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Beyond the Uniform: The Militarisation of Portuguese Youth in the Estado Novo

Para Além da Farda: A Militarização da Juventude Portuguesa no Estado Novo

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This article examines the militarisation of Portuguese youth under the Estado Novo regime, with particular emphasis on the role of the Mocidade Portuguesa (Portuguese Youth) uniform as a tool of propaganda and social control. Adopting a historical and sociological approach, the study examines the creation, objectives, and organisational structure of the Mocidade Portuguesa. It offers a descriptive and interpretative analysis of its uniform, focusing on its symbolism and the military influences embedded in its design. The findings reveal that the uniform functioned as a key instrument in promoting a collective identity and in instilling values such as discipline, obedience, and self-sacrifice. The study compares the Mocidade Portuguesa with other contemporary youth organisations — namely the Hitler Youth, the Falangist Youth, and the Opera Nazionale Balilla — and

examines the specific features of the Mocidade Portuguesa Feminina (Portuguese Female Youth), demonstrating how the organisation reinforced traditional gender roles. The analysis concludes that the Mocidade Portuguesa and its uniform played a central role in the Estado Novo's strategy of youth indoctrination and authoritarian nation-building.

Keywords: Mocidade Portuguesa, Estado Novo, uniform, semiotics, social control

Para Além da Farda: A Militarização da Juventude Portuguesa no Estado Novo

Este artigo analisa a militarização da juventude portuguesa durante o Estado Novo, com foco no papel da farda da Mocidade Portuguesa como instrumento de propaganda e controlo. Através de uma abordagem histórica e sociológica, o estudo examina a criação, os objetivos e a organização da Mocidade Portuguesa, e descreve e interpreta a sua farda, explorando o seu simbolismo e as influências militares presentes na sua conceção. A análise revela como a farda funcionou como um instrumento de propaganda e controlo, contribuindo para a construção de uma identidade coletiva e para a inculcação de valores como a disciplina, a obediência e o espírito de sacrifício. O estudo compara a Mocidade Portuguesa com outras organizações juvenis da época, como a Juventude Hitleriana, as Juventudes Falangistas e a Opera Nazionale Balilla, e analisa as especificidades da Mocidade Portuguesa Feminina, demonstrando como a organização reforçava os papéis de género tradicionais. Conclui-se que a Mocidade Portuguesa e a sua farda constituíram instrumentos eficazes na estratégia de controlo e doutrinação do Estado Novo, contribuindo para a militarização da juventude e para a construção de uma identidade nacional autoritária.

Palavras-chave: Mocidade Portuguesa, Estado Novo, farda, semiótica, controlo social

Introduction

This article explores the profound influence of militarisation on Portuguese youth during the Estado Novo, with particular attention to the multidimensional role of the Mocidade Portuguesa (Portuguese Youth) uniform. Far from being mere clothing, the uniform transcended its practical function to become a powerful symbol of propaganda and social control, closely tied to the construction of an authoritarian and militarised national identity. The analysis focuses on how each element of the uniform — ranging from its colours and insignia to its cut and accessories — was deliberately designed to convey specific ideological messages and shape the perceptions of children and young people. These visual cues served to instil values such as obedience, discipline, and an exaggerated nationalism. By examining the aesthetics and symbolism of the uniform, this study reveals how the Salazar regime strategically used clothing to influence behaviour and cultivate a youth subservient to its ideals.

Research into the Mocidade Portuguesa and its uniform contributes to a deeper understanding of the history of education in Portugal under the Estado Novo, highlighting how the regime manipulated the educational system as a tool for propaganda and social control. Rather than merely transmitting knowledge, education was employed to shape mentalities and entrench Salazar's ideology. Within this context, the uniform functioned as an instrument of continual indoctrination — an omnipresent visual reminder of the regime's authoritarian values. Immersed in this controlled environment, children and young people were conditioned to internalise and reproduce the principles of the Estado Novo, thereby undermining the development of critical thinking and individual autonomy.

Beyond its historical significance, this study is highly pertinent in the current context, marked by the rise of populist and authoritarian movements across various regions of the world. By examining the control and indoctrination strategies employed by past dictatorial regimes, such as the Estado Novo, we can identify recurring patterns and tactics. Understanding how the uniform of the Mocidade Portuguesa was utilised to shape mindsets and behaviours serves as a warning against the dangers of manipulation and propaganda while fostering a greater critical awareness of discourses and practices aimed at limiting individual freedoms and stifling independent thinking.

The Mocidade Portuguesa: Historical and Ideological Context

To understand the Mocidade Portuguesa and its role in the militarisation of youth, it is essential to analyse the historical and ideological context in which the organisation emerged and developed. As Rosas (2012) highlights, the Mocidade Portuguesa was a crucial instrument in Estado Novo's strategy of social and political control, shaping generations of young people in line with its principles.

The Mocidade Portuguesa was established in 1936 at the height of the consolidation of the Estado Novo regime led by António de Oliveira Salazar. Drawing inspiration from youth organisations in fascist regimes, such as the Hitler Youth in Germany and the Opera Nazionale Balilla in Italy, the Mocidade Portuguesa aimed to mould Portuguese youth according to the regime's ideals. Its primary objective was to shape children and young people in accordance with the values of nationalism, discipline, obedience, and patriotism, creating citizens who were submissive and loyal to the regime. The organisation sought to instil in young people a strong national identity, emphasising Portugal's historical legacy and glorifying national heroes. Furthermore, it promoted both the physical and moral training of youth, preparing them for military service and the defence of the nation. This process of "civic militarisation" (Rosas, 1998), as described by Rosas, aimed not only to prepare youth for military service but also to inculcate values such as hierarchy, obedience, and a strong sense of duty and sacrifice. The

Mocidade Portuguesa was officially created through Decree-Law No. 26611 on April 19, 1936, which outlined its objectives and structure. Key figures in its implementation included Francisco Cabral, its first national commissioner, and Marcelo Caetano, who played a pivotal role in shaping its ideology.

According to Decree No. 27:301 (Decreto n.º 27:301, 1936), dated December 4, 1936, the Portuguese Youth organisation had a hierarchical and structured framework, incorporating young people of various age groups, resembling, in some respects, a military organisation. The structure was divided into ranks, each with distinct activities and uniforms, which became progressively more demanding as the members aged. The younger ranks, such as the “lusitos” (little Portuguese; aged 7 to 10) and the “infantes” (infants; aged 10 to 14), focused on recreational and moral development, emphasising the cultivation of a patriotic spirit and the learning of the regime’s values. The older age groups, such as the “vanguardistas” (vanguardists; aged 14 to 17) and the “cadetes” (cadets; aged 17 to 21), incorporated military training and preparation for compulsory military service, including drills, shooting, and other military activities. In addition to these ranks, there was also the Mocidade Portuguesa Feminina (Portuguese Female Youth), established in 1937, which aimed to prepare girls for their roles as “exemplary wives and mothers” in line with the regime’s ideals. The Mocidade Portuguesa had a nationwide presence, with delegations in cities and towns across the country, enabling the regime to exercise effective control over young people and discipline them. In this way, the Mocidade Portuguesa functioned as a mechanism of power that shaped individuals with useful and “docile bodies” (Foucault, 1975/2023, p. 160). Its influence permeated all aspects of social and cultural life, from schools to football stadiums.

The ideology of the Mocidade Portuguesa was deeply rooted in the principles of the Estado Novo: nationalism, authoritarianism, Catholicism, and anti-communism. The organisation employed various mechanisms of indoctrination, such as propaganda, censorship, and control of information, to shape the minds of young people and instil the regime’s values. School textbooks, publications of the Mocidade Portuguesa, and the speeches of its leaders were filled with messages glorifying Salazar, the greatness of Portugal, and the superiority of the “Portuguese race”. The history of Portugal was presented in an idealised and mythologised manner, emphasising the heroic deeds and achievements of the past. Catholicism was promoted as the official state religion, with young people encouraged to participate in religious activities. Anti-communism was another cornerstone of the Mocidade Portuguesa ideology, portraying communism as a threat to social order and traditional values. Through these indoctrination mechanisms, the regime aimed to cultivate a “new generation” loyal to its principles and committed to defending the nation.

The Uniform of the Mocidade Portuguesa: Symbolism and Meaning

In his work, *Sistema da Moda* (The Fashion System), Barthes (1967/2015) argues that every item of clothing, every accessory, carries a series of coded meanings that can be read and interpreted as a text. In this sense, just as Barthes described the meanings embedded in clothing and accessories, the uniform of the Mocidade Portuguesa can also be analysed as a vehicle of meaning and a mobile means of communication used by the regime. Building upon the historical and ideological context of the Mocidade Portuguesa, attention now turns to the description and interpretation of the uniform, which functioned as a central element of the organisation's visual identity and a fundamental instrument in the militarisation of youth.

The uniform of the Mocidade Portuguesa, inspired by military attire, consisted of various elements that differed according to rank and gender. According to Decree No. 28:410 (Decreto n.º 28:410, 1938), dated January 7, 1938, the basic uniform for boys included a green shirt, brown trousers, a belt with an S-shaped buckle, and a beret. For the older ranks, a brown Dolman jacket, resembling the uniform of the Portuguese army of the same period, was added. This can be seen in the illustration in Figure 1, contained in the decree itself. Meanwhile, Decree-Law No. 28:262 (Decreto-Lei n.º 28:262, 1937), dated December 8, 1937, specifies that girls should wear a green shirt, a pleated brown skirt, a belt with a buckle, and a hat. Like the previous decree, it also includes an illustrated representation of these uniform designs (Figure 2). While the interpretation of colour is subjective in semiotic analysis, the green of the shirt can be seen as symbolising hope and youth, and the brown of the trousers and the Dolman represent tradition. As for the “S” on the buckle, although it officially stood for “serve”, it was often associated with the “S” of Salazar, thereby reinforcing the connection between the Mocidade Portuguesa and the regime. This association with Salazar ultimately personified devotion to the leader. The berets, a distinctive feature of military uniforms, lent the uniform an air of authority and discipline. Beyond the colours and symbols, the very act of wearing the uniform carried symbolic weight. By donning the uniform, young people not only “wore” the national identity but also embodied the values of the regime, entering a process of integration and conformity. The uniform thus acted as a second skin, shaping both the bodies and minds of its wearers.



Figure 1: Representation of three male ranks and their respective uniforms in the Mocidade Portuguesa

Source. Retrieved from Decreto n.º 28:410, *Diário do Governo* No. 5/1938, Series I, p. 17. (<https://files.diariodarepublica.pt/1s/1938/01/00500/00130023.pdf>)

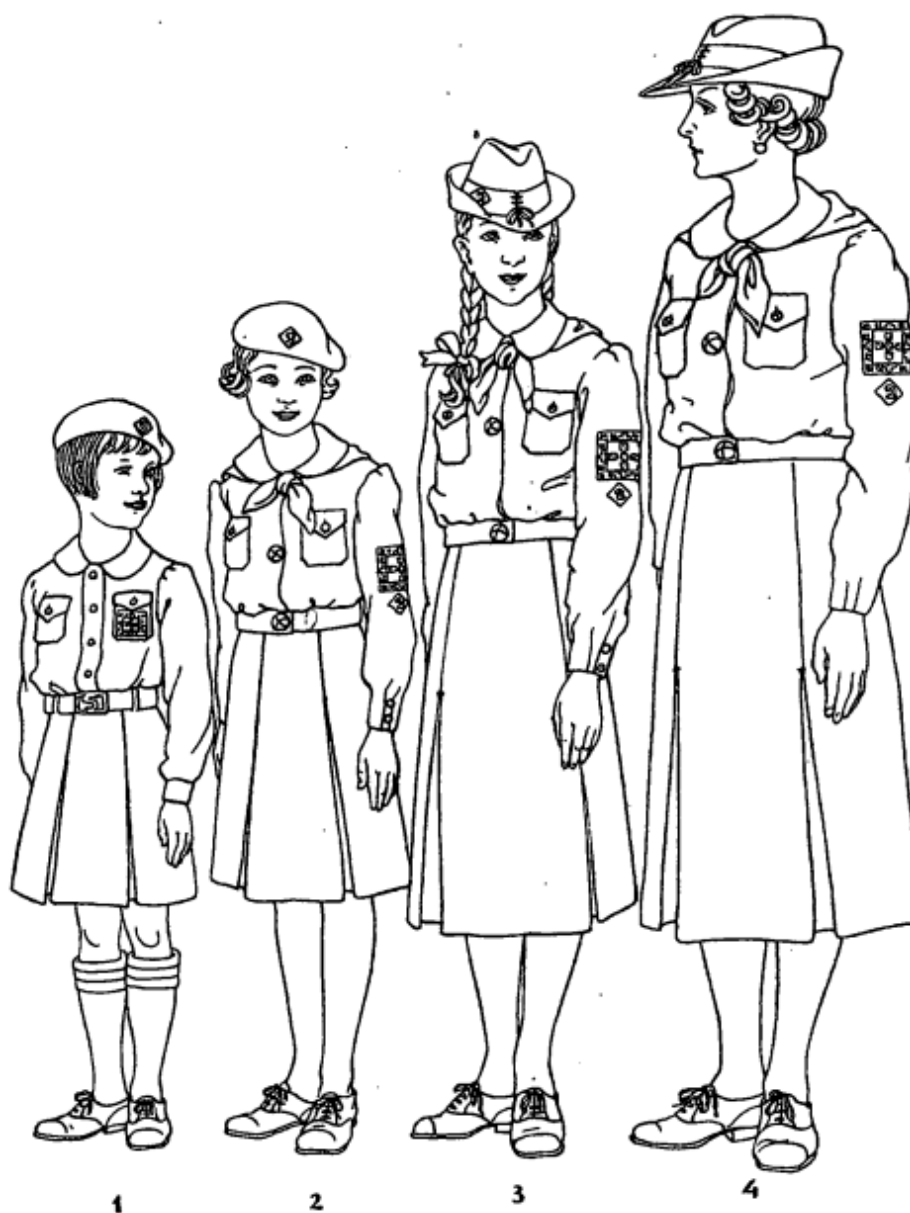


Figure 2: *Representation of three female ranks and their respective uniforms in the Mocidade Portuguesa*

Source. Retrieved from Decreto-Lei n.º 28:262, *Diário do Governo* No. 285/1937, Series I, p. 1382. (<https://files.diariodarepublica.pt/1s/1937/12/28500/13791383.pdf>)

The uniform underwent several changes over time, yet it consistently retained its militaristic essence and its role in standardising and disciplining youth. In this sense, the uniform of the Mocidade Portuguesa functioned as a miniature military uniform intended to instil in young people a taste for order and discipline.

The military influence on the uniform is unmistakable. From the colour palette to the cut, from the insignia to the accessories, every element echoed military attire, reinforcing the association between the organisation and the armed forces. The Dolman jacket (Figure 3 and Figure 4), central to the uniforms of the older ranks, was a simplified version of the military Dolman, complete with decorative buttons and epaulettes that lent it a distinctly martial appearance. The berets (Figure 5 and Figure 6) likewise referenced military headgear. The very structure of the Mocidade Portuguesa, with its hierarchy, commands and parades, mirrored the military model. This militarisation of both aesthetics and organisation aimed to cultivate an appreciation for order, discipline, and hierarchy in young people, effectively preparing them for compulsory military service and the defence of the nation. As Rosas (1998) observes, the Mocidade Portuguesa operated as a kind of miniature army, training young people to be disciplined and obedient soldiers. This strong military influence reflected the ideological foundations of the Estado Novo, which promoted militarism and nationalism as pillars of the social order.



Figure 3: *Dolman jacket*

Source. Retrieved from Decreto n.º 28:410, *Diário do Governo* No. 5/1938, Series I, p. 17. (<https://files.diariodarepublica.pt/1s/1938/01/00500/00130023.pdf>)



Figure 4: *Dolman jacket*

Source. Retrieved from Decreto n.º 27:301, *Diário do Governo* No. 5/1938, Series I, p. 1594. (<https://files.diariodarepublica.pt/1s/1936/12/28400/15911594.pdf>)



Fig. 4

Figure 5: *Front and side of the beret*

Source. Retrieved from Decreto n.º 28:410, *Diário do Governo* No. 5/1938, Series I, p. 18. (<https://files.diariodarepublica.pt/1s/1938/01/00500/00130023.pdf>)



Figure 6: *Beret worn by members of the Mocidade Portuguesa*

Source. Retrieved from Decreto n.º 28:410, *Diário do Governo* No. 5/1938, Series I, p. 20. (<https://files.diariodarepublica.pt/1s/1938/01/00500/00130023.pdf>)

The Uniform as an Instrument of Propaganda and Control

Beyond its aesthetic and symbolic function, the uniform of the Mocidade Portuguesa served as a key instrument of propaganda and control under the Estado Novo regime. Through the imposition of uniform dress, the regime sought not only to disseminate its ideological principles but also to exert direct control over the youth population (Duarte, 2024b).

The uniform played a central role in the construction of collective identity and the standardisation of youth. By donning the uniform, young people effectively “clothed” themselves in the national values and identity promoted by the regime, undergoing a process of integration and ideological conformity (Duarte, 2024a). It fostered a sense of belonging and reinforced the notion of a cohesive, unified nation under Salazar’s leadership. Through this visual homogenisation, the regime aimed to suppress individual distinctions and mould a disciplined, obedient mass of young citizens. The uniform functioned as a unifying force that transcended social and cultural differences, cultivating a sense of collective purpose and national solidarity (Duarte, 2024a, 2024b).

Discipline was inseparable from the use of uniforms — discipline being a core value of both the Mocidade Portuguesa and the Estado Novo. The standardised attire played an essential role in promoting obedience, order, and reverence for hierarchical structures. The uniform symbolised the subordination of the individual to the collective and the internalisation of the regime’s rules and expectations. Youth who wore it were bound by a strict code of conduct that extended beyond appearance to govern behaviour in both public and private spheres. As such, the uniform became a potent symbol of discipline and conformity, designed to suppress individuality and foster unquestioning allegiance to the regime (Duarte, 2024a).

The use of the Mocidade Portuguesa uniform extended beyond the promotion of discipline, serving also as a mechanism of social control. It enabled the regime to identify and monitor young people, distinguishing those integrated into the system from those who stood outside it. The uniform acted as a social marker, signifying adherence to the values of the Estado Novo. Young people who did not wear the uniform — or who failed to wear it correctly — were viewed with suspicion and risked being subjected to surveillance or repression. In this way, the uniform contributed to the establishment of a climate of conformity and self-censorship, where young people felt compelled to align themselves with the regime's ideals in order to avoid marginalisation or persecution (Duarte, 2024b).

The Mocidade Portuguesa and the Construction of the "New Portuguese Man": Body and Soul

The Mocidade Portuguesa, as the youth organisation of the Estado Novo (1933–1974), played a key role in the regime's attempt to shape the figure of the "new Portuguese man" idealised by Salazarism. This section analyses how the organisation, through its activities, discourses and practices, promoted a model of youth aligned with the authoritarian and conservative values of the regime, with particular emphasis on physical discipline and moral training (Pinto, 2014).

The Mocidade Portuguesa placed a strong emphasis on physical education and bodily discipline, reflecting the Estado Novo's ideological valorisation of physical strength, virility and health. Through activities such as gymnastics, military parades, camps and war games, the aim was not merely to develop the physical fitness of young people but also to instil values such as discipline, obedience, a sense of self-sacrifice, and physical endurance (Duarte, 2024a).

As Rosas (1998) notes, the youthful body was regarded as an instrument to be moulded, disciplined and placed at the service of the nation. This emphasis on physical discipline was also expressed in the design of the Mocidade Portuguesa uniform, which evoked military aesthetics and conveyed symbols of authority. Wearing the uniform contributed to the construction of a collective identity centred on strength, virility and submission to hierarchical power.

Alongside physical discipline, the Mocidade Portuguesa also focused on the moral and spiritual education of young people, promoting values such as patriotism, civic duty, loyalty to the regime, and adherence to Catholicism. Through lectures, courses, magazines and other organised activities, the movement sought to promote a conservative worldview aligned with the ideological tenets of the Estado Novo (Duarte, 2024b).

The Mocidade Portuguesa encouraged young people to take part in religious ceremonies and charitable activities, promoting the idea that faith and Christian morals were fundamental pillars of Portuguese society. It also fostered the cult

of the homeland and national heroes through commemorations, competitions, and visits to historical sites (Duarte, 2024b).

The organisation aimed to shape a new generation of Portuguese citizens who were physically and morally “regenerated” and aligned with the values of the regime. The “new Portuguese man” was envisioned as strong, disciplined, patriotic, obedient, and morally upright. Through physical education, moral instruction, and ideological indoctrination, the Mocidade Portuguesa contributed to the construction of this idealised figure, as imagined by the Estado Novo (Pinto, 2014).

The Mocidade Portuguesa served as a key instrument in the construction of the “new Portuguese man”, shaping notions of body and soul according to the authoritarian and conservative values of Salazarism. It promoted physical discipline, moral formation, and ideological adherence, thereby reinforcing a conservative and hierarchical social order.

Comparison With Other Youth Organisations

While the Mocidade Portuguesa had its distinctive features, it was not unique in the European context of the early 20th century. Several countries — especially those under authoritarian regimes — established youth organisations designed to indoctrinate and discipline young people. This section compares the Mocidade Portuguesa with similar movements, both within and beyond Portugal, highlighting key similarities and differences.

Catholic Scouting Organisations in Portugal

In Portugal, organisations such as the Catholic Scouts coexisted with the Mocidade Portuguesa, offering alternative educational models. Although both movements employed uniforms and promoted values like discipline and group cohesion, the Catholic Scouts placed greater emphasis on moral and religious education, and it operated independently of the Estado Novo regime. This contrast reflects the divergent conceptions of youth and education that coexisted under Salazar’s rule.

Broadening the scope of analysis to the international context, the Hitler Youth in Germany provides a compelling point of comparison.

Hitler Youth (Germany)

The Mocidade Portuguesa drew clear inspiration from the Hitler Youth (Figure 7), founded in Germany in 1926. Both organisations shared a core ideology centred on nationalism, authoritarianism, and the cult of the leader. Hierarchical structures, paramilitary activities, and systematic propaganda were common to both. Kallis (2002) argues that the Hitler Youth sought to shape young people into instruments of the Nazi regime, instilling absolute loyalty and

promoting social control. Although Kallis discusses only the German context, a similar strategy of control is evident in the Portuguese case. However, the Hitler Youth was significantly more militarised and violent, playing a direct role in the war effort and the persecution of political enemies. In contrast, the Mocidade Portuguesa was more focused on civic education and moral instruction. While both organisations engaged in ideological indoctrination, the German movement featured intensive military training, combat preparation, and overt Nazi indoctrination.



Figure 7: *Hitler Youth teenagers saluting the Third Reich's minister of the Interior, Wilhelm Frick, in Poznan, November 3, 1939*

Source. Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-E12088 / CC-BY-SA 3.0. (https://pt.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ficheiro:Bundesarchiv_Bild_183-E12088,_Posen,_Amtseinführung_Arthur_Greiser.jpg)

The uniform of the Hitler Youth, characterised by dark colours and Nazi symbols, reflected the organisation's more aggressive and militaristic nature. The brown shirts, swastika armbands, and black trousers projected an intimidating and martial image. In contrast, the uniform of the Mocidade Portuguesa, with its lighter tones and more discreet symbolism, conveyed an image of healthy, disciplined youth but without overt belligerence. These aesthetic differences mirror the distinct roles and objectives of the two organisations: whereas the Hitler Youth functioned as an auxiliary force to the German army, the Mocidade Portuguesa was primarily concerned with civic training and ideological indoctrination. Despite these divergences, both organisations used the uniform as a powerful instrument for promoting their ideals and exerting control over the younger population.

The comparative analysis does not end with Germany, however, as Italy's Opera Nazionale Balilla also served as a significant model for the Mocidade Portuguesa.

Opera Nazionale Balilla (Italy)

The Opera Nazionale Balilla¹, established in Italy in 1926, was another youth organisation that served as a model for the Mocidade Portuguesa. Both aimed to instil values of nationalism and discipline in young people and employed uniforms as instruments of propaganda and control. As Mallett (2013) explains, the Opera Nazionale Balilla aspired to create a “new generation” of citizens who were physically fit, morally upright, and deeply committed to the nation. Although Mallett (2013) refers specifically to the Italian case, his observations can be applied to the Portuguese context as well. Salazar similarly sought to forge the “new Portuguese man” and viewed the Mocidade Portuguesa as a key tool in achieving this goal. However, the Italian organisation was more sports-oriented and less militarised than its Portuguese counterpart. While the Mocidade Portuguesa incorporated military training and preparation for compulsory service, particularly among older members, the Opera Nazionale Balilla focused more heavily on physical education and sport, aiming to foster the health and physical robustness of youth.

The differences in focus were also reflected in the design of the uniforms. The Opera Nazionale Balilla uniform, featuring bright colours and a simpler design — such as black shirts, coloured scarves, and shorts — conveyed a youthful and energetic image associated with outdoor activity and sportsmanship. In contrast, the uniform of the Mocidade Portuguesa, with its more subdued colours and formal structure, evoked discipline and rigour, closer to military aesthetics. These differences in visual representation corresponded to the distinct priorities of each organisation. Whereas the Italian model emphasised physical training and vitality, the Portuguese movement prioritised civic and moral education, with a marked component of ideological indoctrination. Despite their divergences,

¹Image available at <https://www.gettyimages.pt/detail/fotografia-de-not-Ãncias/italy-is-a-nation-under-arms-the-entire-fascist-fotografia-de-not-Ãncias/515339562?adppopup=true>.

both organisations recognised the uniform as a powerful means of collective identification and as a vehicle for transmitting the regime's values.

Continuing the analysis of European youth organisations, attention now turns to Spain, where the Falangist Youth played a significant role.

Falangist Youth (Spain)

The Falangist Youth², created in Spain in 1937 during the Spanish Civil War, shared several similarities with the Mocidade Portuguesa, particularly in terms of nationalist ideology and the use of uniforms as instruments of propaganda. Both organisations emerged under authoritarian regimes and aimed to indoctrinate young people and mobilise them in service of the national cause. As Payne (1999) notes, the Falangist Youth, like its Portuguese counterpart, sought to forge a new generation of citizens committed to the regime's values and willing to fight for their country. However, significant differences set the two organisations apart. The Falangist Youth was more directly integrated into the single-party structure of Franco's regime — the Spanish Falange — and played a more active role in the repression of political opponents. While the Mocidade Portuguesa was a state organisation with a more autonomous structure, the Falangist Youth was integrated into the framework of the Falange, which gave it a more explicitly political and partisan character, as well as a more active role in the repression of regime opponents.

This distinction was also evident in their uniforms. The uniform of the Falangist Youth — with its blue shirt, belt bearing the Falange symbol (the yoke and arrows), and red beret — closely resembled that of the Falange, reinforcing their identification with the party. The Mocidade Portuguesa, by contrast, adopted a uniform with its own design, which, though inspired by military dress, was not directly linked to any political party. Moreover, the Falangist Youth played a more direct role in repression, engaging in surveillance, denunciation, and persecution. The Mocidade Portuguesa, while also contributing to the maintenance of social order, was less directly involved in political repression. These differences reflect the more violent and repressive character of Franco's regime compared to the Portuguese Estado Novo.

The Portuguese Youth and Gender Issues

Although initially conceived for boys, the Mocidade Portuguesa was soon extended to girls with the creation of the Mocidade Portuguesa Feminina in 1937. This section analyses the particularities of the female branch, examining its objectives, activities, and uniforms and how these elements have contributed to reinforcing traditional gender roles.

²Image available at <https://journals.openedition.org/histcrit/docannexe/image/4698/img-2.png>.

As Pimentel (2007) notes, the primary aim of the Mocidade Portuguesa Feminina was to prepare girls for their roles as “exemplary wives and mothers”, in line with the ideals of the Estado Novo. The activities promoted by the organisation sought to instil values such as restraint, submission, a sense of self-sacrifice, and dedication to the family. Girls were trained in domestic tasks such as cooking, sewing, and childcare and were encouraged to engage in cultural and recreational activities that reinforced conventional female roles. Physical training was also included, though with a different emphasis from that of the boys, favouring activities such as rhythmic gymnastics and dance designed to promote grace and femininity.

The girls’ uniform differed from that of the boys, as stipulated in Decree-Law No. 28:262 (Decreto-Lei n.º 28:262, 1937) of December 8, 1937. Instead of brown trousers, girls wore a pleated brown skirt, symbolising femininity and restraint. A belt with a buckle and a hat completed the uniform, lending it a distinctive and elegant appearance. Like the male uniform, the female version functioned as a tool of propaganda and control while also reinforcing gender stereotypes and societal expectations.

The Mocidade Portuguesa Feminina played a key role in maintaining traditional gender roles and promoting a conservative vision of womanhood. As Belo et al. (1987) underline, young women were educated to be devoted wives and mothers, submissive to their husbands, and responsible for the household and the upbringing of children. The norms of what it meant to be a woman were clearly defined in one of the organisation’s publications, *Menina e Moça* (Azevedo, 2011), which, according to Braga and Drumond Braga (2012), was regarded by the regime as “the best magazine for all girls” (p. 204). The values it promoted aligned with those of the organisation, consistently reinforcing the idea that a woman’s primary role was that of wife and mother and that personal fulfilment was to be found in marriage and motherhood. This conservative perspective on women corresponded to the ideology of the Estado Novo, which upheld the traditional family as the cornerstone of society.

Despite their differences, it is important to highlight that the Mocidade Portuguesa Feminina and the Mocidade Portuguesa Masculina shared the overarching goal of shaping youth according to the ideals of the Estado Novo. Both organisations promoted nationalism, discipline, and obedience, although these were articulated differently in line with traditional gender roles. While boys were trained to become future soldiers and leaders, girls were educated to be exemplary wives and mothers, thereby ensuring the reproduction of the regime’s values within the family. Both branches used uniforms as instruments of propaganda and control, yet the symbolism and meaning were adapted to each gender. The male uniform, with its militaristic character, was intended to instil courage, strength, and a spirit of sacrifice; the female uniform, with its more discreet and elegant design, promoted restraint, gracefulness, and submission.

Conclusions

This article examines the militarisation of Portuguese youth under the Estado Novo regime, with particular emphasis on the role of the Mocidade Portuguesa uniform as a tool of propaganda and social control. By examining the historical and ideological context of the organisation, describing and interpreting the uniform, and comparing it with other contemporary youth movements, it was possible to understand how the regime used the Mocidade Portuguesa to shape future generations according to its ideals.

The uniform, with its carefully chosen symbols and colours, played a central role in this process, serving as a vehicle for propaganda, identity formation, and social control. In wearing the uniform, young people also “clothed” themselves in the national identity and values of the regime, undergoing a process of integration and conformity. The uniform helped to instil discipline, obedience, and a sense of sacrifice, preparing the youth for eventual military service and for defending the nation.

A comparison with other youth organisations of the period — such as the Hitler Youth, the Falangist Youth, and the Opera Nazionale Balilla — allowed the Mocidade Portuguesa to be contextualised within a broader international framework and brought its specific features into sharper relief. The analysis of the Mocidade Portuguesa Feminina further demonstrated how the organisation reinforced traditional gender roles and promoted a conservative vision of women’s place in society.

In sum, the Mocidade Portuguesa and its uniform functioned as effective instruments within the Estado Novo’s broader strategy of control and indoctrination. The organisation contributed not only to the militarisation of youth and the dissemination of the regime’s ideology but also to the construction of an authoritarian national identity. Studying the Mocidade Portuguesa and its legacy is essential for understanding Portugal’s 20th-century history and for critically reflecting on the perils of authoritarian regimes and extremist ideologies.

Translation: Anabela Delgado

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