International Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics

Volume 21, Number 2 (2024)

Anti-Racist Values in Portuguese Baccalaureate Social Work Education: A Content Analysis Study

Erick da Luz Scherf, BA, MSW, PhD (Student)
The University of Alabama
edaluzscherf@crimson.ua.edu

Abstract

Social work has been called upon to embrace anti-racist education, values, and ethics in teaching, research, and practice, however, formal assessments of the degree to which social work educational programs have adopted anti-racist values have been largely restricted to English-speaking countries. This study is a modest attempt to enlarge the literature on this topic by providing an assessment of anti-racist and diversity content in the undergraduate social work curriculum in Portugal, a Southern European country with a particular history of colorblind racism. It adopts a content analysis methodology, and it looks at course syllabi across several different social work programs. The main findings from the analysis of the formal curriculum tell us that Portuguese schools of social work lack an intentional and systematic approach to adopting anti-racist values and teaching about racial and ethnic diversity.
Keywords: Baccalaureate, social work, education, anti-racism, Portugal

For many years, the public perceptions of racism and related discrimination in Portugal have been guided by notions of colorblindness and rooted in lusotropicalist assumptions (Araújo, 2006; 2007; 2013; Valentim & Heleno, 2018). While modern colonialism in the early twentieth century was built on racist assumptions - i.e. the idea that colonized groups were in essence racially inferior - Portugal has for decades been regarded as a "benevolent" colonizer, therefore avoiding claims of racism (Araújo, 2013).

The historical portrait of Portugal as a good colonizer was drawn from Gilberto Freyre's idea of *lusotropicalismo*, the notion that the Portuguese were better colonizers than other Europeans and that race relations were remarkably peaceful and friendly under Portuguese rule (Araújo, 2013; Valentim & Heleno, 2018). These historical constructs, although often built on misguided assumptions, have managed to become social facts (Vale de Almeida, 2005), to the extent that ethnoracial discrimination has been institutionalized in many instances, not requiring any specific legislation targeting racialized and minoritized individuals but merely by failing to address existing hierarchies of power and privilege within Portuguese society (Araújo, 2016).

Araújo (2006; 2013) argues that the myth of Portuguese non-racism during and after colonial times contributes to the depoliticization of the debate on colonialism and racism, which, until today, fuel common narratives that portray Portugal as a country "at ease" with diversity (Araújo, 2013, p. 29). Therefore, there is a strong argument that the socio-political-historical background of colonialism and race relations largely influences the so-called management of difference in Portugal even in contemporary times.

This work is concerned with the degree to which these pervasive ideologies might have permeated social work education in Portugal over the years. This idea of a "natural" inclination toward tolerance and acceptance of difference in Portuguese society (Vala et al., 2002) – may it be differences in national origin, race, ethnicity, gender identity, or others – makes it hard to have public discussions on the meanings and ongoing impacts of racism, xenophobia, and discrimination.

In Portugal, there seems to be a widespread lack of recognition of racism as a social problem (Casquilho-Martins et al., 2022), even though a recent statement released by the United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent has confirmed the "prevalence of systemic racism and racially motivated violence and ill-treatment, racial profiling, abuse of authority, [and] frequent police brutality towards people of African descent" in Portuguese society (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2021a, para. 8). The statement also mentions that the school curricula and textbooks in Portugal fail to properly address the country's history of colonial violence, enslavement, and involvement in the transatlantic slave trade (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2021b).

Taking this context into consideration, this investigation is particularly concerned with the extent to which colorblind ideologies might still inform social work education in Portugal. The argument here is that a colorblind social work curriculum may contribute to these normative discourses and possibly to the reproduction of systemic oppression (Choi, 2008). Although highly understudied in Europe, in comparison to English-speaking countries especially in North America, these themes are essential to the education and training of social workers. Social workers are responsible for providing services to people from diverse backgrounds, and therefore, they must have a deep understanding of the complexities and nuances of various cultures, identities, and experiences. To effectively work with and advocate for clients or service users who are often racialized and minoritized, social workers must be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to address issues related to racism, oppression, and discrimination. (Deepak et al., 2015; Olcoń et al., 2020).

If we look at the latest statement on Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training, "[...] knowledge of - human rights, social movements and their interconnectedness with class, gender and ethnic/race-related issues" is cited as a crucial component of social work educational programs (International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW], 2020, p. 12). Thus, teaching about anti-racism and diversity of lived experiences is a

crucial task for social work educators. This is why it is also important to re-visit, time and again, how these issues are dealt with in the social work class-room.

Methods

This study adopted a content analysis methodology to assess the presence of certain themes relevant to the research objectives. Documents analyzed included: institutional landing pages, syllabi (*Planos de Estudos* in Portu-guese), and curricular guidelines, that is, mostly materials easily accessible online. A literature review was also performed, which revealed only one other study addressing similar topics in social work education in Portugal (Sousa & Almeida, 2016). I have looked through the curricular plans and units of all active Bachelor of social work (BSW) programs across Portugal and have performed a word search for the terms race/ethnicity, and diver-sity, while also considering synonyms and comparable words/themes.

This type of research with the same methodology has been executed before in other contexts (e.g. Teasley & Archuleta, 2015), but not so much in Portugal. Looking at the curriculum is an important task because it is not merely a document - quite the contrary - it reflects broader power struggles over what is considered valid knowledge. It is also important to mention that, in general, curriculum, can often be separated into two categories: the explicit curriculum and the implicit curriculum (Herr et al., 2020). This arti-cle focuses only on the formal or explicit curriculum.

Literature Review: The History of Social Work Education and Practice in Portugal

The history of the social work profession in Portugal is very distinct and it accompanied the country's social and political transformations over the years. Carvalho (2010) analyzes the emergence of social work education and training in Portugal by reviewing textbooks, research articles, and her work

teaching in Portuguese higher education institutions. She divides the history of the profession into four eras: the first would be marked by the institutionalization of social work as a profession and field of training, which happened between the 1930s and 1940s (Carvalho, 2010); the second took place in the 1950s, 60s, and mid-70s, and refers to social changes and "professional discontinuities" which took place across these three decades (Carvalho, 2010); the third one spans a period that encompasses the April Revolution of 1974 (popularly known as the Carnation Revolution), until the 1990s, and is marked by a reaffirmation of the profession (Carvalho, 2010); the fourth epoch is situated between the 1990s and 2004, and is characterized by a strong consolidation of the social work profession in the country (Carvalho, 2010). Ultimately, according to her, the contemporary portrait of the profession is defined, among other things, by the period of education reform following the Bologna process, neoliberalism, and the global financial crisis, as well as ongoing struggles for recognition and professionalization (Carvalho, 2010).

Ferreira and Pena (2014) also provide a historical overview of social work education and practice in Portugal. According to them, the history of social work education in Portugal started with the creation of the first Portuguese School of Social Work, the 'Lisbon Superior Institute of Social Work', in 1935, followed by the creation of the Coimbra Social School in 1937 (*Escola Normal Social de Coimbra*). At its birth, social work education in the country was oriented toward social intervention of different kinds (Ferreira & Pena, 2014). Carvalho (2010) also notes that social work practice in Portugal during its 'first era', as aforementioned, was strongly marked by ideals of social control, especially over poor and marginalized populations in favor of dominant political ideologies.

Nonetheless, over the years, both social work education and practice in Portugal have transformed considerably to respond to challenges brought about by European integration, globalization, and other factors. For instance, Carvalho and Pinto (2015) offer a historical overview of the social work profession in Portugal, while highlighting the current challenges it faces as well. They argue that, even though social work education and

practice in Portugal emerged in a dictatorial context (under the Estado Novo), social work knew how to reinvent itself and face the oppressive regime by integrating democratic principles and values associated with civic, political and social rights (Carvalho & Pinto, 2015). It also transformed its nature from voluntarism/assistentialism to professionalization built on theoretical and practical evidence, forming a journey of autonomy and scientificization (Carvalho & Pinto, 2015).

It is important to highlight that the emergence and the institutionalization of the social work profession in Portugal were characterized by ideas of racial superiority and repressive morality (Carvalho, 2010; Carvalho & Pinto, 2015). It was also dominated by women of the bourgeois classes and highly influenced by reformist ideas linked to the national education political project, which carried the motto "God, nation, and family" (Deus, pátria e família in Portuguese) (Carvalho & Pinto, 2015).

In the years following democratization, especially in the early and mid-1970s, Portuguese social work practice and education took a turn toward what Santos and Martins (2016) called a critical trend(s). From 1973 onwards, Portuguese social work grew closer to the class struggle and union movements, also advocating for the end of the salazarista dictatorship (Santos & Martins, 2016). It started to question the supposed neutrality of social work and its positivist nature, aiming to conceive the profession in light of current developments (at the time) of critical thinking, either through the dialogue between Christianity and Marxism, or through the pedagogy of Paulo Freire (Santos & Martins, 2016). Also noteworthy, during this period, was the great influence of the Reconceptualization movement within Latin American social work (Santos & Martins, 2016). Between the 1980s and early 2000s, several other important transformations took place regarding social work education in Portugal, especially after the country joined the former European Economic Community in 1986 and after adhering to the Bologna Declaration in 1999 (Santos & Martins, 2016).

Santos and Martins (2016) have also looked at curriculum plans or units (Planos de Estudo) of different schools of social work in Portugal, and they also conducted interviews with professors and course coordinators/direc-

tors, to investigate the role of critical thought in social work education, especially related to the theoretical traditions of Ccritical and radical social work practice (Santos & Martins, 2016). Their findings indicate that within those frameworks, different traditions are discussed during the education of social workers in Portugal: from feminist theories/interventions to critical/dialectical social work and anti-discriminatory, anti-oppressive, and empowerment practices (Santos & Martins, 2016).

However, in their work, it is not very clear how schools of social work in Portugal implement antiracist pedagogies or diversity-related content. Furthermore, their research findings (Santos & Martins, 2016), suggest that there is an ongoing struggle between two forces within social work education in Portugal: one that is oriented toward homogeneity/order/regulation within the profession, and another one that privileges critical traditions, including anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive frameworks.

Sousa and Almeida (2016), on the other hand, decided to look specifically at the place of diversity and culturally sensitive practices in social work education in Europe, with a focus on Portugal and Portuguese universities and institutes. Their article is based on research that aimed at finding out if there are mandatory curricular units within social work programs that explicitly address culturally sensitive social work, cultural competencies, and diversity content (Sousa & Almeida, 2016). They performed an online survey and a document analysis of the curricula of all Portuguese courses in social work (Sousa & Almeida, 2016). According to them, social work courses and programs in Portugal have different curriculum programs, as the country lacks National Standards of Education concerning social work education (Sousa & Almeida, 2016). This is why looking at different curricula and syllabi is an important task, given that social work education in Portugal does not have a common curriculum based on national educational policy or accreditation standards (Sousa & Almeida, 2016). Their findings suggest that "in general, from the main outcome of the study, it may be concluded that the courses of social work do not have a curriculum offer that addresses diversity/cultural sensitivity/cultural competence as compulsory" (Sousa & Almeida, 2016, p. 14). Moreover, they argue that "the absence of well-deve-

loped cultural competences can lead to a color-blind view of reality and to a certain cultural daltonism" (Sousa & Almeida, 2016, p. 14). Their findings have contributed significantly to my choice of pursuing this theme, in hopes of challenging colorblind ideologies in social work education in Europe in general and in Portugal more specifically.

Carvalho et al. (2019) explore recent shifts in social work education in Portugal, from what they characterize as 'exclusivity' to a 'massification' process. They employ a critical understanding of higher education and argue that although education is a right, "it has become a commodity as a result of the Bologna process" (Carvalho et al., 2019, p. 690). Many challenges have arisen in recent years according to them, including a "dispersion of an educational project theoretically, methodologically, and ethically consistent in our country, defined by social workers and trained by them (in schools) to a mass model where any teacher from these universities and institutes could also teach social work" (Carvalho et al., 2019, p. 702). They also blame the reduction of years required to graduate with a social work degree and the lack of teaching guidelines for the scientific areas of social work and related fields (Carvalho et al., 2019) for the reduction in quality and the massification of social work education in the country, among other things.

Sousa and Almeida (2021) reiterate the problem regarding a lack of standards and guidelines for accreditation of social work education in Portugal and argue that "standards in social work education should set out what students need to learn to do, what they need to be able to understand, and the competences they must have when they complete their training to be prepared for the labor market" (Sousa and Almeida, 2021, p. 202). Menezes (2021) also mentions the role of academic training in social work in Portugal as a structuring and identity element; she argues that initial training in social work should encompass reflective teaching, based on the consolidation and internalization of new forms of social work research, practice, and education (Menezes, 2021).

Although the majority of the studies on this topic are from English-speaking countries, Sousa and Almeida (2016) shed light on the place of diversity and culturally sensitive practices in social work education in Europe,

specifically in Portugal. Their research findings suggest that the lack of compulsory curriculum units that address diversity/cultural sensitivity/cultural competence lead to a color-blind view of reality and cultural daltonism. The absence of well-developed cultural competencies highlights the need for standards and guidelines for the accreditation of social work education in Portugal. As Menezes (2021) argues, academic training in social work should encompass reflective teaching based on new forms of social work research, practice, and education. This study builds on the work of Sousa and Almeida (2016) and expands the analysis of anti-racist values in social work education in Portugal.

Content Analysis of Portuguese BSW Curricula: Results and Discussion

Because social work is a profession guided by principles of social justice, the social work curriculum needs to reflect the lived experiences of diverse populations, especially those who have been historically racialized, minoritized, and marginalized. To interrogate the role of the curriculum in (re)producing unequal power relations, Professor Michael W. Apple poses a series of questions that might illustrate what being critical about the curriculum may look like:

> Whose knowledge is this? How did it become 'official'? What is the relationship between this knowledge and how it is organized and taught and who has cultural, social and economic capital in this society? Who benefits from these definitions of legitimate knowledge and who does not? What are the overt and hidden effects of educational reforms on real people and real communities? What can we do as critical educators and activists to challenge existing educational and social inequalities and to create curricula and teaching that are more socially just? (Apple, 2018, p. 2).

Movements toward contesting the curriculum in higher education have taken place in the United States, United Kingdom, and France since the

1960s (Murphy, 2021). Recent mobilizations such as the *Why is My Curriculum White* movement in England have gained notoriety as they highlight a lack of awareness that the curriculum often reflects 'White ideas' written by 'White authors', as a result of colonialism, epistemic violence, and the naturalization of whiteness in educational settings (Peters, 2015).

However, many White educators are still resistant to recognizing the harmful, ongoing legacies of racism and colonialism in the curriculum of different higher education institutions (Picower, 2009), especially in previous white-settler colonialist societies. In Portugal, this historical amnesia has been frequently reproduced in education, politics, and society. Marta Araújo (2013) argues that education, most notably in the Portuguese history curriculum and textbooks, imposes or reinforces an anachronical image of a homogeneous nation, marked by a White, Christian, national identity while downplaying colonialism and inequalities tied to the race/power binary (Araújo, 2013).

The result is an education that is frequently disconnected from the mental and material aspects of colonialism, institutional racism, and related discrimination (Araújo, 2013; 2018). If left unchallenged, the reproduction of this mentality in social work education can have negative implications for social work students (Abrams et al., 2021), especially minoritized ones, and for the present and future of the social work profession. Teaching about race, ethnicity, and diversity is a crucial task in the larger strategy which is to decolonize and diversify the curriculum (Housee, 2021). Efforts are needed to address discrimination and personal biases in social work education programs, especially in the Portuguese context.

In 2020, the Portuguese National Council of Education (Conselho Nacional de Educação) released a recommendation concerning the role of anti-racist education in the country. The document mentions the persistence of institutional blindness to racism and discrimination, and a failed attempt of Portuguese society to implement a "post-racial strategy," as if not talking about race/ethnicity will make racism and related discrimination simply go away (Menezes et al., 2020). Considering this background of colorblind assumptions in education, politics, and society, the Council

suggested, among other things, the inclusion of anti-racist, anti-discriminatory, and diversity content in all levels of formal education in Portugal (Menezes et al., 2020). Despite these provisions and recommendations, is it not completely clear how schools of social work across Portugal incorporate (or not) these themes into the formal curriculum, which is why this investigation was developed.

After going through every curricular unit of every syllabus available online, a few patterns could be identified. The first one is that the content in the formal curriculum varies greatly among higher education institutions in Portugal. As mentioned previously, social work education in Portugal does not follow nationally established guidelines, which means that universities responsible for deciding what is going into the formal curriculum and what is not. Therefore, one BSW program can look very different from another in terms of core courses and competencies. Secondly, it was possible to identify that the majority of BSW programs integrate at least some content about diversity, especially cultural diversity, in the core curriculum. Thirdly, while some syllabi integrated topics related to discrimination, racial and ethnic discrimination appeared less frequently in comparison to other topics. In Table 1, the extended results of the curricular analysis are presented.

Higher Education Institution	Race/ethnicity, racism, and related discrimination	Diversity (social and cultural), and/or intersectionality	Migration-related content	"Transversal competencies" (these modules are available to all majors)
ISCTE-IUL, University Institute of Lisbon	No	Yes **02846 - Laboratory in Social Work Settings and Fields**, 2. Children/young people, Seniors, Gender, Dependencies,	Yes **L5133 - Sociology of International Migrations**	Yes **Diversity in the workplace** (1 ECTS) **Intro. to gender equality and diversity** (1 ECTS)

		Exclusion processes, Interculturality **L6102 - Social Classes and Stratification** 1.7. Classes, gender, ethnicity – intersectionality *Mandatory*	*Optional*	*Optional*
University of Lisbon (ULisboa)	Yes **9238209.Anthropology** Unit 3.1. Race, Ethnicity, and Nation; Unit 3.2. Ethnic relations: majorities and minorities. **9238310. Contemporary Theories of Social Work** Unit 3.2.1 Feminism, anti-racism, anti-oppression, and social activism. **9238502. Models of Intervention in Social Work**	Yes **9238209.Anthropology** **9238111. General sociology.** Unit II, Gender and Sexuality. **9238310. Contemporary Theories of Social Work** Unit 3.2.1 Feminism, anti-racism, anti-oppression, and social activism. **9238502. Models of Intervention in Social Work** 2.6 Empowerment and advocacy; 2.7 Critical model, anti-oppression and anti-discriminatory practice	Yes **9238209.Anthropology** **9238202. Applied Sociology** **9238308. Demography**	Not applicable

		9238604. **Social Work and Ageing** *Mandatory* ———— 9238115. **Social Work in the Areas of Disability and Mental Health** *Mandatory* *Optional*	*Mandatory*	
University of Coimbra	No	Yes **01010213. Theoretical Foundations of Social Work** Mentions of multiculturalism, advocacy and empowerment, intercultural mediation, and reflexivity in social work practice **01010197. Sociology of Development** 2. Cultural diversity and multiculturalism **01010298. Educational Gerontology and Active Aging** **01741796. Rehabilitation in Special Populations**	No	Not applicable

		Disability studies		
		Mandatory		
Universidade Lusófona	No	Yes **ULHT119-16426. Intervention in the Area of Diversity and Interculturality** **ULHT119-22372. Intervention in Social Gerontology** *Optional*	No	Not applicable
University of Açores	No	Yes **0102047. Introduction to Sociology** 4.2. Culture and Society **0106053. Vocational Social Work Contexts** Social work with diverse populations *Mandatory* **0102012. Sociology of Culture** *Optional*	No	Not applicable

Catholic University of Portugal – Lisbon (Universidade Catolica de Portugal) [15]	Yes **Sociology I** 2.4. Race and ethnicity **Cultural Anthropology** 2.3. Race and ethnicity **Social work: paradigmatic fields and theories** 3.5. Critical theories: radical and anti-oppressive Social Work practice *Mandatory*	Yes **Sociology I** 2.1. Culture and Society 2.5. Sex and gender **Cultural Anthropology** 2.2. Sexuality, identity and culture 3.1. Multiculturalism, interculturalism and acculturation **Social Work and Human Rights** 5.3.Critical perspective, guarantee of human rights, and respect for cultural diversity *Mandatory*	Yes **Seminar: Social Work Laboratory** 3.2. Social Work, migration processes, and refugees *Mandatory*	Not applicable
Universidade Lusíada, Lisboa	Yes **L4401. Anthropology of complex societies**	Yes **L4401. Anthropology of complex societies** Cultural diversity, sex, and gender	Yes **L4405. Seminar: Introduction to Social Problems**	Not applicable

---

[15] At the time of consultation, information about the BSW program at this HEI was only available regarding the first year of courses, information about years two and three was missing from their website. See: https://fch.lisboa.ucp.pt/pt-pt/licencia-turas/programas/licenciatura-em-servico-social/plano-curricular

	Racism, ethnicity, and identity **L4405. Seminar: Introduction to Social Problems** 2.7 - Racism, prejudice, and ethnic and religious discrimination *Mandatory*	**L4403. Globalization and Inequalities** **L4405. Seminar: Introduction to Social Problems** 2.6 - Criminality, discrimination, and gender and sexual violence **L4407. Human development contexts** "6. People with special needs and developmental problems" **L4409. Social Work and Society** 3. Human Rights, Cultural Diversity and Local Identities: dilemmas and challenges of Social Work *Mandatory*	2.1 - Demographic social problems: population and migrations *Mandatory*	
University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro (UTAD)	Yes **12622. Introduction to Sociology** 2.2 Ethnicity **12640. Social Psychology**	Yes **12623. Introduction to Social Sciences** Module 6 - Analysis of social and cultural reality **12613. Social, family, and**	Yes **12615. Political economy of globalization** 1. […] Migratory movements, flexible work, new forms of poverty, discrimination	Not applicable

IX - Stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination *Mandatory* **12630. Migrations and interculturality** 4. Migration, ethnicity and racism 4.3. From the lusotropicalist myth to post-colonial racism in Portuguese society 4.4. Biological racism, new racism, and institutional racism **12643. Theories of social intervention** 4.1 Anti-oppressive practice 4.2 Radical Social Work *Optional*	**generational dynamics** 6. Family and gender relations in contemporary Portugal **12638. Developmental problems** Cognitive diversity **12609. Culture, and society: anthropological perspectives** **12606. Citizenship, social exclusions, and empowerment** *Mandatory* **12630. Migrations and interculturality** *Optional*	and social exclusion. *Mandatory* **12630. Migrations and interculturality** *Optional*	
Higher Institute of Social Work of Porto (ISSSP)[16]	No	No	Yes	Not applicable

[16] At the time of consultation, information about the BSW program at this HEI was only available regarding the first and second years of courses, information about year three was missing from their website. See: https://www.sigarra-isssp.pt/is-ssp/planos_estudos_geral.formview?p_Pe=630

			SS2210209. Societal Phenomena II 1.2.3. The social and cultural integration of migrants in host societies *Mandatory*	
Polytechnic Institute of Leiria[17]	No	Yes **9238507 Social and Cultural Anthropology** **9238520 Problems of Contemporary Society and Culture** **9238528 Multiculturalism and Intercultural Education** *Mandatory*	No	Not applicable
Polytechnic Institute of Portalegre	Yes **Social Work, Inequalities, and Social Exclusion** Prejudice, stereotype, discrimination, stigma.	Yes **General Sociology** 6. Gender, sexuality and gender inequalities **Social and Cultural Anthropology**	Yes **Vulnerable Populations** 5. Immigrants and Ethnic Communities. 5.2. Immigrant communities in Portugal:	Not applicable

---

[17] Information about specific contents in the syllabi was missing from this HEI's website; only a list of courses was available. See: https://arquivo.pt/noFrame/replay/20221125215619/ and https://www.ipleiria.pt/curso/licenciatura-em-servico-social/

	The importance of anti-oppressive practice and critical reflection on the practice of social work. **Vulnerable Populations** 5.3. The Roma ethnicity in Portugal: characterization, main problems and possible solutions *Mandatory*	3.2. Cultural identities, multiculturalism and cultural relativism **Rehabilitation, Disability, and Mental Health** *Mandatory*	characterization and perspectives of social inclusion *Mandatory*	
Polytechnic Institute of Beja	Yes / But partially only **923823 - Theory of Social Work II** 7. The perspective of Anti-oppressive and Anti-discriminatory intervention	Yes **923802 - Contemporary Social Problems** 5. Some social problems and needs associated with specific groups: 5.3. People belonging to ethnic-cultural minorities **923810 - Social and Cultural Anthropology** 4. Multi-interculturalism 2. Sociocultural unity and diversity in Portugal: ecology and society	Yes **923802 - Contemporary Social Problems** 5. Some social problems and needs associated with specific groups: 5.2. Migrants *Mandatory* **923830 - Option 2 – Social Work Intervention - b) Intercultural Mediation**	Not applicable

	Mandatory	**923816 – Sociology of the Family** 4. The family in contemporary society: diversity of family forms *Mandatory* **923830 - Option 2 – Social Work Intervention -b) Intercultural Mediation** *Optional*	*Optional*	
Polytechnic Institute of Viseu[18]	No	Yes **3186501208 Sociocultural Anthropology** Learning goal: "to reflect critically on the problem of unity and human diversity" **3186502116 Sociology of the Family** III.1 Plurality of forms of the family **3186502117 Intergenerational Social Work** *Mandatory*	No	Not applicable

[18] Information about several Curricular Units from the BSW program at this institution was missing. See: https://www1.estgl.ipv.pt/fichas-ects-de-ss

Polytechnic Institute of Castelo Branco[19]	Information not available online	Information not available online	Information not available online	Information not available online
Miguel Torga Institute of Higher Education[20]	Information not available online	Information not available online	Information not available online	Information not available online

Table 1: Results from the review of curricular units and course syllabi of Portuguese BSW programs. Source: Elaborated by the author based on online information available at HEIs' institutional websites.

The above findings from the analysis of the formal curriculum alone are pre-occupying because race, ethnicity, and/or ethnic and racial discrimination appear in the curricular units at a much lower rate than the other topics. With that said, while Portuguese BSW programs perform relatively well in integrating diversity and migration-related content in the core curriculum, race/ethnicity, racism, xenophobia, and related discrimination rank the lowest among the topics selected for this study. Critical Race Theory (CRT) would tell us that addressing systemic racism and related systems of oppression must be a foundational component of social work education (Williams, 2022). CRT would also compel "[...] us to address the complexities of systemic racism as they relate to social justice issues in the field of social work" (Williams, 2022, p. 2).

Considering Portugal's history of institutionalized racism and color-blind attitudes, an absence of these themes in the formal social work curriculum might lead to an unintended colorblind view of reality. From the viewpoint of CRT and anti-racist pedagogy, Portuguese schools of social work could benefit from incorporating these themes into the curriculum in a

---

[19] This HEI did not disclose the contents of the Curricular Units on its website: See: https://www.ipcb.pt/esecb/ensino/licenciatura-em-servico-social
[20] This HEI did not disclose the contents of the Curricular Units on its website: See: https://ismt.pt/pt/servico-social#study-plan

more objective manner, so that social work educators can engage in meaningful discussions about the ongoing implications of ethnoracism, racial injustice, and so on. A quantitative summary of the curricular analysis is displayed in Table 2.

	Race/ethnicity, racism, xenophobia, and related discrimination	Diversity (social and cultural), and/or intersectionality	Migration-related content
Number of BSW programs with explicit mentions in the formal curriculum (mandatory courses only)	**5** (≈ 38%)	**13** (100%)	**7** (≈ 54%)
Total number of programs analyzed: 13 (two programs were left out of the count for not having information available online)			

Table 2: Quantitative content analysis of BSW programs in Portugal concerning the selected themes. Source: Elaborated by the author.

On the other hand, in terms of the diversity content, culturally sensitive practice and cultural humility emphasize the importance of acknowledging and respecting diverse cultures, values, and experiences in social work education and practice (Gottlieb, 2021). The finding that the integration of migration-related content is relatively strong in Portuguese BSW programs aligns with these frameworks, as migration is a significant aspect of cultural diversity. However, in terms of socio-cultural diversity, diversity content is usually delivered through either sociology or anthropology courses, which means that it is not clear how this content is translated to cultural competencies in social work practice, therefore, there might be a need to further develop cultural sensitivity within the curriculum, so that social workers can work effectively with diverse populations.

Especially concerning anti-racist values, if one cannot identify these topics throughout the formal curriculum, it is hard to objectively evaluate their presence, or absence for that matter. Ethnoracial issues and diversity content are addressed in fundamentally different ways across various BSW programs in Portugal. While at some HEIs, they occupy a more privileged

space in the curriculum, they appear in less frequency at others. The pedagogical tools and methodologies chosen to introduce and debate these themes also seem to be fundamentally different across the HEIs represented in this study. An explicit commitment to anti-racist education is necessary to challenge racism and discrimination and to promote social justice through social work education and practice. Therefore, these findings suggest that many BSW programs in Portugal are lagging behind. I would thus encourage Portuguese schools of social work to adopt a bolder and more consistent approach to diversity and racial justice in social work education, providing students with the necessary tools to navigate and transform an unequal and racialized society.

Concluding remarks

The main goal of this study was to assess the presence of anti-racist and diversity values in undergraduate social work education in Portugal. After analyzing the formal curriculum of BSW programs in Portugal using content and document analysis techniques, it is unequivocal that the curriculum of first-cycle social work programs at the majority of higher education institutions lacks a clear and systematic strategy to address the themes of anti-racism, anti-discrimination, and culturally sensitive practice.

While cultural difference is debated in pretty much every BSW program across the country, anti-racist values are not always expressly mentioned. It is important to highlight that, in Portuguese society, there is widespread social avoidance when it comes to addressing racism in public spaces, which is reproduced at some level in the social work classroom. Portuguese politicians refuse to acknowledge the existence of minority groups in the country (ACFC [Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities], 2019), and Portuguese legislation prohibits the production of data that reveals a person's racial or ethnic identity. While in other countries such as the United States, where teaching about racial and ethnic diversity has been a mandate of social work education since the 1980s, these issues do not seem to have occupied a privileged

space in the history of social work education in Portugal. Therefore, while the Portuguese social work curriculum is not entirely colorblind, some BSW programs might be missing key competencies related to anti-racist and anti-discriminatory social work practice in connection to a subjective frequency of when and how these themes are discussed.

To foster anti-racist values in social work education, Portuguese schools of social work could aim for a more consistent and comprehensive approach to addressing diversity and ethnoracial issues across the curriculum. This can be done in several different ways. Good examples should be amplified through knowledge exchange and cooperation between different social work programs across the country. Steps could be taken to ensure that: (i) there is a greater emphasis on diversity coursework, and (ii) there is a serious commitment to anti-racist education in BSW programs in Portugal. Other aspects could involve providing social work educators with specialized programs and training in the area of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I), as well as with competencies necessary to address systemic racism and discrimination.

One of the major limitations of this study is that it only looked at the formal curriculum, whereas the hidden or implicit curriculum also carries important weight in higher education. Therefore, for future research, social work researchers and educators could consider interrogating classroom practices and policies with the use of ethnographic methods, and/or in-depth interviews with both social work educators and students in Portugal, to capture the nuances and complexities that are not necessarily represented in the formal documents that inform teaching in social work.

References

Abrams, L. S., Garcia-Perez, J., Brock-Petroshius, K., & Applegarth, D. M. (2021). Racism, colorblindness, and Social Work Education: An exploratory study of California MSW student beliefs and experiences. *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research*, Online First. https://doi.org/10.1086/714830

ACFC (2019). *Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. Fourth Opinion on Portugal adopted on 28 June 2019*. Retrieved April 3, 2023, from https://rm.coe.int/4th-op-portugal-en/1680998662

Apple, M. W. (2018). Critical curriculum studies and the concrete problems of curriculum policy and practice. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 50*(6), 685–690. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2018.1537373

Araújo, M. (2006). The colour that dares not speak its name: schooling and 'the myth of Portuguese anti-racism'. In I*nternational Conference Equality and Social Inclusion in the 21st Century: Developing Alternatives*. Belfast, Northern Ireland. https://estudogeral.sib.uc.pt/handle/10316/42632

Araújo, M. (2007). O silêncio do racismo em Portugal: o caso do abuso verbal racista na escola [The silence of racism in Portugal: the case of verbal racist abuse at school]. In N. L. Gomes (Ed.), *Um olhar além das fronteiras: Educação e relações raciais* [A view beyond the borders: Education and racial relations] (pp. 77–94). Autentica.

Araújo, M. (2013). Challenging Narratives on Diversity and Immigration in Portugal: the (de)politicization of colonialism and racism. In P. Kretsedemas, J. Capetillo-Ponce, & G. Jacobs (Eds.), *Migrant Marginality: A Transnational Perspective* (1st ed., pp. 27–46). Routledge.

Araújo, M. (2016). A very 'prudent integration': White flight, school segregation and the depoliticization of (anti-)racism. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 19*(2), 300–323. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2014.969225

Carvalho, M. I. (2010). Serviço Social em Portugal: percurso cruzado entre a assistência e os direitos [Social Work in Portugal: Crossroads Between Assistance and Rights]. *Serviço Social e Saúde, 9*(10), 147–164. https://doi.org/10.20396/sss.v9i2.8634890

Carvalho, M. I., & Pinto, C. (2015). Desafios do Serviço Social Na Atualidade em Portugal [Challenges faced by Social Work in Portugal nowadays]. *Serviço Social & Sociedade*, *121*, 66–94. https://doi.org/10.1590/0101-6628.014

Carvalho, M. I., Teles, H., & Silva, T. P. (2019). From exclusivity to massification of Social Work Education in Portugal. Limits, potentialities, and challenges. *Social Work Education*, *38*(6), 689–706. https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2018.1564741

Casquilho-Martins, I., Belchior-Rocha, H., & Alves, D. R. (2022). Racial and ethnic discrimination in Portugal in times of pandemic crisis. *Social Sciences*, *11*(5), 184. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci11050184

Choi, J. A. (2008). Unlearning Colorblind Ideologies in Education Class. *Educational Foundations*, *22*(3-4), 53–71. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ857639.pdf

Deepak, A. C., Rountree, M. A., & Scott, J. (2015). Delivering diversity and social justice in Social Work Education: the power of context. *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, *26*(2), 107–125. https://doi.org/10.1080/10428232.2015.1017909

Ferreira, J. M. L., & Pena, M. J. B. (2014). Research in Social Work: Education, Process and Practice in Portugal. In J. Hämäläinen, B. Littlechild, & M. Špiláčková (Eds.), *Social Work Research Across Europe: Methodological Positions and Research Practice* (1st ed., Vol. 3, pp. 159–174). University of Ostrava – ERIS with Albert Publisher.

Gottlieb, M. (2021). The case for a cultural humility framework in Social Work Practice. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, *30*(6), 463–481. https://doi.org/10.1080/15313204.2020.1753615

Herr, K. D., George, E., Agarwal, V., McKnight, C. D., Jiang, L., Jawahar, A., Pakkal, M., Ulano, A., & Ganeshan, D. (2020). Aligning the implicit curriculum with the explicit curriculum in Radiology. *Academic Radiology*, *27*(9), 1268–1273. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acra.2019.12.028

Housee, S. (2021). Enough is enough: De-colonise, diversify and de-construct the curriculum. *Social Policy and Society*, *21*(1), 123–133. https://doi.org/10.1017/s1474746421000567

IFSW. (2020). *Glonal Standards for Social Work Education and Training*. International Federation of Social Workers. https://www.ifsw.org/global-standards-for-social-work-education-and-training/

Menezes, I., Brocardo, J., & Malhó, L. (2020, November). *Recomendação: Cidadania e Educação Antirracista* [Recommendation: Citizenship and Anti-racist Education]. CNE. Retrieved May 1, 2023, from https://www.cnedu.pt/content/deliberacoes/recomendacoes/REC_Cidadania_Educacao_Antirracista.pdf

Menezes, N. (2021). Ser Assistente Social: a formação académica em serviço social (Portugal) enquanto elemento estruturante e identitário [Being a social worker: Academic training in social work (Portugal) as a structuring and identity element]. *Revista Temas Sociais*, *1*(1), 104–121. https://doi.org/10.53809/2021-01-ts-n.1-104-121

Murphy, M. (2021). *Social Theory: A New Introduction*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Olcoń, K., Gilbert, D. J., & Pulliam, R. M. (2020). Teaching about racial and ethnic diversity in Social Work Education: A systematic review. *Journal of Social Work Education*, *56*(2), 215–237. https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2019.1656578

Peters, M. A. (2015). Why is my curriculum white? *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *47*(7), 641–646. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2015.1037227

Picower, B. (2009). The unexamined whiteness of teaching: How white teachers maintain and enact dominant racial ideologies. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *12*(2), 197–215. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613320902995475

Santos, C. M., & Martins, A. M. (2016). The Education of Social Assistants in Portugal: Trends in critical thinking. *Revista Katálysis, 19*(3), 333–341. https://doi.org/10.1590/1414-49802016.003.00003

Sousa, P., & Almeida, J. L. (2016). Culturally sensitive social work: Promoting cultural competence. *European Journal of Social Work, 19*(3-4), 537–555. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2015.1126559

Sousa, P., & Almeida, J. L. (2021). Social Work Education in Portugal. In S. S. M, R. Baikady, C. Sheng-Li, & H. Sakaguchi (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Social Work Education* (pp. 189–205). Springer Nature.

Teasley, M., & Archuleta, A. J. (2015). A review of social justice and diversity content in diversity course syllabi. *Social Work Education, 34*(6), 607–622. https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2015.1037828

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2021a). *Portugal at crossroads of anti-racism, say UN experts*. UN OHCHR Media Center. https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2021/12/portugal-crossroads-anti-racism-say-un-experts

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2021b). *Statement to the media by the United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, on the conclusion of its official visit to Portugal*. UN OHCHR Media Center. https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2021/12/statement-media-united-nations-working-group-experts-people-african-descent

Vala, J., Lopes, D., Lima, M., & Brito, R. (2002). Cultural differences and heteroethnicization in Portugal: The perceptions of white and black people. *Portugese Journal of Social Sciences, 1*(2), 111–128. https://doi.org/10.1386/pjss.1.2.111

Vale de Almeida, M. (2005). *An Earth-colored Sea: 'Race', Culture, and the Politics of Identity in the Postcolonial Portuguese-Speaking World* (1st ed.). Berghahn Books.

Valentim, J. P., & Heleno, A. M. (2018). Luso-Tropicalism as a social representation in Portuguese society: Variations and anchoring. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *62*, 34–42. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2017.04.013

Williams, E. J. (2022). *Conceptualizing the Use of Critical Race Theory as a Teaching Tool and Intervention Approach*. Doctor of Social Work Capstone Reports. University of Alabama School of Social Work. https://ir.ua.edu/handle/123456789/8493