

ARTICLE

Social work and Marxist critique

Trabajo social y crítica marxista

José Fernando Siqueira Da Silva¹

São Paulo State University

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Abstract

This article offers essential elements for a fruitful debate on social work, Marx, and the diverse tradition associated with him. It does so considering the multiple tensions between a typical profession of the monopoly-imperialist era of capital and a critical social theory of capitalism as a social order, which has allowed the expanded reproduction of capital in the historical and particular conditions of Latin America. The objective of this text is to elaborate some notes that establish a propositional debate between a profession that works in the management of the multiple social tensions created and recreated within the framework of world capitalism as a metabolic social order, and a theoretical tradition whose legacy is progressive anti-capitalist. Although this dialogue is contested and full of traps, it is an important debate to captivate the most critical tradition of social work in

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Resumen

This article offers essential elements for a fruitful debate on social work, Marx, and the diverse tradition associated with him. It does so considering the multiple tensions between a typical profession of the monopoly-imperialist era of capital and a critical social theory of capitalism as a social order, which has allowed the expanded reproduction of capital in the historical and particular conditions of Latin America. The objective of this text is to elaborate some notes that establish a propositional debate between a profession that works in the management of the multiple social tensions created and recreated within the framework of world capitalism as a metabolic social order, and a theoretical tradition whose legacy is progressive anti-capitalist. Although this dialogue is contested and full of traps, it is an important debate to captivate the most critical tradition of social work in Latin America. It can stimulate research and social interventions built from the concrete life of Latin American peoples.

Palabras clave:
trabajo social;
marxismo;
crítica; teoría
social.

Introduction

Although this article raises the possibility and need for social work to contribute from the studies of Marx and his diverse tradition, it must be recognized that it is not a proposition that can be announced abstractly, as an empty speech, only epistemological, that is, as a certain "application" of a set of scientific assumptions for social work to the work of professionals. This complex debate requires a certain type of epistemology capable of counteracting the "ideological decadence" (Lukács, 2015) and the "miserable reason" with a structuralist and / or irrationalist basis (Coutinho, 2010), which affects different theoretical traditions (including part of the Marxist tradition). Any process of knowledge production based on these questioning bases raises two central issues:

a) a type of ontological science committed to mental reproduction, as a critique of the materially existent, objectively placed, historically explained and located, in constant and permanent movement, as knowledge that reproduces the "logic of the thing" (Marx, 2005, p.39). That is, it deals with the real life of real social beings, as a social theory enlightened and oriented by the perspective of the whole (Lukács, 2010, 2012 and 2013);

b) there is no space for the arbitrary application of concepts and categories to reality and

social work, without the proper reconstruction of the mediations in the context considered, and with the profession; a fact that prevents the logical-scientific manipulation of real life, which frequently adopts the “practical” ones as theoretical models.

That said, some questions are relevant: would this debate be possible and viable today? Would this interlocution be valid at a time of absolute civilizational regression? If so, how can it be stimulated under current historical conditions? How can a critical and creative dialogue be articulated between a profession whose genesis is committed to managing tensions and structural contradictions and a critical tradition of capital and society that allows its expanded reproduction?

What arises here is that this debate, in the particular sphere of social work, is not only possible, but absolutely necessary, if it is to stimulate a critical approach to the reality with which social work professionals act on a daily basis. Furthermore, the dialogue with Marx and his tradition is essential for training and professional work, although it is surely not the only theoretical reference that makes explicit critical positions. This process is unthinkable without a serious debate on the concrete conditions of production and reproduction of the life of social beings in a given sociability (that of capital), at a certain historical moment of the accumulation process, in particular regions (Latin America and its dependent conditions), with diverse impacts such as different social classes constituted there and their diversity (men, women, whites, blacks, native peoples, among others).

The Marxist debate in social work: genesis and material basis

The Marxist debate on social work in Latin America has a very precise genesis: the second half of the 1960s, within the framework of the reconceptualization process that was proposed, from different perspectives, to counteract traditional social work (Netto, 1981). Still, this heterogeneous and complex movement that shook the profession cannot be explained solely from professional frontiers as an endogenous movement. Two universal and central theses are fundamental to explain the genesis of social work as a profession, as a critical-objective expression of a movement of reality itself, under certain historical conditions and based on a historical legacy:

a) Social work is a profession structurally linked to the monopolistic order of capital (Netto, 1991), that is, it was objectively demanded by the capitalist labour market from the imperialist phase of capital (Lenin, 2008). This phase of accumulation concentrated large-scale production (initially guided by Fordism), created monopolies, instituted finance capital as a fusion between bank capital and industrial capital, and intensified



the export of capital in the process of colonial reorganization and dependency (Fernandes, 2009)². It is a complex process that was born from the contradictions of the order of capital itself, the expanded reproduction of it, the deepened class struggle in the second half of the 19th century, immediately exposed through the refractions of the "social question" - here understood as an expression of the general law of capitalist accumulation (Marx, 1984)³.

b) What explains social work as a profession is its particular insertion into the social and technical division of capitalist labour, as a specialization of collective labour (Iamamoto and Carvalho, 1985). Although the scientific statute and the area of knowledge are important for social work itself and its relationship with other disciplines (including for the interdisciplinary approach), what determines the nature of this profession is the labour market that establishes the conditions and objective-materials of the professional intervention (Iamamoto, 2007). Therefore, the management of pauperism occurs in the field of bourgeois social inequality and the multiple inequalities that are restructured from this material base (gender, race, ethnicity, among others). Still, these two important theses, formulated from very precise and universal historical-material bases, need to be rethought throughout the historical movement of capital itself and the adjustments of this sociability in at least the last 100 years. Furthermore, it is necessary to take into account how this complex process has been reproduced and changed in Latin American realities marked by dependent capitalism and a strong (although not homogeneous) colonial tradition and, with it, the particular movement of social work in the American continent.

Examining the Latin American reality is an essential procedure to understand it and explain the social work practiced here. Therefore, it is necessary to analyse in what way imperialism, neocolonialism and dependency (commanded by the financial fraction of capital), in the monopoly phase of capitalist accumulation, have hit Latin America and imposed limits on the freedom of the peoples that live here. Such a procedure requires the radical analysis of the ideology that hides, naturalizes, justifies, inverts and generalizes as truth (Marx and Engels, 2007), theses and proposals that reaffirm submission and dependence. As has been said in the introduction to this article, it is about evaluating a type of knowledge oriented by the ontological point of view, that is, by the reproduction of real life of real social beings, historically located, as a science that goes beyond descriptive miserable reason. In other words, it is a knowledge

² "Financial capital has considerable force, it can make decisive, in all economic and international relations, which is capable of subordinating, and really subordinates, the same States that enjoy the most complete political independence (...)". (Lenin, 2008, p. 47).

³ The word "social question" was taken up and re-signified by conservative thought, from the second half of the 19th century, with the aim of characterizing a set of social problems that affected Europe during the industrial revolution (on this debate, consult Marx and Engels, 2010). Still, the explanation of it is unsustainable without the Marxian observations formulated in chapter XXIII of "Capital" (Marx, 1984).

oriented by the point of view of totality (Marx, 1989; Lukács, 2012), capable of decoding the logic of reality itself, producing ontological-materialist knowledge without identifying representations about reality with the very dynamics of reality. What matters is the rational-scientific pursuit of a movement that constitutes reality; the rationality that mentally reconstructs - as a theory - the historically located real movement (Netto, 1989; 2020).

What has characterized Latin America in the field of political economy? How can the process of reconceptualization of social work be located in this context? Where is the Marxian and Marxist-inspired debate established by this profession located in this complex scenario?

Latin America has played a strategic role in capitalism from the first moments of the necessary primitive accumulation of capital, explicitly initiated in the late sixteenth century, in the phase known as mercantilism. The economic base imposed here was underpinned by the looting of its natural agro-mineral resources, taking the slavery of blacks and native peoples as the paradigm for labour exploitation. It should be emphasized that this process was marked by the violence imposed by the central economies, but also by the resistance of the native peoples, blacks, Afro-descendants, and native Latin American people. Looting, violence and genocide, at different times, have been used and reproduced. Some examples among many: a) the elimination of diverse native peoples that resisted colonization in different ways (Tupis-Guaraníes, Mapuches, Wichis, Diaguitas - Quechuas, Andean Quechuas -, Yamanas, Huarpes, Aimaras, Tobas, Onas, Calchaquíes, Maticos, Mazatecos, Comechingones, Yanomamis, Sanavirones, Quichuas, Man, Ashánincas, Xavantes, Yukpa, Paítavyterás, Pemóns, among many others); b) the resistance of the enslaved black peoples (Quilombo de los Palmares, with Zumbi, and the Haitian Revolution of 1791 led by François-Dominique Toussaint Louverture, for example); c) the peoples that fought against colonialism, in favour of the Latin American “Great Homeland”, constituted from a complex Euro-Afro-Native American mixture (many of them commanded by Simón Bolívar, José Artigas, José Martí, among others); d) the cowardly massacre promoted by the Brazil-Argentina-Uruguay coalition against Paraguay led by Solano López, in the Great War (or the War of the Triple Alliance, 1864-1870); e) in addition to the broad resistance that has been constituted throughout the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century: anti-dictatorial struggles, armed movements, various anti-capitalist, anti-colonial and anti-imperialist projects, progressive rebellions

highlighting the Cuban experience of 1959. And these are just a few historical examples that cannot be forgotten⁴.

It is worth emphasizing that the conservative modernization imposed in Latin America, especially from the middle of the 20th century, together with the dictatorship of the great North American monopoly capital (Ianni, 2019) and the reissue of labour exploitation (as super-exploitation - Marini, 2008), created a certain type of uneven and combined "development" (Fernandes, 1968; Oliveira, 2003), which reactivated the historical Latin American dependency⁵. The modernization of the central-southern cone of America was readjusted to the gear of the world economy in constant and intense change over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries. In this process, colonialism was reorganized in the monopoly-imperialist era of capital (Lenin, 2008), and with it, dependence -constituted in the context of two great world conflicts (1914-1918 and 1939-1945) and the later development of capitalism (Mandel, 1985).

And what about social work in Latin America? The profession had its genesis, was consolidated and developed in this complex context of profound instability. This has required changes and revisions of the professional community, either to deal with the multiple refractions of the social question, or to, at the same time, tune the profession to the enormous structural limits imposed by the expanded reproduction of capital in Latin America in the process management of the general law of capitalist accumulation (Marx, 1984)⁶. Among the professional proposals elaborated, more or less conservative, more or less progressive, the so-called "process of reconceptualization" was established, which convulsed the profession in Latin America over 10 years: 1965-1975 (not exactly and in a heterogeneous way on the continent)⁷. In this context, a progressive group was formed within social work, not necessarily Marxist (but influenced by that tradition), which questioned the more conservative approaches of the profession and sought an "authentically Latin American" dialogue. Some characteristics of this heterogeneous group are:

a) A certain type of social work committed to the particular reality of Latin America, anti-imperialist, impacted by very diverse progressive influences - not without problems and often eclectic -, also inspired by the tradition of Paulo Freire and of liberation theology; perspectives committed to the fight against various types of

⁴ Part of the content of this paragraph was exposed in the article "Capital and destruction of rights in Latin America", recently submitted by this author to the *Frontiers Journal of the University of the Republic*.

⁵ In this process, the civic-military dictatorships of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s were devastating.

⁶ The general law is to tend to favor constant capital (destined for the means of production) to the detriment of variable capital (part of the surplus value consumed in the payment and reproduction of the labor force - its general costs). It has increasingly created a surplus population called by Marx relative overpopulation, industrial reserve army, available labor force.

⁷ It must be emphasized that it was an extremely heterogeneous movement, lived in different conditions and times (as in the cases of Chile, Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay, for example). Also, non-existent in countries like Paraguay and Cuba (for different reasons).

oppression, articulated with different groups of the left, armed or not; libertarian social movements; projects defending the Latin American political redemocratization and the "national liberation" of the nations that constitute it, some inserted in the world and Latin American Marxist tradition, with different theoretical-practical appropriations of the original sources;

b) Emphasis on a type of social work stimulated by a material base that required thinking about the profession beyond its own borders (Netto, 1991; Silva, 2013), which did not mean that the profession stopped reproducing and reissuing endogenous approaches. This created better conditions for the constitution of a social work committed to expressing the fabric of what was materially put, stimulated by real historical processes. Here, the Latin American material base, its particularities, began to feed the concerns of the social workers;

c) In addition to what has been stated in the previous items, it is important to emphasize that criticism here has the potential to value permanent study and research, the link with universities, with progressive social movements, with a certain type of broad and generalist training and radicalism politics for a practical-militant insertion. It is committed to theoretical-practical actions (such as praxis) that extract, from reality itself, the decisive elements for an intervention with political intentionality and practical effectiveness. It is a debate with the potential to stimulate an analysis beyond the empiricist formalism, with an ontological "vocation" to move from the reality that cannot be explained only within the boundaries of the professions (although it does not disregard them).

The influence of Marxian and Marxist inspiration on social work in Latin America is structurally linked to this context of anti-imperialist struggles in favour of the liberation of this part of the American continent. Its genesis is tied to two structuring elements:

a) The objective reaffirmation of the historical Latin American social inequality, based on the imposition of the paradigm of conservative modernization and uneven and combined development, both committed to imperialist interests and to the reissue of dependency;

b) The resistance struggles waged against this model, in which a certain type of theoretical basis normally without Marx, that is, inspired by certain Marxist traditions owed little to Marx himself, or that had original approaches that deviated from him⁸. This was imposed as a certain type of application of European Marxist assumptions to

⁸ These are some examples: the approach proposed by Stalinist-Marxism or the different analyzes of social work that are the main sources of the studies of the French Marxist structuralist Louis Althusser: It is not a question, here, of disqualifying this tradition, much less their historical importance, but rather of indicating the innumerable problems raised from them. It must be emphasized that this limit was not created by social work, but by the way in which Marx and the Marxists were incorporated into the Latin American debate with external and internal stimuli.

the Latin American reality, which were characterized by making interpretations detached from Marx or, conversely, by the creation of orientations disconnected from Marx's contributions, "typically Latin American". The two paths agree on an absolutely decisive aspect: they annul the perspective of the totality and, with this, are unable to reconstruct the necessary mediations to explain the way in which capital has immediately imposed itself in Latin America (as singularity) and the particularities -rich in mediations- here constituted in a universality globalized. The consequences are explicit: a Marxism without Marx's dialectic, a certain kind of critique of political economy without history and dogmatic, and a revolutionary perspective incapable of being realized.

However, important approaches of Marxian and Marxist inspiration have matured in social work in recent decades, in the process of struggling for the political redemocratisation of Latin America. In them, the critical legacy accumulated since the reconceptualization process has been re-evaluated and the studies of Marx himself, and part of the non-dogmatic European and Latin American tradition, have been deepened. In this process, studies of all Marxian works and of some important authors have gained strength: Gramsci, Lukács, Lenin, Rosa Luxemburgo, Hobsbawm, István Mészáros, among others, but also intellectual cadres of Latin Americans - or who studied Latin America - such as, for example, Mariátegui, Enrique Dussel, Caio Prado Junior, Florestan Fernandes, Octavio Ianni, Clovis Moura, Paul Singer, Julio César Jobet Bourquez, Theotonio dos Santos, Ruy Mauro Marini, André Gunder Frank, Vânia Bambilra, Heleieth Saffioti, Claudio Katz, Ricardo Antunes, Carlos Nelson Coutinho, José Paulo Netto, Marilda Iamamoto (the latter two from social work in Brazil). It is still necessary to highlight the vast tradition that has been established from the legacy of the Cuban Revolution and the Chilean path to socialism of Salvador Allende.

But some questions are central to this article: how do we deal with this debate from a social work perspective? How can we do it while considering the differences between a profession structurally linked to monopoly capitalism and a critical social theory of capital society? Would this dialogue be useful, relevant and valid in the field of anti-imperialist resistance? To what extent and in what way?

Contributions of Marxian and Marxist criticism in Latin American Social Work

An elementary aspect must be taken into account to support the proposed debate. As Netto (1989) suggested, no matter how much better and more qualified the dialogue established between social work, Marx and their traditions may be, a Marxist social work will never be constituted. What does this mean specifically? That they make up



two dimensions that cannot be identified by erasing and cancelling by decree, as simple speculative exercises, aspects that constitute their nature. As a profession and discipline, social work has structural links with monopoly bourgeois society that allows for the expanded reproduction of capital. In addition, it is a profession that acts in the refractions of the social question from very well-defined limits and borders. At the same time, Marx's social theory and Marxisms are committed to overcoming the bourgeois order, that is, the radical critique - taken from the roots - of the elements that structure capitalism and capital, as a praxis that destroys all bases that allow the subsistence and reproduction of capital as a social relationship of exploitation in different phases and moments of accumulation.

How, then, can the debate be raised? It is not a speculative, messianic, idealistic and scientific imposition that devalues the ontological-material basis that constitutes the nature of both, which would generate significant analytical-interpretative and practical misunderstandings. The possibilities were also correctly summarized by Netto in his 1989 article: social work and social workers can explain the nature of the professional work performed, the social meaning and their work in capitalism, using the important Marxian contributions of part of its most qualified tradition⁹ On the other hand, the Marxist debate, particularly in Latin America (and this is essential), could appropriate important aspects that constitute the harsh reality of Latin American peoples, since social workers occupy very peculiar work spaces, directly linked to the management of pauperism and different oppressions, as few professionals do. Here, not only is the possibility of dialogue imposed, but also the need and usefulness of this dialogue, although without accepting an idealistic relapse (Marx and Engels, 2007)¹⁰.

A mistake frequently made in this dialogue is linked to the temptation to "apply Marxism" to social work. Beyond countless dogmatic attempts that messianically attribute tasks of collective and class social praxis to the profession (which is a brutal reductionism and an unattainable task), another type of light appropriation is imposed: a certain type of initiative that draws the method of Marxian social theory and defines it as the part that interests social work. In other words, if on the one hand this debate is commonly reduced to the application of "Marxism" to social work (as "Marxist social work"), the impoverishment of this dialogue is also reflected through theoretical-professional initiatives that separate the method of Marx from the whole of his social theory, valuing it as the main aspect to be absorbed by the profession. What is proposed in this article is different from these alternatives and from other forms of incorporation that, by different theoretical-practical arrangements, make the

⁹ Of course, it is not the only reference and the only tradition that could critically contribute social work, but it is absolutely unique and essential.

¹⁰ Men make their history not as they wish, but from the objective conditions that affect and hit them, which were transmitted from the past (Marx, 1987).

juxtaposition between profession and social theory (or fragments of it).

Marx's social theory is objectively based on three essential bases, articulated and historically in motion, without which it is absolutely innocuous: a) the dialectical method, which offers the scientific bases to mentally reconstruct and theoretically expose the dynamics of reality; b) the critique of the labour theory of value, absolutely articulated with the historical-objective changes of it throughout the genesis, constitution and consolidation of capitalism and capital, as a real social relation of accumulation-exploitation that is mobilized and changes; c) the historical and objective possibility of the revolution, as the human emancipation of men and women, as social beings, that is, the overcoming of the order of capital from the contradictions contained in it, as social praxis, without any speculative-idealistic procedure.

It must be said that there is neither dogmatism nor orthodoxy here in relation to Marx's observations made from the historical conditions of English industrial capitalism, nor in relation to revolutionary paths. Orthodoxy is valid only in the method of analysis, although here it is necessary to underline that it allows us to carry out analytical heterodoxy, that is, to explain the changes, contractions and movement of reality itself throughout the historical movement, inspired by the point of view of the totality and of the multiple determinations rich in mediations. Nothing less dogmatic than that.

The debate between social work, Marx and the Marxists requires a type of professional training that values a science guided by the ontological dimension, that is, oriented by a type of reason that has as its starting point the elements that act in the production and reproduction of people's lives, in a given sociability, based on a certain historical legacy, that considers the genuinely human problems with which social workers work (Silva, 2013). This type of training should train intellectuals¹¹, that is, professionals who think about reality from solid theoretical bases (not only located in Marx and the Marxists), cultured and broad - although without relapsing into eclecticism. The objective is to propose a professional work not supported by an instrumental reason, only operational, reproducing bureaucratic features, totally institutional, with responsible compliance and a sounding board for official regulations. The technical-operational dimension is no less important, but it is commanded by a rich process that starts from the reality objectively lived by the population with which social work intervenes; the immediate dimension of it, the way in which "social problems" are immediately manifested for professional work. This dimension makes up the concrete totality (Lukács, 2010, 2012 and 2013) as an essential starting point for a professional approach rich in multiple determinations, which contemplates real demands, stimulates

¹¹ Not to be confused with strict academic training.

creative and non-institutional intervention (although it does not disregard institutional boundaries). It is a profession that needs to enrich the analysis about itself, based on labour relations commanded by the bourgeois order and about the work carried out by salaried social workers who fulfil a socially demanded function, inserted in the social division and work technique in the current management of the general law of capitalist accumulation¹². It is not, therefore, an epistemological statement, a scientific imposition, an application of explanatory models and sectorial intervention (health, social assistance, justice, among others), but rather an ontological determination guided by the perspective of totality, without which the nature of the profession, nor of the work demanded and carried out by the social workers can be explained.

What are the practical consequences of adopting this perspective?

First of all, social workers do not deny the demands immediately presented by people seeking certain care, nor do they limit themselves to them in their emergency, that is, to the way they initially appear as “social problems.” Deprivations and needs in the field of the production and reproduction of life are critical and must be observed. However, relevant and articulated demands with various requests, not immediately presented as priorities, are frequently not made visible. It must be emphasized that social work inspired by Marxian and Marxist observations, does not confuse what is said with what in fact exists. *Discourses, although relevant, do not reveal truths, but rather the way in which a certain consciousness interprets its own deficiencies and needs based on objective conditions.* The field of ideology is essential - because it interferes with real life- but needs to be analysed as a dimension marked by interpretative deviations that change the intellectual reproduction of reality, justify misunderstandings and omit essential aspects -consciously or not. Therefore, truth is not limited to diverse and "plural" interpretations (as posited by heterogeneous postmodernity), nor does truth only exist if consciousness recognizes it (as phenomenology sees it). For example: hunger is not a real problem because people say it or recognize it, but because hunger really exists with objective effects, regardless of the consciousness of the people impacted by it. That is, hunger exists independently of people's consciousness, although it is not recognized by the hungry conscious themselves.

Here a question arises: are there important demands, not immediately visible and frequently not recognized by social workers? What type of approach, in the work of social work, should professionals take into account, to contribute to the manifestation of what is not immediately revealed? Social work - inspired by Marx's social theory - starts from immediately revealed demands, but makes them more complex by exploring their nature, their foundations, scrutinizing complex, apparently simple processes. It is

¹² Changes in the job market have been brutal. New studies are urgent on it. Intense precariousness has hit the diverse working class, of course the social workers: “uberization”, teleworking, outsourcing, for example. See Antunes (2018) and Raichellis (2020).

not about investigating people's lives or imposing on them a way of thinking that they have not identified. On the contrary, it is about problematizing what is apparently simple, recognizing that this initial appearance is no less important, but the way the complexity appears immediately. So, a request for an emergency basket of food may not just be a space to keep people alive. It can and should be a space to broaden the professional approach, working on ontological demands, treating them critically (theoretically and practically), ethically and politically, using a set of instruments and techniques available to know, think and act with social complexes which the individuals and their subjectivities are a part of (whether they like it or not). For this reason, individuals are not guided by discourses and subjectivities, rather they are social beings that construct and reconstruct subjectivities as part of a complex social process determined by a certain objectively existing sociability. And this society is no different -in our case, the Latin American bourgeois order. The professional room for manoeuvre, made up of very precise objective and subjective conditions, is inherently contradictory (Iamamoto, 2007), limited to making structural changes, but no less important. What is behind these stories by Latin American women and men?

“There are people who sell shifts [in the queue for social services] for \$ 100. They even take mattresses to sleep. So, when they offer shifts, they are not enough. Besides, I don't have \$100 to pay so that's why in general we don't go [to get an appointment].”

“I don't remember any time in my life when my stomach didn't roar. One day I ate and three did not. Now it is still the same, only that at least we know the causes of the death of our children: diarrhoea, pneumonia, lack of vitamins ... malnutrition (...) Our conditions were worse than those of the animals, but at least we could survive. I am not ashamed to have looked for work, to plough like a mule. I alone raised eight children.”

“I was a student of Law and had a friend from the university, we always met on Friday. He was white and studied Engineering. We were about 20 years old, more or less. I got off the bus and went walking by Bom Fim [Porto Alegre's bohemian neighbourhood in the 1980s], which was full of people, until I faced a patrol of the Military Brigade. They approached me directly, and asked what I was doing, where I was going and what I had in my bag. They said that I didn't have to be there. When I said that I was a Law student, that I would find a friend, the police laughed. I showed what I had in my bag, my packed lunch and a version of the Civil Code, but they were not satisfied with that. No one helped me. When I asked them to gather my belongings, they got furious. I was saved by the commander of the operation, a black captain who returned my bag to me. That day I realized that police violence against black people is a requirement of society.”



"They called us shitty indians, parasites. They took my minor nephew out by his hair and put him on the floor, I asked them please not to hit him and they told me 'shut up fatty, you are pigs, you all have to go to die in the Chaco, you are black'. They stepped on his feet, beat him on the hands. They hit my brother-in-law with the butt of a gun and broke his shoulder."

"I hadn't come out of the closet yet when my 'best friends', one night we were enjoying, suddenly made a circle around me. They started asking me if I was gay, because there were rumours. They said that if I was gay, they would beat me up for walking with them and not saying anything. At the time I was sure I would, but I was afraid to come out of the closet. I decided to shut up so that they wouldn't hit me at that moment and, when I returned to my residence at night, I received a blow to the head, they threw me to the ground and kicked me several times."

"I did not know what femicide was, but when they showed me the photos of how they found my daughter and they explained to me what this crime is, I knew that this had happened to Campira, because my girl was full of blows, naked, and Joy cut her hair and took it away, like it was a trophy, Margarita mentioned."¹³

Although professionals have the ethical commitment to contribute to people not dying, it is equally ethical to think beyond this border. There are genuinely ontological demands, as a field of struggle for increasing levels of social, political and human emancipation (Marx, 2009). The question is: What do we do with our work? What are we not doing and could do? It is exactly on this aspect that all the ontological-intellectual creativity of professional work must be concentrated. It is not about attributing to the profession tasks that it will surely not fulfil, but about enriching the analysis of reality and contributing beyond the interdisciplinary juxtaposition of the fragmented knowledge that comes together to interpret reality, recounting it to manage it. This must be articulated with other important initiatives in the professional field and outside it, in social movements, unions and political parties that fight for civilizing guidelines. Professionals can and should articulate these dimensions, but not assume that these functions are identical. In other words, the strategies and procedures of a union activist and a social work professional are not the same, simply because they are different spaces of action that require equally particular strategies. Furthermore, professional work is intelligently contaminated by militancy (as an overcoming of militantism), as militancy is informed by professional work. The secret is not to have explanatory or intervention models, but to be fond of explaining the logic of reality

¹³ Stories available at: <https://www.losandes.com.ar/relatos-de-pobreza-la-v-da-de-los-que-se-van-a-dormir-sin-comer-y-se-sienten-olvidados>, <https://www.ecrimesim.alloutbrasil.org>, <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/mundo/la-vida-rota-historias-de-feminicidio-en-al>, <https://latinta.com.ar/2017/05/mujeres-originarias-relatos-de-tortura-represion-y-encierro/and> <https://www.accioncontraelhambre.org/es/te-contamos/blog-testimonios/maria-guatemala-no-recuerdo-ningun-dia-que-no-me-hayan-rugido-las-tripas>



itself, drawing on the experiences and accumulated knowledge to concretely analyse the scenario which one works with daily, reconstructing this particular movement and evaluating the possibilities.

Surely this path requires effort, discipline and encouragement to permanent research and study. It is not just something that can be conquered solely with individual effort, much less an achievement acquired through instrumental and purely operational science. It requires collective work that articulates individual skills and study groups critical of ideological decadence and the different forms of descriptive science. It is necessary to recognize that it is not easy at all to produce knowledge from this perspective, in a highly regressive scenario that persecutes everything that some type of subversive danger may mean in times of “normality and democratic formality”, of more or less authoritarianism explicit and naturalized. This persecution has a clear purpose: to dismantle critical reflection anchored in real life, discouraging the analysis scrutinized in it, eliminating ontological science, genuinely human problems and the transformative potentialities of the scientific horizon. When traveling through this “dim path”, social work and any type of profession and human action tend to operate instrumentally, reproduce immediate official norms, mechanize intervention through protocols or, in other words, validate “immediate truths”. Captivating genuinely ontological research and study, inside and outside universities, at different levels and spaces, is a central task for social workers inspired by Marx and the diverse tradition associated with him. How is this orientation different from other critical orientations? In addition to the radically ontological, materialist-dialectical analysis, this does not nurture any hope of reforming capitalism and thereby offering capital eternal life. The defence of life, the criticism of the refractions of the social question and the innumerable oppressions reissued in the conditions of dependent capitalism have a precise orientation: progressive anti-capitalism.

Conclusions

The debate between social work, Marx and Marxisms is not only possible but absolutely necessary for the most critical fraction of this profession in Latin America. In addition, it is useful in the field of professions and progressive anti-capitalist Latin American resistance. The current highly regressive scenario requires analytical radicalism and the ability to practice grand politics. Surely this interrogates, at the same time, the updated systemic conceptions, the apparently rebellious and radical postmodern tendencies, the Marxisms reduced to application, as well as the diverse immobile perspectives that do not appreciate this debate. The resurgence of reactionary conservatism, the absolute civilizational regression that has hit the planet, the impact of this in Latin America and in the profession, impose this dialogue as something



absolutely necessary, although insufficient. It is necessary to know the different trends present today in Latin America, their central theses, their foundations, either to compose civilizing forces and stimulate increasing levels of social emancipation or to combat those who oppose it inside and outside the profession. Social work has something to say and contribute in the field of resistance.

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About the author

José Fernando Siqueira is a social worker, Associate Professor of the Department of Social Work at the São Paulo State University (UNESP-Franca). Postdoctorate in Social Work from the National University of La Plata (UNLP-Argentina). Email: jose.siirse-silva@unesp.br

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1040-9558>

