals to qualify them, measure them and rank them, taking into account the establishment of a common norm. We can therefore say that the common element between the two technologies is the Norm. It is precisely from the intersection between the norm of discipline and the norm of regulation that the Normalising Society emerges. As Foucault (1999) explains, it acts on the individual body and the population "through a double game of technologies of discipline, on the one hand, and technologies of regulation, on the other" (p. 302), which allows it to control different dimensions of people's lives and populations, through a set of "procedural institutions, analyses and reflections, calculations and tactics" (Foucault, 1992, p. 291). Normalising power in contemporary societies is therefore not exercised by just one institution but by a series of institutions and agents that control, monitor and correct individuals. For Foucault (1999b), "all these institutions - factory, school, psychiatric hospital, prison - do not aim to exclude, if not, on the contrary, to fix individuals" (p. 248) according to a certain norm. It is a network of power that establishes control on an individual or collective basis by creating a series of agents/institutions - or micro-powers - that seek to "reign over the universality of the normative; and each one, at the point where it is, submits bodies, gestures, behaviours, aptitudes, performances" (Foucault, 2001a, p.251). As such, power is exercised through the mediation of several institutions/agents that are unrelated to the state, allowing the effects of power to circulate continuously throughout the entire social body. By spreading socially, these micro-powers have enabled a new "economy of power", in which the effects of power are "spread" throughout the social body, making the activity of controlling, monitoring and normalising as inexpensive as possible (Foucault, 2001a, p.180). These are micro-powers that base their action on normalising technologies and act on a double process, which both homogenises by teaching and shaping individuals to achieve a certain goal and individualises by

determining the differences between individuals to establish levels and deviations, transforming and making these differences "profitable" with the ultimate aim of achieving the common norm.

Social intervention under the RSI and the normalising power

In 2003, the RSI was introduced in Portugal. During the election campaign leading up to the March 2002 elections, the liberal parties criticised the previous policy (Guaranteed Minimum Income - RMG), which they considered ineffective. The media was used to portray the beneficiaries of the policy as having abusive attitudes, lazy behaviour and an attitude of dependency. This justified the need to change the policy and make it capable of "moralising" the use of the benefit and thus taking care of the proper use of public money. We believe that the reinforcement of the "transitional nature" of the policy, as well as the centrality of the "insertion component" (Bill 6/IX) through the (social, parallel and secondary) labour market, show that it was not just a change of name - from Minimum Guaranteed Income to Social Insertion Income - but an ideological transformation. We can therefore say that the election of the centre-right coalition in 2002 made it possible to replace the RMG with the RSI, invoking moralising reasons centred on the negative characteristics of the beneficiary citizens and justifying the insertion of control actions to increase its effectiveness. In 2010, the SII law was amended with the entry into force of Decree-Law 70/2010 of 16 June. The proposed changes were justified by the existence of a global context of economic and financial crisis and were drawn up based on the 2010-2013 Stability and Growth Programme. There was an increase in the selectivity of the measure by changing the conditions of access and the calculation formula, allowing it to be focussed on the "poorest of the poor" and resulting in the expulsion of a considerable number of beneficiaries who, despite remaining in a situation of poverty and social exclusion, no longer met the criteria and consequently no longer received the support. We can see this in the official data (pordata), which shows a decrease in active RSI beneficiaries between 2010 and 2014 (11.7% in 2010, 10.1% in 2011, 9.9% in 2012, 8.7% in 2013 and 7.8% in 2014) and, contrary to what might have been expected (a decrease in the number of poor people), an increase in the poverty intensity rate over the same period (23.2% in 2010, 24.1% in 2011, 27.4% in 2012, 30.3% in 2013 and 29% in 2014). In 2012, the definition and conditions of the RSI were republished by Decree-Law No 133/2012 on 27 June. The changes led to a decrease in the amounts received by beneficiaries and the exclusion of several households, who had not abandoned their situation of poverty, but who no longer met the increasingly selective requirements. The retraction of this policy in Portugal, justified by the government by the need for budget cuts, led to a limitation of social support for the poorest and a replacement of the right/duty by welfare practices, in which the state is placed as a subsidiary of the interventions. Nowadays, the RSI is presented as a social policy to combat poverty and social exclusion, which combines both a cash benefit and an insertion contract/programme. The insertion programme is seen as an essential mechanism for the social insertion of beneficiaries and is conceived as a set of actions

established between the Local Insertion Centre (NLI) and the benefit holder and their household. Failure to fulfil or comply with these actions leads to the termination of the benefit and the impossibility of re-applying for it for a set period.

The RSI and the welfare state in which the measure is integrated can be seen as a regulatory technology or biopolitics, which acts on the lives of populations and whose object is not the individual body, but rather the lives of men, individuals considered as a whole, in this case the population living in poverty. Thus, this type of state can be seen as a strategy for regulating populations, a technology that "addresses the multiplicity of men, not insofar as they are summarised in bodies, but insofar as they form a global mass, affected by overall processes that are proper to life" (Foucault, 1999, p.289). From this perspective, the state, through agents and institutions legitimised for this purpose, determines the regularities and malfunctions of populations and establishes certain balances through a series of regulatory mechanisms. We are not calling into question the central importance that welfare states have had and still have in the lives of populations, but we are proposing a critical reading based on Foucault's analysis of power. This normalising and regulating control is not only carried out by the state, but through a series of organisations, institutions, technical procedures and agents. It is a network of powers, or rather micro-powers, that extend over the individual body and the social body to manage behaviour and govern people's lives. In short, according to Foucault, political power, which is not located in the hands of the government, is exercised through several institutions and agents with a view to regulation. Welfare states have also created spaces for the construction and reconstruction of knowledge-power relations, sustained by the various professions and specialisations that make up the state. It is this knowledge-power that is expressed through norms and allows a standard of normality to be established for individuals through the discourse of laws and social practices. The RSI, as a normalising mechanism, is an example of the so-called life policies that intervene in the phenomena of poverty and social exclusion. In addition to the financial support that the RSI provides to the poorest, it presupposes an integration programme. It is a device that articulates strategies for disciplining bodies and regulating the population, through the surveillance of beneficiaries and the disciplinarisation of different dimensions of their lives.

Through the use of normalising technologies, the SII policy makes it possible to consider individuals either as a whole (homogenised) to mould them to the established norms, or individually, to understand the levels and degrees of existing deviations and thus make differences useful. This power is exercised through microphysics of power, i.e. by a set of institutions (the NLI and the institutions that implement the policy) and agents (professionals who carry out social intervention) who, in addition to exercising normalising power, produce knowledge about the beneficiaries. Power and knowledge are two components of normalisation and regulation, which are partly sustained by the professionals who apply the measures. It is a power of the norm that "works easily within a system

of formal equality. Within a homogeneity that is the rule, it introduces, as a useful imperative and the result of a measure, all the recording of individual differences" (Foucault, 2001b, p.154) [6]. Deviation from the norm socially excludes the individual, while normalisation includes them. The social actors involved in implementing the policy carry out a diagnosis of the beneficiaries to get to know their situation. Information about citizens is "placed at the mercy of those who control it", which allows the technician to fulfil the role of "ideological patrol of the client's personal and social life" (Faleiros, 1997, p.33) [7]. In this way, visibility is centred on those who are controlled and observed and not on those who assume and concentrate the data and information. The social diagnosis of the situation, characterised by in-depth knowledge of the beneficiaries' situation, will serve as the basis for drawing up the integration programme. This programme is an insertion mechanism inherent to the measure and involves constant monitoring, verification of compliance and, in the event of non-compliance, a sanction. It is an examination of the situation of individuals through observation, surveillance and continuous recording of their behaviour to qualify them within normal standards, establish their degree of deviation and adopt individual correction strategies. The integration programme and its follow-up are based on a double procedure of homogenisation and individualisation. Individualised action is a requirement of the measure since it considers that each beneficiary is a case that must be examined to understand their difficulties and thus be able to tailor the responses. In this way, problems are individualised, both in terms of their definition and their treatment, allowing beneficiaries' problems to be considered as pathologies where standards of normality appear as a reference. Beneficiaries are thus made responsible for their situation and are categorised and compared according to a definition of normality. The homogenisation of action, on the other hand, is aimed at integrating the individual beneficiaries into the previously defined and stipulated actions, taking into account what is considered to be the needs of the beneficiaries of the measure and, consequently, what has been politically defined as the actions necessary to socially integrate the beneficiaries.

Through knowledge and technical know-how, professionals exercise power "not with the function of appropriating and withdrawing", but rather of "training", in other words, they exercise "a specific technique of power that takes individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise" (Foucault, 2001a, p.143). This normalising power is not an instrument that the professional applies in certain circumstances, but a process that works in the relationship. It should be noted that this is not a majestic or triumphant power, but a power that works subtly and based on a permanent economy, through the permanent use of three instruments: "surveillance, examination and normalising sanction" (Foucault, 2001a, p.143). The evaluation of the implementation of the integration programme can lead, in the event of non-compliance, to the cancellation of the benefit. This evaluation, this exercise of normalising power, uses a specific type of punishment: the normalising sanction, which consists of a specific form of punishment that corrects anything that deviates from the stipulated rule. It is an imposition through subtle mechanisms of compensation and punishment based on which

professionals develop actions to "persuade by mobilising the minimum of explicit coercion for the maximum of adherence" (Iamamoto, 1992, p. 101) [8], thus attenuating tensions and dissatisfaction. It is an exercise in control based on an essentially corrective punishment that aims to reduce deviations and acts on a dual system of gratification-sanction. This normalising form of sanctioning makes it possible to relate the acts and behaviour of individuals to a set that serves both as a space for comparison and as the principle of a rule to be followed. It is therefore a sanction whose function is to "correct the virtues" of individuals and not to repress or atone (Foucault, 1999a, p.227). In short, it is a field of action where the power of sanction is based on micro-penalties "of activity (inattention, negligence, lack of zeal), of behaviour (rudeness, disobedience), of discourse (chatter, insolence)" (Foucault, 2001a, p.149).

CONCLUSION

According to the argument presented here, it is considered that the practice of social interveners in the application of the RSI policy occurs through the exercise of micro-powers which, in action and direct relationship with the beneficiaries, make it possible to control maladjustments and guarantee the preservation of the socially established order. Power is considered to be an essential element in the practice of these professionals, who work as a means of establishing and monitoring social normality. Professionals who put disciplinary and regulating technologies into practice. Of course, many social interveners don't intend to give their practice a supervisory and controlling character, but their link to an institution and a policy implies relationships of control and verification in which authority (sometimes confused with authoritarianism) and the power to normalise are naturally implicit. Normalising power, although it doesn't appear as one of the express objectives of social intervention, is present in that intervention and is implicitly associated with it. It should be noted that this is not a fatalistic reading, since there is the possibility of resistance, of creating counter-powers. For Foucault, where there is power, there is always freedom, so it is possible to modify the domain of that same power under certain conditions. He believes that no power is entirely controllable and can therefore be changed.

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