

CRITICAL PROPOSALS IN SOCIAL WORK



PROPUESTAS
CRÍTICAS
EN TRABAJO SOCIAL

9



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Propuestas Críticas en Trabajo Social - Critical Proposals in Social Work

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Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Gabriela Rubilar

Contact: grubilar@uchile.cl

Department of Social Work - Faculty of Social Sciences

University of Chile

Av. Capitán Ignacio Carrera Pinto 1045, CP 7800284, Santiago de Chile.

E-mail: propuestascriticas@facso.cl

<https://revistapropuestascriticas.uchile.cl>

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Editorial

100 years of Social Work: Global Discussions and Perspectives on the Discipline’s Past, Present and Future

The ninth issue of the Revista Propuesta Críticas en Trabajo Social is published a few days before the commemoration of the centenary of Social Work in Chile and Latin America, and this is not accidental but an explicit act to commemorate a significant event for Social Work at a global level.

In Chile, on 4 May 1925, 42 “girls” and “ladies” began their social service studies at the School of Social Service under the Junta de Beneficencia, as described by Leo Cordemans (1927b, p.113-114) in his paper presented at the National Conference of Social Service, and published in full in the journal Servicio Social.

The Santiago School of Social Service was the first school founded in Latin America, and the entry of this group of women not only inaugurated a new profession but also instilled and strengthened a social and political movement that was fighting for women’s rights at the time. Many would have pursued higher education in various feminised professions, including new careers such as Social Service (Zárate and del Campo, 2021).

This global movement also includes other countries, as this table presented in the first issue of the Social Service Journal shows.

EN EUROPA:	
Alemania.	31
Gran Bretaña.	10
Bélgica.	8
Francia.	4
Países Bajos.	4
Austria.	3
Suecia.	3
Suiza.	3
Finlandia.	2
Polonia.	1
Italia.	1
Tchecoslovaquia.	1
EN AMÉRICA:	
Estados Unidos.	23
Canadá.	1
Chile.	1
Total.	25
96	

Source: Cordemans (1927a, p.9).



Some of these were social service schools attached to the university, like the schools in Anglo-Saxon countries, while others were independent schools, like those founded in Chile in 1925 and then in 1929. This same model was followed by the Escuela del Museo Social Argentino (1930), highlighting the innovative character of these projects.

One hundred years later, we commemorate this event and acknowledge the changes experienced in this profession and discipline, one of Latin America's oldest social sciences. In this ninth issue, we have sought to highlight nine changes that social work faces today concerning its foundational elements and that constitute challenges for the next century:

- 1) A change of name, where social service is replaced by social work, paraphrasing Durkheim in his doctoral thesis (1987) (originally published in 1893), and which accounts for structural and societal aspects of a discipline that recognises its origins and research influences, but also changes in approaches and ways of understanding the individual-society relationship, dynamising its social identity over time.
- 2) A change of institutional frameworks, where this project is inscribed, going from more independent schools to departments or schools fully incorporated into the structure of higher education institutions in their faculties, such as in Argentina or Brazil with the faculties of social work.
- 3) The first school founded in Santiago was followed by the creation of other schools in Latin America due to the demand for social visitors and, later, social workers. The graduates of the Alejandro del Rio School played a special role in this task, contributing to the founding of schools in the cities of Mendoza, Argentina, as well as in Venezuela, Uruguay, Bolivia, Guatemala, El Salvador and Ecuador (Solis, 1985). Today, in Chile, the number of institutions offering social work courses exceeds 40 universities, distributed from Arica to Punta Arenas (Servicio de Información de Educación Superior, 2024).
- 4) A career exclusively for women (Deegan, 2001), which after the first quarter of a century began to progressively incorporate men (1952), with special entry modalities for the under-represented gender, in a movement towards gender equality.
- 5) An extension of the years of study, from 2 years (divided into 4 semesters) in 1925, with theoretical courses and practical work, towards an undergraduate education reaching, in formal terms, 9.5 semesters, with continuation of studies at postgraduate level.
- 6) An increase in enrolment, from 42 people in the first year of 1925 to more than 2331



- students enrolled in the first year of social work in Chilean universities (SIES, 2024).
- 7) A training that initially had no specialisations but which soon identified fields of study such as childhood, school service, hospital care and industry (Cordemans, 1927b), and which today takes on other facets and global challenges, such as international social work, social work and the environment, disaster contexts, among others.
 - 8) A graduation paper consisting of a social thesis, presented to a jury and based on the experiences acquired during their stays and corroborated by appropriate readings (Cordemans, 1927b, p.119-120), to a monographic type of graduation paper, linked to experiences, research and/or intervention, which gives rise to diverse products differentiated by schools and intuitions that award professional degrees (Rubilar, 2022).
 - 9) A Social Service journal created in 1927 with the purpose of “serving as a link between all those interested in social issues” (Cordemans, 1927b, p.120) to a multiplicity of journals and dissemination media (Muñoz et al., 2021), some of them under the auspices of universities or study centres, publishing houses or companies responsible for the dissemination of the knowledge produced. In Chile in 2024, 11 disciplinary journals were attached to universities, and one journal published by the Professional Association was registered (Red de Investigación Trabajo Social, 2025).

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With these nine distinctions, we invite you to review eight articles that make up this ninth issue. These include retrospective research and analysis and critical readings about the profession’s past and the identity of the pioneers, contained in three papers: an analytical proposal of historical memory by Ingrid Álvarez (Chile), a review of the production of knowledge from two complementary approaches by Claudia Bermúdez (Colombia), and the article by Margarita Rozas (Argentina) and Camila Véliz (Chile), in a clear interdisciplinary dialogue.

Also included in this issue are debates on the reform processes that the discipline underwent in the 1960s and 1970s, around the movement known as the reconceptualisation of Social Work, contained in the article by Renzo Tiberi (Argentina). In this conceptual approach, two other articles are published that discuss the denaturalisation of the notion of social intervention, based on the contributions of Juan Saavedra (Chile), which is complemented by the article prepared by a team of researchers led by Ronald Zurita (Chile), who develop a bibliometric analysis of the scientific production generated under these names.

The disputed approaches and issues that challenge social work in past, present and future schemes are present in the article by Paul Garret (Ireland) and the review of his book at the end of this issue. Also included in this issue is a review of the Magister in



Social Work research production carried out by Tania Kruger (Brazil) in the framework of a programme of internships and regional mobilities.

This special 100th-anniversary issue opens with a greeting from James Midgley (USA), Dean Emeritus of the University of California, Berkeley, who explicitly links social work and social policy, highlighting the links between different social work traditions and their international reach.

Finally, this issue includes the complete publication of the first part of an unpublished interview conducted in 2011 by Teresa López Vásquez (deceased in 2023) with Professor Teresa Quiróz Martín (deceased in 2019). The transcription of this conversation allows us to remember and honour two significant social work personalities with an international imprint that recognises their legacy today. This interview and other materials are part of the Teresa López Vásquez Fund, donated by her family to the University of Chile (2025). The second part of the interview will be published in the tenth issue. This fund has been made possible thanks to the contributions of the ANID/CONICYT/FONDECYT 1230605 project, for which we thank you for your contribution to the disciplinary memory.

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As an editorial team, we hope that the works and approaches presented in this issue will contribute to critical thinking, contribute to memory and allow us to illustrate, even if only briefly, some elements of the trajectory of a century-old discipline; we look forward to seeing you in the following journal issue, which emphasises perspective views on the future of social work and its transformations, the identification of emerging contexts and new professional fields, and the challenges of training in contexts of transformation and change.

Gabriela Rubilar

Editor-in-Chief Magazine



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Greetings from Dr. James Midgley

Celebrating a century of international social work: Issues and Debates

Social work colleagues with an interest in international social work will know that the first professional school outside of Europe and North America was established in Santiago, Chile in 1925. Since then, more professional schools have been established in the country and social work education has spread throughout Latin America as well. As Chilean social workers celebrate the school's centenary, I am greatly honoured to participate in this special issue of the journal *Propuestas Críticas en Trabajo Social* and to celebrate your achievements over the last century. I know my colleagues at Berkeley will join me in congratulating you and all social work practitioners, educators and administrators in Chile on reaching this important milestone.

I am grateful to the journal's editors for inviting me to reflect on the profession's international accomplishments during this time. Although I am not qualified to comment on trends in social work in Chile, I am sure others contributing to this special issue will address this topic. But there can be no doubt that social workers in Chile have made a major contribution to international social work. In particular, their resistance to the military dictatorship during the 1970s and in subsequent years inspired many of us. Also, many of us who attended the conference of the International Association of Schools of Social Work in Santiago in 2006 were moved by the speech given by former president Michelle Bachelet who spoke warmly of her close association with social workers during her earlier practice as a medical doctor.

The past century has seen momentous changes. Some of them have caused great harm to millions of people but others have significantly improved their lives. It was during this century that the first nuclear weapons were detonated with devastating results but also when smallpox was eradicated, and many other killer diseases including Covid-19 were brought under control. Because of improvements in both public and curative health, life expectancy during the last century has soared, infant mortality has fallen and never in human history have so many people lived such long and satisfying lives. On the other hand, climate change and environmental disasters have negatively affected millions of people, but many governments have been slow to act. Another major change over the last century is the rapid increase in mass migration which has fostered cultural pluralism

in many societies. The last century has also seen major geopolitical changes with the emergence of new centres of power. The breakup of the Soviet Union and the decline of the British and other European empires fostered the emergence of the United States as the world's dominant economic and military power, but it has in turn been challenged by the rise of China and other countries in the Global South. The adoption in 1948 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights ushered in a new era of international law which sought to maintain peace and promote respect for all, but which has sadly been undermined in recent years as a number of governments have blatantly violated the very treaties they acceded to.

The social work profession has been affected by these and other social changes. Although some social workers may think that the momentous times in which we live have little to do with their professional lives, it is an inescapable fact that we are all affected by international events. Today, social workers all over the world invoke the concepts of social and human rights in their daily practice, believing that everyone has a right to live a decent life and to have access to core social services. Social workers have also reacted to particular problems like HIV-AIDS and have played a major role in responding to this pandemic. They have also been involved with international social movements campaigning against oppression and discrimination and today, antiracism and gender equality feature prominently among the profession's commitments.

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Many issues facing social work in different countries have been debated at the international level and they now feature prominently in debates at international conferences and in social work's academic and professional literature. Although there have been different responses to these issues, they have enriched the profession's understanding of its global role and scope. They have also been instrumental in improving social work practice. On the other hand, some of these issues have not been resolved resulting in ambiguity and even confusion which does not enhance the profession's standing. These deserve further discussion.

One of the first and arguably most important concerns the question of what is social work? Although most professional schools and textbooks offer formal definitions, there is considerable variation internationally about what social work involves. While some definitions stress social work's role in solving people's personal problems, others emphasise the way it addresses social needs at the community level. Others highlight its preventive function and yet others claim that social work is primarily committed to ending oppression and bringing about progressive social change.

In an attempt to formulate a universally valid definition of social work, a meeting of delegates to the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) held in Melbourne Australia in 2014 adopted a definition which states that social work promotes “social change and development, social cohesion and the empowerment and liberation of people”. This definition is very different from those that focus on problem solving for individuals and their families like the one offered by Barker (2013) which states that social work is “the professional activity of helping individuals, groups or communities to enhance or restore their capacity for social functioning and creating societal conditions favorable to this goal.”

It is admittedly very challenging to incorporate a multiplicity of definitions as well as practice activities within one all-encompassing definition. Social workers have engaged in many different types of practice over the years and often, these are easily recognisable. For example, I note in my book *Social Welfare for a Global Era* (2017) that most social workers are engaged in direct practice with families and children and often they do so in statutory settings or in non-profit and faith-based agencies. On the other hand, it is well-known that many social workers in the United States have embraced private psychotherapeutic practice while this is not the case in most other countries. Some other examples of the diversity of social work practice include nontraditional interventions like outreach programs to street children in Latin American cities, rural community development projects in Africa, youth focused community interventions in Europe and social work in childcare centres in Asia.

While it would be difficult to formulate a definition of social work that reflects these very different forms of practice, there are general principles which apply to all types of social work. In my book I suggest that these include direct face-to-face interventions by professionally trained personnel and a reliance on key values and principles. Hugman (2010) takes a similar view and urges a ‘pluralist and inclusive’ approach, which recognises and celebrates the different forms of practice social workers engage in within the framework of a core set of skills, knowledge and values. It should also be noted that other well-established professions like engineering and medicine also find application in different types of practice but because of a common professional training and commitment to key values and principles, these professions are readily recognisable. Although mechanical engineering is very different from chemical engineering, both are a part of the engineering profession. Similarly, very different types of medical practice ranging from neurosurgery to dermatology are encompassed within one well-recognised profession.



However, for this interpretation to be realised in practice, social workers should accept social work's practice diversity and desist from confronting those who hold different positions. Unfortunately, this diversity has created tensions within the profession which reflect the passionate beliefs that many social workers hold about their own preferences. There has been a long-standing discord between those who believe that social work should be guided by Freudian psychoanalysis and those who are inspired by critical theory and believe that social work should engage in an unstinting struggle against patriarchy, racism and other manifestations of oppression. While reasoned and temperate disagreements are entirely legitimate, they have sometimes boiled over into intemperate and often personal recriminations. These disputes do not promote professional unity or indeed foster an acceptance of the notion that social work has core principles and values that apply to all forms of practice.

Because social work evolved in societies with very different cultural, economic and social conditions, it is important that the diversity of professional practice around the world be recognised. Sadly, this has not always been the case. In the years following the Second World War, when social work spread very rapidly to the newly independent nation states of the Global South, it was generally assumed that social workers in the developing countries should replicate the social work knowledge and practice skills established in the metropolitan countries. Often, the new schools of social work and professional associations that emerged in the Global South adopted what subsequently turned out to be inappropriate academic curricula and practice approaches. However, at the time, the replication of Western social work in the Global South was thought to be appropriate and even desirable since Western ideas and practices were somehow believed to be 'superior' and worthy of emulation.

It was only later that some social work writers recognised that this trend reflected the persistence of what President Kwame Nkruma of Ghana called 'neocolonialism' and that it needed to be critically assessed and addressed. At this time, writers like Khinduka (1971) and Shawkley (1972) published important articles on the topic which questioned the widespread adoption of Western social work knowledge and skills in the Global South. In addition, some social work writers proposed that new forms of engagement should be introduced to reflect the needs and circumstances of different societies. I myself (1981) argued for greater *pragmatism* and *indigenization* while Walton and El-Nassr (1988) urged the *authentization* of practice so that social work in the Global South would reflect the social, cultural, economic and political characteristics of these societies. Since then, the issue has been widely debated in the profession's literature. As an edited collection by Gray and her colleagues (2008) reveals, the case for developing culturally rooted forms of practice has been widely accepted. Today, calls for the decolonisation of social work are commonplace.



On the other hand, the diffusion of inappropriate knowledge and practice approaches continues in some parts of the world. Although there is far greater awareness of the need for appropriate cross-cultural transfers, Gray and Coates (2010) reveal that the curricula of schools of social work in many developing countries still rely extensively on Western models. In addition, some writers like Huang and Zhang (2008) argue that this is not a problem since social workers everywhere will benefit from international transfers. Also, they aver that social workers everywhere are capable of adapting innovations to fit their own needs. They also contend that cultures are dynamic and readily absorb and adapt new ideas and practices. As the debate continues, it is likely that international exchanges between social workers will be more sensitive to these issues and that a syncretic adaptation of different approaches will emerge. Hopefully, Huang and Zhang's (2008) contention that adaptation and judicious replication can bring positive benefits will be realised. However, this should also involve the adoption of knowledge and skills from the Global South in the metropolitan countries. Fortunately, there are instances of this already happening.

Another issue facing the profession concerns public recognition and professional status. Since social work first emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, great efforts have been made to secure professional status and in addition to creating schools for the training of social workers, professional associations have been established in both the national and international levels to secure recognition and lobby for salaries and decent working conditions. These efforts have been quite successful and today social work education is well-established, and numerous professional associations have emerged. In addition, social workers in some countries have secured statutory recognition through licensure, registration and title protection. Nevertheless, it cannot be claimed that social work has achieved the same professional status as medicine, engineering, and law and instead it is sometimes referred to as a semi-profession similar to teaching, nursing and librarianship. Many social workers also complain that their salaries are relatively low and that they are accorded little public recognition for their work. This problem has been exacerbated by the international diffusion of neoliberal ideology which has resulted in the adoption of managerialism and cost reduction as well as retrenchment to the social services which have all negatively affected social work and the other helping professions.

Although efforts to address these challenges continue, some argue that the quest for professional status has diverted social work from its mission to address poverty and oppression. Instead of devoting considerable effort to improve social work's professional status, they contend that the tasks of eradicating poverty, reducing

inequality and abolishing injustice should be given top priority. They claim that these were the challenges that social work originally sought to address when it emerged in the nineteenth century; but by pursuing self-interest through professionalisation, social work has abandoned its true purpose. This argument is most frequently made by radical social workers who are critical of the profession's commitment to direct practice and its attempts to ameliorate the emotional and other social problems that families encounter. Instead, they believe that social workers should join with community activists, volunteers and progressive politicians to promote social justice. Since many of these progressive change agents are not professionally qualified, social work's quest for professional status is not only irrelevant but a hindrance. However, few social workers are persuaded by this criticism and most retain their commitment to enhance their professional status. Obviously, professional social work associations around the world also continue their efforts to improve educational and practice standards, and secure greater professional recognition for their members. This is also true of most social work academics.

On the other hand, many social workers, including myself, believe that the profession can combine a commitment to professionalism with a greater engagement with issues of social justice. This is compatible with my earlier argument that it is possible to encompass social work's diverse practice commitments within an all-encompassing professional framework. In its formative years, social work's founders were committed to this goal and despite differences and tensions, they forged a unitary model which incorporated direct casework practice with community-based activities as well as social activism. While Mary Richmond famously promoted direct casework, other founders like Jane Addams and Florence Kelley in the United States and Beatrice Webb in Britain engaged in activism and political lobbying in order to bring about progressive social change. Since then, the commitment to social justice has been prominent in academic circles where a significant number of social work scholars have argued for a greater engagement in activities that promote social change. Terms such as social change, empowerment, equality and social justice now pervade the profession's academic literature and feature prominently in social work curricula in many countries. These ideas have been echoed by many professional associations which often issue press releases and similar statements on social justice issues. However, this is not always the case, and there are many instances of how they failed to take a strong position against discrimination, oppression and injustice.

On the other hand, some social workers have taken a vigorous position on these issues. In South Africa where the country's official professional association failed to challenge the government's abhorrent *apartheid* policies, some social workers bravely

confronted the government and, as Patel (1992) reveals, an alternative grassroots movement of social workers providing welfare services to the oppressed majority emerged. There were similar developments in Chile where radical social workers who protested against injustice were brutally oppressed by the Pinochet regime. Fortunately, there is evidence that professional associations are now more willing today to oppose oppression. Recently the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) expressed the international profession's condemnation of the brutal killing and maiming of tens of thousands of civilians in Gaza and the ongoing oppression of the Palestinian people in the occupied West Bank. Also, by expressing its solidarity with Palestinian social workers, it encourages and heartens them in their important work.

These efforts can be augmented by forging closer links with those who hold political office and are able to exert power to both progressive causes. Many professional associations have sought to do so, and their lobbying has resulted in positive outcomes. However, it is even better when social workers themselves are elected office and there have been instances where some have secured influential positions. In the United States, a number of social workers have been elected to the Congress where they have served as influential Senators and members of the House of Representatives. One example, which I frequently cite, is Congresswoman Barbara Lee who is a graduate of the Berkeley School of Social Welfare and who represents the constituency in which I live in California. Over a long career in the United Congress, she has exerted considerable influence on the formulation of progressive social policies and of equal importance, is her resolute commitment to human rights. She famously cast the only opposing vote against the *Military Authorization Act* of 2002, which allowed President Bush to deploy the United States military without Congressional authorisation. Being the only member of Congress out of about 600 members to vote against this legislation, she received a great deal of abuse, hate mail and even death threats. Despite this she continued to campaign insidiously for social justice and after many years, has retired to much acclaim. It is through colleagues like her as well as progressive academics and practitioners, that the social work profession has institutionalised progressive attitudes and values and that most schools of social work today educate students on social justice issues. Ideals like gender equality, redistribution, antiracism and human rights now feature prominently in the curriculum. Irrespective of the fields of practice social workers may choose, or their preferences for different roles, they are more competent and committed because of efforts to achieve social justice.

I hope that this brief article has elucidated some of the issues and debates that have challenged the social work profession over the last hundred years. Although these



debates may not have been resolved, they have informed and enriched the profession. They have also fostered a critical perspective that continuously questions and renews established views. It is likely that social work's growth over the next century will continue to debate critically important issues like these and also that new issues will emerge to foster an increasing awareness of the profession's commitments. Social workers in Chile and many other countries will undoubtedly contribute to these debates and so enhance the profession's international role. Again, many congratulations to our Chilean colleagues as they celebrate the founding of the country's first professional school of social work. May the next hundred years be just as successful.

January 5, 2025

Author biography

James Midgley is Professor and Dean Emeritus of the School of Social Welfare at the University of California, Berkeley. Originally from South Africa, he trained as a social worker and sociologist. He was Dean at Berkeley from 1997 to 2006 and has had a distinguished international career in social policy, especially in developing countries. He has also held academic positions at Louisiana State University and the London School of Economics.

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ARTICLE

Common sense as a conceptual tool to reflect on social work's past, present and future: A short essay marking 100 years of social work education in Chile

El sentido común como una herramienta conceptual para reflexionar sobre el pasado, presente y futuro del trabajo social: un breve ensayo que celebra los 100 años de la educación de esta disciplina en Chile

Paul Michael Garrett¹

University of Galway, Irlanda.

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Abstract

Antonio Gramsci's conceptualisation of common sense helps us to think more critically about dominant ideas within, and beyond, social work. Especially important are his articulations of common sense (*senso comune*) and good sense (*buon senso*). Gramsci's understanding is also rooted in a more encompassing theoretical apparatus in which hegemony and the role of intellectuals are central. Having pointed to the progressive possibilities associated with the shaping of a more Gramscian social work, four alternative social work futures are identified.

Keywords

Common Sense, Gramsci, Capitalism, Hegemony, Intellectuals

¹Contact: Paul Michael Garrett, Irlanda. ✉ pm.garrett@universityofgalway.ie

Resumen

La conceptualización del sentido común, de Antonio Gramsci, nos ayuda a pensar de manera más crítica sobre las ideas dentro y fuera del trabajo social. Particularmente importantes son sus articulaciones de sentido común (*senso comune*) y buen sentido (*buon senso*). Así también, su concepto de entendimiento se fundamenta en un aparato teórico más amplio, en el que la hegemonía y el rol de los intelectuales son esenciales. Señaladas las posibilidades progresivas asociadas con la conformación de un trabajo social más Gramsciano, se identificaron cuatro alternativas de futuro para el trabajo social.

Palabras Clave:

Sentido común;
Gramsci;
Capitalismo;
Hegemonía;
Intelectuales

Introduction

We are surrounded by assertions that politics, policies and social practices reflect, or are unambiguously embedded in, ‘common sense’. For example in a fawning profile of Evelyn Matthei, current mayor of Providencia and potential candidate for Chilean president in 2025, it was claimed that ‘Chileans are fed up with extremism and yearn for moderation and common sense’ (*The Economist*, 2024). The ‘left’, maintained Matthei, ‘wanted to weaken the police, almost to get rid of them’. The same article went on to refer to the current president, Gabriel Boric, as a ‘leftist firebrand’ who during his term of office foolishly backed a rejected and ‘utopian and barely intelligible draft constitution, which would have defined Chile as a “plurinational, inter-cultural, regional and ecological” state, banned for-profit universities and granted rights to nature’. Perhaps, these are, in fact, aspirations which may have actually reflected the aspirations of the Chilean people. However, here it is clear that the reasonable political project is being simply ridiculed by *The Economist* as a departure from common sense: indeed the periodical is simply making a performative move to try to marginalise, even to erase, alternative political possibilities.

This short article will briefly comment on the theme of common sense (*senso comune*) in the context of social work. Following Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), however, the foundational understanding is that *common* sense is not necessarily *good* sense (*buon senso*), it is simply sense that appears to be common across an entire social formation or, following Bourdieu (2003 [1977]), within a particular ‘field’.

Attentive to Gramsci’s ideas on common sense we can recognise that it can be immensely powerful and an organiser and influencer of popular perceptions, but is

also very often wrong, and not infrequently swept aside by history. According to Kate Crehan (2018: 278), common sense is the ‘polar opposite of critical thinking, which demands that we accept no “truth” unquestioningly, but always carefully scrutinise the evidence on which it is based’. For example, it was common sense that women should not be permitted to vote and, for many, it was ‘obvious that slavery was eternal and desirable’ (Miéville, 2022: 104). Turning to social work in Ireland, for decades it was disciplinary common sense that ‘unmarried mothers’ had to spend time in quasi incarceration in Mother and Baby Homes and that their offspring should be swiftly adopted by more ‘respectable’, heteronormative couples. Moreover, in a powerful statement, the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) identifies how the common sense of the profession ‘reinforced the colonial project’ and refers to how this was apparent in its collusion with policies and practices directed at indigenous peoples (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) (CASW, 2019: 3–4). Similarly, mainstream white South African social work accepted supremacist separationist ideologies well before 1948 and readily adopted the common sense practices of racial segregation culminating in the creation of Apartheid (Ioakimidis and Trimikliniotis, 2020: 6).

However, it has also been charged that the idea of ‘common sense’ has become something of a ‘cultural studies joke’, a term ‘hailed out to cover much too much while explaining all too little’ (Bhattacharyya, 2015: 25). Gargi Bhattacharyya’s provocation may be right in so far as analyses rooted in the theorisation of common sense have to be careful not to become vapid, even patronising, toward those who, in difficult times, find a measure of psychological comfort in dominant and popular ‘explanations’ and proposed ‘solutions’ to a host of individual and social problems. However, it remains important to engage with common sense because, far from static, it can congeal and distil diverse forms of dominant thinking and contribute to the consolidation of hegemony within a social formation and the diverse ‘fields’ or disciplines situated within it (Bourdieu, 2003 [1977]). Often grounded in deeply racialised and patriarchal forms of reasoning – and lack of reasoning – common sense can also create and sustain intersectional hierarchies.

This is not, of course, to imply that ideas alone can shore up hegemony; nor can ideas alone create counter hegemonies and prompt meaningful social and economic transformation within and beyond social work. Nevertheless, echoing Marx, it is still the case that ideas – modes of thought and how we conceive and ‘think about stuff’ – are of the utmost importance for leftist educators, students and practitioners. This claim can also be connected to Marx’s assertion that the ‘dissolution of a given form of consciousness’ can aid in the transition from one ‘epoch’ to another (Marx, 1981

[1857–58]: 540–41). In short, ‘mental conceptions’ matter (Marx, 1990 [1867]: 493).

Elsewhere, I argued that dissent within social work education and practice may be thwarted because of two key factors (Garrett, 2021a). First, social work students, practitioners and educators may, perhaps, be reluctant to promote progressive ideas and practices because of concern about the adverse impact on their jobs and careers. In short, the tilt toward compliance with often highly retrogressive policies is materially rooted. That is to say, what Marx terms, the ‘mute compulsion of economic relations’ leads to the tapering and shaping of what is likely to be viewed as ‘inappropriate’ behaviour (Mau, 2023). Second, and the main focus in what follows, is that dissent may be stymied because social work is frequently enmeshed in a particular type of common sense. That is to say, the profession is often marinated in a cocktail of ideas, ideologies and doxic forms of reasoning which may blunt more socially progressive ways of *thinking* and *doing* social work.

The article is divided into three sections. The focus is initially on Gramsci’s understanding of common sense and how it relates to his more encompassing conceptual apparatus, particularly hegemony and the role of intellectuals. Second, there is a short discussion on shaping a Gramscian social work. Finally, I identify four main perspectives on how social work’s potential futures can, perhaps, be articulated²

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Gramsci, common sense (*senso comune*) and ‘good sense’ (*buon senso*)

According to Gramsci’s reading, common sense is a ‘chaotic aggregate of disparate conceptions, and one can find there anything one likes’ (Gramsci in Hoare and Nowell Smith, 2005: 422). Gaining currency through language, many elements of common sense contribute to ‘people’s subordination by making situations of inequality and oppression appear to them as natural and unchangeable’ (Forgacs, 1988: 421). To justify the way society is hierarchised and regulated, ruling elites oftentimes purposefully ‘manufacture ignorance’ (Slater, 2012). Controlled by Big Tech, social media now also fulfils a significant role as a potent transmission belt helping to constitute public opinion.

Common sense is not embedded in critical reflection, but merely distils and amplifies already socially prevalent narratives and, seemingly, self-evident ‘truths’ which shed light on the ‘way things are’. For example, ‘neoliberal rationality is assumed and

² See Garrett, 2024

reproduced as common sense appearing in a subtle manner in people's daily experiences, either blaming service users or imposing market discipline' (Muñoz Arce and Pantazis, 2019: 140). Such understandings paint the stage-set where social work is performed. For example, there may be a tendency to accept that the rationing of services and unfilled posts is inevitable rather than contingent on and a consequence of a specific economic system favouring the few and not the many.

Typically, common sense 'expresses itself in the vernacular, the familiar language of the street, the home, the pub, the workplace and the terraces. The popularity and influence of the tabloid press – one of its main repositories – depends on how well it imitates, or better, ventriloquises the language and gnomic speech patterns of the "ordinary folk"' (Hall and O'Shea, 2015: 52–53). Today, the mainstream press – be it tabloid or broadsheet – is often viewed as being of reduced significance. Dismissed as part of an old fashioned, pre-digital world, corporately owned media is frequently perceived as having been supplemented by social media and new ways of shaping perceptions. This is a view that seriously underestimates the continuing impact which the supposedly anachronistic 'legacy media' has in moulding public perceptions (Langer and Gruber, 2021). Nevertheless, online sources are clearly a significant element of our lives and they furnish part of the cultural and political atmosphere in which our 'habitus' is formed and in which we chart our life courses.

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Not measurable in terms of any international empirical studies, common sense in social work might be regarded as an assortment of, often conflicting, schemes of perception. According to my interpretation, common sense in social work is not an ideology: derived from ideology, yet paradoxically often founded on a refutation of ideology, it is comprised of a more amorphous mix of elements. Social work common sense is a fluid and unstable 'sense', that might be perceived as a form of everyday 'professional' thinking which provides a way to comprehend the social work role, its 'limits' and boundaries, and the wider world in which the role is located. Social work common sense is derived from the often unquestioned 'knowledge base' constituting the curricula of taught programmes, the frameworks furnished by accrediting and registration bodies and the reading lists assembled, catalogued and marketed by corporate publishers. This is a 'sense' also emanating from and helping to constitute so-called 'practice wisdom'. It is also shaped by the 'official' discourse of the employing organisations and the 'unofficial' exchanges and language used in the more 'informal' conversations of practitioners with each other.

None of this suggests that ‘there are no truths in common sense’ in that it is ‘an ambiguous, contradictory and multiform concept’ (Gramsci in Hoare and Nowell Smith, 2005: 423). Common sense contains ‘elements of truth as well as elements of misrepresentation – and it is upon these contradictions that leverage’ must be obtained in a struggle to win and maintain political hegemony (Forgacs, 1988: 421). That is why common sense matters. Writing as a young political activist prior to the end of the carnage of the First World War, Gramsci observed that every ‘revolution has been preceded by a long process of intense critical activity, of new cultural insight and the spread of ideas through groups of men [*sic*] initially resistant to them, wrapped up in the process of solving their own, immediate economic and political problems, and lacking any bonds of solidarity with others in the same position’ (Gramsci in Bellamy, 1994: 10).

Gramsci acknowledges therefore that common sense is not simply and solely the product of the ruling class. Importantly, he also comprehends that, potentially, even the most oppressed and denigrated of people have the ability to think critically about the reality that confronts them. Although far from utopic, Gramsci’s engagement with common sense is imbued with radical hope. Following Marx, he believes that ‘worldviews do not exist in an independent sphere of ideas, developing according to their own dynamics, but are rather necessarily anchored in the practical activities of the people who have them in mind’ (Snir, 2016: 271).

From his prison cell, Gramsci observed that ‘repetition is the best didactic means for working on the popular mentality’ (Gramsci in Hoare and Nowell Smith, 2005: 340). Indeed, contemporary social media provides a powerful vehicle for ‘repetition’ with advertisers, government and policy-makers attuned to the potential of memes culture to distil messaging and embed a common perception in relation to an array of topics (Garrett, 2018). The immediacy and sheer welter and velocity of online communications may also render common sense more fickle and subject to swifter change and re-shaping. Running throughout Gramsci’s prison *Notebooks* is the recurring, even urgent, preoccupation: what is the relationship between common sense and social transformation? Also significant when writing the *Notebooks* was his investigation of the role of common sense within the conjuncture leading to the rise of Mussolini and fascism. Only by seeking to understand this, could one go about trying to shape a new common sense and a new society in which fascism would be wholly eradicated. Given the resurgence of the far right, a hundred years later, such preoccupations are once again timely.

Gramsci frequently refers to common sense as the ‘philosophy of non-philosophers’, ‘the philosophy of the man [*sic*] in the street’, or ‘spontaneous philosophy’ (Green and Ives, 2009: 13–14). Attuned to his interpretation, we can recognise that within common sense there may also be a kernel of subversive good sense (*buon senso*) which is more than a simple reflection of the dominant ideas of the ruling class. Consequently, Gramsci’s perspective offers ‘us a way of thinking about the texture of everyday life that encompasses its givenness— how it both constitutes our subjectivity and confronts us as an external and solid reality—but that also acknowledges its contradictions, fluidity, and flexibility’ (Crehan, 2016: 58). That is to say, common sense is one of the terrains of struggle that revolutionaries – and socially progressive educators and practitioners – must enter.

Within his wider analysis of common sense, Gramsci is also interested in what he terms ‘folklore’ and this aspect of his thinking may have been brought into productive conversation with the growing recognition, within and beyond social work, about the importance of indigenous knowledge. When Gramsci was imprisoned in 1926, Italy had been unified for a mere thirty-five years and the new nation was riven by class differences and also enormous differences related to language and culture. As a Sardinian, Gramsci was also a member of a minority group from an island whose inhabitants were frequently racialised and patronised by ‘northerners’. More pervasively, Italians were often preoccupied with what was dubbed the ‘southern question’. Conservatives, and even some elements within the socialist movement, considered the south as ‘inherently backward due to the inferiority of southerners’ and frequently expressed such views in explicitly ‘biological and racist terms’ (Ives, 2004: 35). This functioned – and to some extent still functions – as a pernicious ‘screen discourse’ obscuring the country’s uneven development and the way that this favours capital to maintain an ample supply of cheap labour in the south.

Gramsci respected the kind of peasant culture that he had grown up in, but he still depicted it as ‘narrow and parochial, and needing to be transcended’: he never sentimentalised it (Crehan, 2002: 98). He was also alert to the sheer, stubborn rootedness of peasant culture and ‘folklore’ and recognised that it had to be meaningfully engaged with by those aspiring to promote social and economic change: there was, as the common maxim would stress, a need to ‘start where people are at’. Top-down, standardised ‘solutions’ intent on creating one, monolithic culture generally do not work, and should be rejected. A good example of this orientation to common sense within the social work literature is provided by, for example, Khan and Shahid’s (2022) fascinating exploration of maternal care practices among slum dwellers in India.

Gramsci's approach was also reflected in his opposition to Esperanto which enjoyed a certain popularity when he was alive. The whole idea of an invented new language was a 'metaphor of mechanical and artificial worldviews or modes of thought that are imposed on people with little reference to their own life experiences and their own creative input' (Green and Ives, 2009: 5). Here again, we can relate this to social work which has, perhaps, sometimes swung from seeking to impose top-down, one-size-fits-all mono-cultural norms to encasing users of services within static and stereotypical cultural identity categories; the latter typified, of course, by frequently arid and damaging ideas circulating around so-called 'cultural competence' (Marovatsanga and Garrett, 2022).

A few additional comments can be made in relation to the Sardinian theorist's perspective on common sense. First, and inevitably, Gramsci was not always able to disentangle himself from the common sense prevalent during the conjuncture in which he was living. Some of his perceptions on schooling and learning are likely to appear somewhat conservative to readers in the twenty-first century. Similarly, today's readers might be struck by his rather 'staid views on sexual morality, women and the family' (Forgacs, 1988: 276). His antipathy toward jazz music is also, it might be argued, rooted in the Eurocentric and racialised common sense of the period in which he was writing (Rosengarten, 1994a; 1994b).

Second, who is the arbiter of 'good sense'? Does Gramsci's perspective have a certain affinity with Bourdieu who was ridiculed by Rancière (2003: Ch. 9) as the 'sociologist king' arrogantly committed to providing insights to cut through the *doxa* of the, seemingly, stupefied masses? Is he a 'Marxist king' ready to judge and correct the perceptions of the 'people'? Such a question is warranted, but there is slim evidence that this is an apt characterisation. As we have seen, Gramsci is attuned to popular ways of perceiving the world and his thinking is grounded in the Marxist intellectual and political conviction that the working class are the agents of their own liberation and emancipation. What constitutes 'good sense' is to be democratically arrived at within the Communist Party – what he terms, riffing on Machiavelli, the 'modern Prince' (Hoare and Nowell Smith, 2005: 123–216) – but also via wider public deliberations. Readers of Gramsci are not left with the impression that once 'good sense' is arrived at on a particular issue then it is forever cast in stone. Far from dogmatic, his whole philosophy is rooted in the idea that everything is constantly in flux and incessantly changing. 'Good sense' is not static, it is always potentially incomplete, impaired and subject to constant reform and renewal. Otherwise, the risk is political and social inertia and the cold brutality of Stalinism.

Hegemony

Those attentive to the construction of hegemonic projects, dwell on how a dominant class has to organise, persuade and maintain the consent of the subjugated by ensuring that its own ideas constitute common sense within a particular society or social formation (Crehan, 2011). Derived from hegemon, literally meaning leader, hegemony signifies a combination of authority, leadership and domination. It is socially neutral and not ‘necessarily tied to progressive or retrogressive’ social movements (Singh and Leonardo, 2023: 2). As a word and concept, now largely associated with Gramsci, hegemony refers to ‘something more substantial and more flexible than any abstract imposed ideology’ (Williams 1973: 10). Hegemony has constantly to be ‘worked on’, maintained, renewed and revised (Hall, 2011: 727–728). Part of the political skill integral to such an endeavour is the ability to co-opt and nullify ‘alternative meanings and values’ (Williams, 1973: 10). Consequently, hegemonic projects attaining success do not simply seek to win over people to a particular world-view. Rather, they aspire to neutralise and render passive competing perspectives ‘while recruiting small but strategically significant populations and class fractions into active support’ (Gilbert, 2015: 31). Such an approach is essential because excluded ‘social forces, whose consent has not been won, whose interests have not been taken into account, form the basis of counter movements, resistance, alternative strategies and visions’ (Hall, 2011: 727–728).

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The key issue for those seeking to maintain hegemonic power is how to get the mix right. Thus, coercive power is perpetually held in reserve for those times and places when the means of generating sufficient consent fails (Smith, 2011). Ordinarily, the mass of people would not directly be targeted or experience such a deployment of coercive power, but some population segments – perhaps impoverished minority ethnic communities in particular urban enclaves – regularly encounter the state’s coercive edge in the form of regular and routine interventions by uniformed and militarised police. We might also translate this understanding across to social work and micro-encounters: in, say, the arena of child protection, parents who are unemployed and/or from certain minority ethnic groups are more likely to face coercive forms of intervention than more consent-generating, ‘partnership’ orientated approaches (Marovatsanga and Garrett, 2022).

A difficulty we face is the tremendously absorbent character of the extant hegemonic apparatuses. The Chilean feminist collective LasTesis (2023: 20–21) stress:

Capitalism possesses the brutal capacity to take ownership of everything. Even critiques of capitalism end up processed, re-appropriated, defanged as tools of struggle, and turned into consumer goods, commodities of the market. One of capitalism's survival mechanisms to sustain its hegemony, is to absorb strategies of resistance. It absorbs them, wrings them out.

This capacity of capitalism to absorb ideas and perceptions of life that challenge it, can be a stumbling block in the creation of a *new* common sense imbued with *good* sense. Certainly, we are at a conjuncture when challenging capitalist common sense is more urgent than ever. Perhaps we are situated at what Gramsci terms, an 'interregnum' when the 'old is dying and the new cannot be born' (Gramsci in Hoare and Nowell Smith (2005: 276). This is a period of indeterminate length, characterised by a series of interlocking structural predicaments that adversely shape, to varying degrees, people's daily lives. According to Gramsci, one of the prime indicators of an 'interregnum' is a 'crisis of authority' caused by the inability of the ruling class to govern in the ways to which it has become accustomed (Gramsci in Hoare and Nowell Smith, 2005: 275). Things begin to unravel and those governed are no longer persuaded by the consensus-generating narratives and messaging that previously sustained the hegemonic order.

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How this situation unfolds will be very different depending on the national contexts, but Gramsci goes on to suggest that an 'interregnum' is a time of great uncertainty in which forms of rule and governance risk becoming increasingly authoritarian and coercive (see Hall *et al.*, 1978). It is a period in which, desperate for 'solutions' to resolve the crisis, elites flail, lash out and are often prone to identify scapegoats and pariahs who can be blamed for the crisis and for people's hardships and dashed expectations. Gramsci also notes that in times such as these we are also likely to witness the appearance of a 'great variety of morbid symptoms' (Gramsci in Hoare and Nowell Smith, 2005: 276); 'symptoms' that are disease-ridden and unhealthy and which may be reflected in the narratives and metaphors featuring in political discourses or cultural phenomena; for example, the genocidal discourse of Zionism and the talk of Palestinians as 'human animals' (Hawari, 2023). We might also refer to contemporary neo-fascist diatribes and the appearance of oddities and startling spectacles such as Trump. In Latin America, the electoral success of Javier Milei reflects similar disturbing political developments (Calvi, 2024).

All of this may seem to take us some distance from social work and its narrower range of concerns, but the argument here is that these 'big picture' factors are, in complex and often obscure ways, reflected in the micro-dynamics of our own 'field'.

Intellectuals

The role of intellectuals is vital within all hegemonic apparatuses. In this context, Gramsci highlights those he termed ‘organic intellectuals’ who are integral to the project of a particular class. Oftentimes, such figures are presented in the literature as being progressive, but Gramsci was always clear that ‘organic intellectuals’ can fulfil a role which is not always socially beneficial for the majority of people. As Spivak quips: ‘Gramsci does not think that the organic intellectual is necessarily a good guy. What he thinks is that every mode of production throws up an organic intellectual who supports that mode of production’ (in Green, 2013: 97). They may, for example, be intellectuals ‘organically’ and purposefully associated with the interests of capital; alternatively they may be linked to and/or part of the working class and other exploited and oppressed groups. In order for such groups to challenge and usurp the existing order they must, in fact, cease relying on intellectuals from outside and create their own ‘organic intellectuals’.

Historically, previous social formations ‘produced different types of organic intellectuals, such as the ecclesiastics in feudalism’ (Green 2013: 96). Gramsci argued that, for a long time, they were probably the ‘most typical’ and held a ‘monopoly of a number of important services: religious ideology, that is the philosophy and science of the age, together with schools, education, morality, justice, charity, good works, etc. The category of ecclesiastics can be considered the category of intellectuals organically bound to the landed aristocracy’ (Gramsci in Hoare and Nowell Smith, 2005: 7).

Gramsci suggested that over time a ‘stratum of administrators, etc., scholars and scientists, theorists, non-ecclesiastical philosophers, etc’ also formed (Gramsci in Hoare and Nowell Smith, 2005: 7). These ‘various categories of *traditional intellectuals*... put themselves forward as autonomous and independent of the dominant social group’ (Gramsci in Hoare and Nowell Smith, 2005: 7, emphasis added). The prime characteristic of this group is that they perceive themselves as not only autonomous, but beyond the cut and thrust of political engagement. One of the ‘most important characteristics of any group that is developing towards dominance is, therefore, its struggle to assimilate and to conquer “ideologically” the traditional intellectuals’ (Gramsci in Hoare and Nowell Smith, 2005: 10).

Intellectuals have a crucial role in maintaining common sense or, alternatively, in helping to shape new forms of revised common sense. Hence, they are able to contribute to

the consolidation or erosion of particular hegemonic orders. As Gramsci avowed, one of his new types of organic intellectual possessed the capacity to help build proletarian hegemony on account of their ‘active participation in practical life, as constructor, ‘organizer, “permanent persuader”’ (Gramsci in Forgacs, 1988: 321).

Gramsci also made an important move deconstructing dominant ideas and perceptions of *who* can be an intellectual. That is to say, and in line with the rest of his politics, he tried to democratise the idea of what constitutes an ‘intellectual’. Consequently, he maintained that although ‘one can speak of intellectuals, one cannot speak of non-intellectuals, because non-intellectuals do not exist...There is no human activity from which every form of intellectual participation can be excluded’ (Gramsci in Hoare and Nowell Smith, 2005: 9). He then went on to redefine ‘intellectual’ as ‘anyone whose function in society is primarily that of organising, administering, directing, educating or leading others’ (Gramsci in Forgacs, 1988: 300).

Shaping a Gramscian social work

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Gramsci’s political philosophy is not comfortably aligned with ‘Bolshevik vanguardism’ nor with the belief that a ‘historical vision’ formulated by professional revolutionaries can be simply passed on to the working class (Rupert, 2005: 488). This is an important point since Gramsci’s entire contribution strongly implies a particular type of political action and pedagogy³. Indeed, his life and work have a number of thematic affinities with Freire. In a thoroughly Gramscian way, the Brazilian educator observes that one ‘cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding’ (Freire, 2017 [1970]: 69). Appreciating such a premise demands that educators try to understand people’s ‘thematic universe’ (Freire, 2017 [1970]: 69). This idea seems to be wholly aligned with Gramsci’s articulation of common sense and ‘good sense’. Moreover, it resonates with progressive social work education and practice (Singh and Cowden 2009; Shahid and Jha, 2014). If, in fact, social workers are not attuned to and respectful of the ‘thematic universe’ of the people who they provide services for, then one wonders if the profession is worth preserving (Maylea, 2021).

How, therefore, might a Gramscian approach influence and inform engagement with contemporary social issues impacting practitioners in Ireland? To take one example impinging on community social work, some local communities object to the arrival of

³ See also Morley et al., 2020.

asylum seekers (Sherlock and Blaney, 2023). If such objections are simply sparked by ideological racists and fascists, then such individuals and groups must be resolutely confronted and not placated. Nevertheless, the common sense of such communities *may* also contain elements which are far less socially toxic and, to some degree, rationally explicable. For instance, the concern may be about the impact that large numbers of newcomers concentrated in an impoverished neighbourhood may have on hard-pressed health and public services already whittled to the bone after years of neoliberal austerity. There may also be anger at the State's routinised lack of consultation with, implicitly devalued, local communities. Questions might be being raised, and puzzlement expressed, about why more affluent parts of the country do not appear to have any asylum seekers located in their leafy neighbourhoods. Here, *maybe* part of the opposition to asylum seekers' presence could be related to a kernel of 'good sense' mired in the muddled and heterogeneous bundle of common sense.

As we have seen, according to Gramsci's Marxist thinking – and what is often termed in the Notebooks, the 'philosophy of praxis' – progressive activists must creatively struggle against and transcend common sense. Common sense must be 'actively grappled with, sifted through, understood and sorted out by the very users of language and holders' of common sense (Green and Ives, 2009: 20). Dialogue must occur because individuals and their mind-sets are the 'terrain of struggle for the competing social relations, or hegemonies' (Davidson, 2011: 142). Consequently, there is a need to engage with, and even challenge, people's views and, of course, our own 'mental conceptions' of the social world (Marx, 1990 [1867]: 493). In this instance, therefore, whilst giving total support to the asylum seekers, efforts might be made by community social workers to dialogue with those opposing their settlement.

Suggesting this may be a way forward does not amount to surrendering ground to racists and neo-fascists. Rather, Gramsci's approach can prompt us to try to reframe what is constructed as the main 'problem'. Hence, interventions would not simply be focused on changing the local residents' opinions, but might look to widen the scope of debate: for example, by raising the issue of better funding services and enhancing the material resources of the community. Housing and health services may be of particular concern. Perhaps efforts could also be made to organise joint community action with local residents – or a fraction of them – with their being encouraged to join with the asylum seekers to place new demands on the State.

Mainstream media discourses are apt to depict communities as being wholly united in their opposition to asylum seekers, but it is likely, of course, that there will already be a diversity of opinion in relation to their arrival. In terms of Bourdieu's reasoning, part of the task is to dismantle the 'screen discourse' evoking the presence of asylum seekers as the sole issue. This also relates, as we have seen, to Gramsci's ideas on hegemony and intellectuals. Political action should 'use good sense against common sense to transform common sense from within' (Snir, 2016: 276). In many instances, this may appear to be politically naïve, but choosing not to enter this often complex 'terrain' means it will be more easily conquered by racists and neo-fascist ideologues whose aspiration is to extinguish 'good sense' so as to nurture the most socially toxic facets of common sense to propel their more expansive and far-reaching political projects.

How, therefore, might social work's futures be perceived. In the final section of the article, mindful that my articulation of these perspectives is determined by my positionality, I will briefly refer to four differing perspectives that are currently present and each may point to alternative futures for the profession. These may, or may not have meaning in a Chilean context.

Social work future(s)

The common sense of a retrievable 'golden age' (or 'Make Social Work Great Again')

Gramsci observed that common sense tends to be 'crudely neophobe and conservative' (Gramsci in Hoare and Nowell Smith, 2005: 423). This facet is to the fore in a perspective on social work harking back to the profession's alleged 'golden age'. In general terms, its implicitly political, social and cultural point of reference is the Fordist regime of capital accumulation and the institutionalised social order that it produced after the Second World War. During this period, in places such as Britain, the common sense of the profession was undisturbed by considerations about class exploitation, racism and gender oppression. Referred to as 'traditional institutionalised social work order' (Brockmann and Garrett, 2022, pp. 5–6), it can be associated with an 'uncomplicated' worldview still existing in the fading glow of Empire and colonial common sense. Today, aspects of this perspective are, perhaps, present in periodic calls to enable social workers to return to more artisanal ways that provide opportunities to build 'relationships' with 'clients' again. Perhaps, in its modern guise, it reduces the scope of social work to a breviary circulating around, for example, 'attachment', 'trauma-informed practice' and 'adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)'. While such concerns are not, of course, to

be wholly decried, the risk is that the wider social and economic world that generates pain and hardships becomes obscured by an overly narrow focus on psychology. In other words, the *social* in social work becomes shrunken. The dangers of this occurring are compounded because of the positivistic and comforting certainties that the novel field of neuroscience, bestowing on this perspective a certain ‘modern’ gloss, seems to provide.

The common sense of ‘it is what it is’

This is the maxim and enveloping common sense of the ‘neoliberal institutional social work order’ (Brockmann and Garrett, 2022: 5–6). Perhaps occasionally not entirely comfortable with the ‘way things are around here’, the dominant tendency is to simply accept the current hegemony and thus to help constitute it. Flooded with a vibe of mandatory workplace ‘positivity’, this perspective can also be readily associated with managerial authoritarianism. Those adopting this form of common sense within social work education are often keen to create minor recalibrations which, whilst reflecting and bolstering neoliberal imperatives in the field, purport to have a totally different intent. This particular variant of professional common sense encompasses talk of ‘diversity’, stresses the need for ‘cultural competence’ and may, in the future, go as far as incorporating a degree of ‘decolonisation’ within its education and practice discourses. It might, in this sense, be characterised as, what Lange and Pickett-Depaolis (2022) dub, a ‘conformist rebellion’: where supine compliance with the dominant order is coated with a dull sheen of reformism. Anything, in fact, is possible so long as it does not disturb the relentless drive of capital accumulation and the workplace and wider social order conducive to such a process (Fraser, 2022).

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Relatedly, in this context, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui furnishes an insightful perspective as to how discourses on ‘multiculturalism’ and the ‘indigenous’ are frequently used in Latin America to shore up neoliberal ideology. Although she does not use the term, her critique might also be framed within Brenner and Fraser’s (2017) ‘progressive neoliberalism’: a conceptualisation that points to the inclination of leading fractions within the global hegemonic bloc, presently constituting the ruling class, to strategically celebrate ‘diversity’ and ‘multiculturalism’ whilst simultaneously eroding public provision and dismantling social protections. This is partly the context in which elites ‘adopted’ multiculturalism in Bolivia and wider afield in Latin America as a project aiming to ‘humanise’ neoliberal structural adjustment programmes (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2020 [2010]: 51).

The common sense of endism and abolitionism

This is a marginal strand of emergent common sense focused on the harms that social work caused – and continues to cause – to a range of communities. Such legitimate denunciations prompted calls to ‘end’ social work (Maylea, 2021; see also Garrett, 2021b). Similarly, but largely associated with the treatment of African-American families by social work services, a related strand of thinking demands not only the ‘abolition’ of the prisons and police, but also social work (Toraif and Mueller, 2023). One of the prime, and cogently reasoned concerns here is that social work, as an institution, is wholly enmeshed in policing, with the child ‘care’ system functioning as a pipeline frequently leading straight into the prison system, especially for those in minority ethnic communities (Adjei and Minka, 2018). A good deal of the sense-making on this theme is persuasive and compelling (Dettlaff *et al.*, 2020). However, the ‘abolitionist’ perspective is arguably U.S.-centric and wholly entangled with the particularities of U.S. racism and, what Wacquant (2009) terms, ‘neoliberal penalty’. Maybe the idea that the police and prisons should be abolished is more complex than the ‘abolitionists’ argue? Do we, for example, hanker to create a new post-capitalist state apparatus where neo-fascists can roam free to intimidate and propagandise as they please? Perhaps what is required are new forms of policing and imprisonment (and social work) which are re-purposed, with new priorities and democratic/accountable structures. The state, as a whole, is not necessarily a mechanism to be simply condemned. Rather, we may be better served by questioning the social forces controlling it.

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The common sense that another (social work) world is possible

Gianinna Muñoz Arce reminds us that in the mid-1960s a debate about the aims and intent of social work was initiated in Chile and elsewhere in Latin America. Dubbed the ‘reconceptualisation movement’, it criticised how social work practitioners and educators operated as supporters of the established order and it went on to stress and campaign for ‘new social work’ wholly committed to the ‘oppressed and dominated Latin American people’ (Aylwin in Muñoz Arce, 2018: 781). Perhaps today there is also a global requirement for us to try to seek out alternative forms of social work education and practice. Important here may be the creation and nurturing of dissenting ‘structures within structures’ inside of social work service organisations and within institutions providing social work education (see also Garrett, 2021a). This tactic, part of a longer-term and strategic struggle, may entail rekindling older forms of organising that emphasise the importance of caucusing: that is to say, *concentrating*, both in terms

of engendering new forms of radical thought, but also in terms of coming together and forming blocs and assemblies – in-person or online – to collectively resist the stultifying neoliberal organisations along with their narrow and toxic imperatives. This might form part of a wider network of similar caucuses spanning a range of jobs across entirely different ‘fields’ within the wider social formation. Indeed, this wider dimension is vital, not only to counteract the fetishisation of sectional interests, but because social workers alone can, of course, actually change very little.

Conclusion

Importantly, in commenting on social work and common sense, I recognise that others have contributed fascinating articles in a Chilean context: for example, Luis Vivero Arriagada (2017). Moreover, my article is constrained because of my unfamiliarity with the specificity of Chile. In this context, the specific composition of social work common sense will vary on account of a myriad of factors related to history, culture, politics and the genealogy of the profession in a specific country. Clearly, given the cloying nature of common sense, there is a risk of becoming myopically preoccupied with the sense-making and what, more generally, is taking place in the countries in which we live and the institutions in which we work. This can lead to wild and misguided generalisations. Despite possible shared characteristics, social work common sense will not, of course, be the same in Chile and Ireland.

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Clearly, social work practitioners and educators occupy a multiplicity of other roles and subject positions: familial roles, roles as manifestly political actors (in political parties and social movements etc). Hence, the struggle to promote a new common sense – perhaps, more accurately, Gramsci’s *good* sense – stretches beyond the sphere of the ‘professional’. Within the field of social work, key questions that we need to keep asking ourselves may include: What would a more emancipatory social work pedagogy ‘look like’? How might it serve social emancipation more broadly? What would it mean if the word ‘liberation’, featured in the IFSW (2014) definition of social work, was taken seriously? None of these questions have easy answers but they prompt us to think more deeply about how to occupy and repurpose the existing social work terrain with the hope of building worlds anew. A good place to start is by questioning social work and its regnant common sense.

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About the author

Paul Michael Garrett is an educator and writer based in Ireland. After many years of practice as a social worker, he obtained his PhD from the University of Nottingham where he lectured for five years before taking up his current post at (what is now) the University of Galway in 2004. Here he helped to set up the first social work programme in the west of Ireland and has been teaching on postgraduate and undergraduate programmes for over twenty years. Paul is a member of the Royal Irish Academy and was awarded a Higher Doctorate from the National University of Ireland in 2022 as well as an Honorary Doctorate from Ghent University, Belgium, in 2024.

His most recent books include: *Welfare Words: Critical Social Work and Social Policy* (Sage, 2018), *Dissenting Social Work: Critical Theory, Resistance and Pandemic* (Routledge, 2021), *Social Work with the Black African Diaspora* co-authored with Washington Marovatsanga (Policy Press, 2022), *Social Work and Common Sense: A Critical Examination* (Routledge, 2024).

E-mail address: pm.garrett@universityofgalway.ie

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2689-0948>

ARTICLE

Knowledge production and the development of postgraduate degrees in Latin America 100 years after the creation of the first school of social work

Producción de conocimiento y el desarrollo de postgrados en América Latina a 100 años de la creación de la primera escuela de trabajo social

Margarita Rozas¹

National University of La Plata, Argentina.

Camila Véliz¹

National University of La Plata, Argentina.

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Abstract

This article recovers the trajectory of postgraduate programs in Social Work in Latin America, with emphasis on doctoral programs, to problematise the production of knowledge and its conditions of possibility in the current context. It emphasises the relevance of the construction of academic projects, where the production of scientific knowledge is a contribution to the understanding and social transformation, enhancing its various uses, through collaborative research networks and the construction of agendas.

Keywords:
social work;
postgraduate
programmes;
training;
knowledge
production

¹Corresponding author: Margarita Rozas, Argentina. ✉ margaritarozaspagaza@gmail.com
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Resumen

Este artículo recupera la trayectoria de los programas de postgrado en Trabajo Social en América latina, con énfasis en los doctorados, para problematizar respecto de la producción de conocimiento y sus condiciones de posibilidad en el contexto actual. Se enfatiza la relevancia de la construcción de proyectos académicos, donde la producción de conocimientos científicos sean un aporte para la comprensión y transformación social, potenciando sus diversos usos a través redes de investigación colaborativas y la construcción de agendas.

Palabras Clave:

trabajo social;
postgraduación;
Latinoamérica;
formación;
producción de
conocimiento

Introduction

This article is the product of research that crosses over time in an intergenerational way, where the production of knowledge in the discipline of Social Work has been a permanent concern for the authors, as it has been throughout the profession's history. We recognise the different expressions this debate has had in developing a discipline celebrating its first century. For this reason, in identifying the singularity of these debates, we would like to specify their indissoluble relationship with the diverse socio-political contexts in which they emerge. Just to give a few examples, we refer specifically to the debates on the relationship between intervention and social research as constitutive elements of the profession (Aylwin et al., 2004; Cazzaniga, 2014; 2015; Rozas, 2001) and the production of scientific knowledge at the disciplinary level (Matus, 1999; 2018; Rozas, 1999; 2004) in coherence with the *ethos* of social transformation (Aguayo, 2007; Castro-Serrano and Flotts, 2018).

In recognition of the uniqueness of these debates in the profession's history, this article seeks to account for the coming together of different generations of researchers who share reflections on these recurring debates. The intergenerational character is also present in how the issues of interest "meet" at various "moments" in the history of the profession of which we have been a part. Thus, the reflections presented here intersect research projects, academic management positions, and experiences of social intervention in different institutional spaces, which have allowed us to build our trajectories.²

We could mention, at least, that in the case of the first author, research on the "Trajectory of the profession in Social Work", the experience in the direction of doctoral and

² The authors met a decade ago, when one of them entered the Doctorate in Social Work at the National University of La Plata. Since then, they have worked together in different academic activities that have allowed them to dialogue, learn and reflect on their concerns about the development of the profession in each of their countries and its expressions in Latin America. Today they work together on the postdoctoral programme at the same institution.

master's theses, as well as her work as a researcher, and her participation from the 1970s to the present in the debates of social work at the Latin American level, related to the production of knowledge and postgraduate training in Social Work, are put into play in the reflections that we share today. On the other hand, for the second author, the doctoral thesis on research training and teaching methodologies in undergraduate courses in Social Work and the postdoctoral project on professional memories in Latin America, regarding professional training and the development of research, in addition to academic management and teaching positions in undergraduate and doctoral courses, are expressions of concern for the production of knowledge in the disciplinary field.

With the above, we do not wish to summarise our trajectories, but rather to show how our research concerns intersect intergenerationally, with the same intention of recovering the thread of the debates on the subject of the production of knowledge in Social Work with a focus on postgraduate training, putting forward converging positions and perspectives in order to analyse in retrospect the advances and challenges that are proposed for the future, 100 years after the first school of Social Work was created.

Many will wonder why start an article with these details, but for us, it is essential to explain "from where" we situate ourselves and talk about the subject that brings us together; it is that sort of epistemic-methodological backroom that, in general, has no place in current productions. These are experiences that have left us with lessons-learned reflections and allow us to continue thinking about proposals for research in Social Work, specifically about how the production of knowledge at the PhD level is an appropriate space (but not exclusive or excluding in the logic of meritocracy) to strengthen the production of rigorous scientific knowledge committed to social transformation, as well as to expand links and collaborative networks. At the same time, we try to refer to the foundational writings related to the need for postgraduate training and then make some reflections focused on the experience of doctoral programmes that have had more significant development in Latin America.

From an integral and relational perspective, we highlight the construction of what we have called "institutional academic projects" (Rozas, 1999; 2004) based on the integration of research, intervention, undergraduate and postgraduate studies in Social Work over the last 40 years – combining and being a condition for the diversity and heterogeneity that characterises the development of the discipline. This perspective generated questions regarding the endogenic and reproductive vision of academic debates, centred on themselves and fragmenting their articulation and relationship with the social sciences.

It is necessary to inscribe the academic subjects of the profession in a broader scenario between State and Society. It is a path that we are building, which allows us to broaden our discursive universe and the plurality of visions and generate new questions in this quarter of the 21st century to resituate our present regarding the importance of the production of knowledge in terms of continuing to contribute to critical thinking and social transformation, enhancing its various uses. In this perspective, it is essential to highlight the production of knowledge and the relationship with postgraduate studies, particularly with doctorates, clarifying that the analysis is limited to the foundational ideas on the importance of postgraduate studies today, taking the experience of the doctorate and postdoctorate in Social Work at the National University of La Plata (UNLP).

Knowledge production and postgraduate programmes in social work: a brief overview

Making reference to the debate on the production of knowledge in Social Work could be a task of a magnitude that exceeds the expectations of this paper; however, we propose to indicate some elements that situate the discussion in postgraduate training in Social Work, specifically, the opportunities offered by anchoring this debate in Doctoral programmes. As shown, we consider it a favourable, but not exclusive, space for developing the discussion.

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For this reason, in this section, we develop a brief synthesis of the postgraduate courses in Social Work; at the same time, we explain that the debate on the production of knowledge has crossed and continues to cross a large part of professional life in a heterogeneous way.

Research and knowledge production dates back to the creation of the first school of Social Work of the Junta de Beneficencia in Chile, Alejandro del Rio, in 1925, in which the need to apply knowledge produced by others was raised, a highly debated situation (Aylwin et al., 2004; González, 2010; 2016; Cortés, 2020; Rozas, 2000).

Discussions on research work in the social sciences, particularly in Social Work, must be placed within a broader framework of analysis regarding the stakes and influences each country has had on academic development and the institutionalisation of research programmes. For this reason, any exercise of synthesis could fall into reductionism regarding the conditions of possibility and emergence of the production of Social Work

knowledge in the respective countries. Nevertheless, we would like to refer to the case of the Latin American Centre for Social Work (CELATS), based in Lima, Peru, to give an account of the development of postgraduate programmes and their link with the production of knowledge.

CELATS was an academic body that depended directly on the Latin American Association of Schools of Social Service (ALAESS), between 1974 and 1992; its activities included the journal *Acción Crítica* (1976-1992) and the first Latin American Master's Degree in Social Work (MLATS), based in Tegucigalpa, Honduras (1979).³

It is worth noting that this organisation's programmatic objective was to generate discussion, reflection and training in social research, which was highly prolific and allowed for the possibility of initiating debates on the need for postgraduate training in the discipline. For example, issue 21 of the journal *Acción Crítica*, published in 1987, articulates the investigation of training and intervention processes. In an article written by Alejandro Maguiña, Diego Palma, Teresa Quiroz and Carlos Urrutia, as well as raising the importance of research in the profession, the debate on the difference between knowledge and experience is discussed, responding to the debates of that time on the premise that experience produces knowledge, expressed above all in the Teresópolis document (Brazil, 1970), as well as problematising the nature of Social Work and the methodological reformulation, incorporating research.

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We can also highlight the article by Elsa Lily Caballero, director of the fifth promotion of the Latin American Master's in Social Work (MLTS), who highlights "learning to research by researching" as a pedagogical experience that articulates teaching and research from different thematic fields of professional work, by developing a virtuous relationship between the working spaces of the Master's students and the development of empirical research that offers other approaches to understanding the social phenomena they address. With this, an articulation is sought between epistemological approaches, theoretical positions and methodological strategies; in revaluing "experience as a material subject of research (...) the process of critical reconstruction of experience not only serves to enrich the experience itself but also constitutes a source of scientific knowledge of reality" (Caballero, 1987, p.42).

³ To learn more about CELATS we invite you to review the following documents: a) Leila Lima (1984) A part of the History of Social Work: Six years of CELATS. Nuevos cuadernos CELATS, N°2. b) Interview with María Cecilia Tobón, el Trabajo Social en Latinoamérica, published in the Revista Trabajo Social de la Pontificia Universidad Católica number 50, 1986.



Furthermore, we could indicate the debates of the time regarding the production of knowledge and the development of research as a manifest tension, as Lorena Molina (2012) points out, describing them as “the underestimation of the competence of Social Work in the field of research, research as a new method for Social Work, research as an auxiliary technique, research is developed in the application of methodology, they locate the study and diagnosis as stages of knowledge and research as the scientific moment of reflection, theorisation of Social Work” (p.55).

This was not only a disciplinary discussion, but also responded to a larger context of reflection in the field of social sciences, which included, among other debates, a broad discussion on the “place” of researchers in the production of knowledge, which leads us to identify the primacy of positivism and functionalism and the “emergence” of critical theories (Cortés, 2015; Sisto, 2008); or the debate regarding the types of research, posed as a versus, between what is known as theoretical and applied research, and which was something that had an impact on the profession. With this, a debate has developed about the place of social work for its application and not the production of knowledge (Rozas, 2001; Véliz, 2024).

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Since the creation of the first Latin American Master’s Degree in Social Work (MLATS) in 1979, the importance of postgraduate programmes in professional training has been established at three levels: specialisation, Master’s and Doctorate. It should also be noted that the first postgraduate programme (Masters and Doctorate), a pioneer in Latin America, was developed by the Pontifical Catholic University of Sao Paulo, which recently celebrated its 50th anniversary. Its contributions to the development of training, both for Brazilian Social Work and for Latin America, are and have been of great importance.

In Latin America, 26 doctoral programmes in Social Work can be found at universities in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Puerto Rico and Uruguay. We bring up these data to put into perspective the progress made in research, training, professional intervention, and doctoral programmes.

We highlight the creation of the first doctorate in Argentina, at the Faculty of Social Work of the UNLP (2005), and in Chile, the first doctorate in Social Work at the Alberto Hurtado University (2020). In addition, the Faculty of Social Work of the National University of La Plata has an agreement with the School of Social Work of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) to form a PhD in Social Work. In 2024, the doctorate of the School of Social Work of UNAM will be approved.



The current debates on knowledge production and training at the doctoral level articulate disciplinary concerns about the development of the social sciences as a whole (Mancovsky, 2015; 2021; Piovani, 2014; Wairnerman and Sautu, 2011), to name but a few: the theoretical-methodological knots on research, the concern for generating theoretical questions from social intervention, how to teach research, the concern and debate on the coherence between theoretical definitions and methodological strategies to build knowledge, and that also has the challenge of contributing to the daily transformation of the actors with whom we work, how to add value to scientific knowledge, the critical capacity that challenges axiological neutrality. To paraphrase Bourdieu (2000), it is about producing knowledge and implies an ethical-political stance in the relationship between knowledge and social agents. This brief synthesis gives us an overview of the debates that have reappeared in thesis workshops, research project exchange meetings, research institutes and laboratories.

In this sense, the postgraduate courses in Social Work and the social sciences, in general, converge in an enriching space of exchange between the production of theses and publications. At this stage, it can be seen that the production of knowledge from doctoral degrees has a valuable academic level and transformative and transfer potential, both for thinking about the discipline and continuing to investigate the problems that the current reality demands of us. We highlight the relevance of doctorates as a space that facilitates the conditions of possibility for the production of knowledge, which also have to do with the processes of insertion of Social Work degrees and doctorates in university life, taking into consideration that these conditions are diverse and depend on the level of institutional progress with the scientific research bodies in each country.

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Conditions of possibility generated for the production of knowledge in doctoral programmes

In the last 40 years, and especially in this quarter of a century in the Latin American region, Social Work has made two central issues a priority; first, the involvement, together with other disciplines, in the generation of conditions of possibility for the production of knowledge, through doctoral theses, master's degrees, postgraduate training scholarships, as well as in the networks of articulation by lines of research. Secondly, a vision of broad professional training that builds meaning through the virtuous relationship between undergraduate and postgraduate studies; thus, breaking with the reductionist view regarding the conception of training based only on the contents of a syllabus.

Based on the above, we can observe that there is a sustained trend in the production of knowledge in Social Work, recognising that this progress is not the same for all countries (even within the academic units of the same country), because there are different conditions that may or may not favour the development of research. It also depends on the accumulation processes that each academic unit undertakes to articulate research and intervention as “academic development projects”. It is also necessary to point out that research constitutes an essential tool for the development of professional life, articulating diverse actors that give meaning and effectiveness to professional life. This broadens and enriches the professional culture.

On the other hand, thanks to the technological development of communications, it facilitates the socialisation and exchange of knowledge, strengthening the commitment to training and professional intervention. This is a necessary task in order to further develop and legitimise the profession’s place in university life, in society, and particularly with regard to those problems that hinder the production of living conditions for citizens.

Based on the above, we highlight some elements of the Doctoral Programme in Social Work at the National University of La Plata (UNLP), under the Faculty of Social Work, which express the importance of postgraduate training as part of academic-institutional projects developed comprehensively and relationally. In its 12 years of operation, strategies have been designed to identify the conditions of possibility for the construction of disciplinary knowledge, betting on the generation and socialisation in collaborative research networks and the construction of agendas.

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Within this framework, research networks, laboratories, observatories and research centres constitute a privileged space to continue strengthening academic exchange and, above all, learning to dialogue among peers and with other social science professionals, articulating lines of research, thematic areas, and diverse educational activities, all building meaning concerning their transformative and transfer potential. For example, in the Institute of Studies in Social Work and Society of the Faculty of Social Work (UNLP), there are fruitful exchanges based on the various lines of research that are developed in them, thanks to the existence of trained researchers, scholarship holders from the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET) and Science and Technology of the university. With this, doctoral students and graduates participate in research projects, scientific dissemination activities and university extension projects promoted by the Institute and the secretariats of the Faculty.

It should be noted that another way of linking the production of knowledge and the different academic activities is also through the Faculty's Postdoctoral Programme, which seeks to "generate institutionalised instances of meetings and links between researchers from the Faculty of Social Work and researchers from other universities, research centres and institutes at national and international level".

By monitoring our graduates, we can observe the initiatives and academic activities that contribute to the professional debate in the countries from which they come. In the case of Argentina, the categorisation of researchers in training, trainees, and scholarship holders whose productions in various areas and topics are of interest for the development of social policies and the concern to contribute to improving the quality of life of the people with whom we work has been expanded. The relationship between teaching, research and extension becomes clearer in this context. The actors involved in developing territorial projects and/or institutions and/or other academic actors become central.

The PhD has made it possible to qualify academic and professional cadres, strengthening the trajectory of knowledge production and publications through theses, articles and books. It has also been beneficial in terms of contributing to undergraduate training. From the epistemological point of view, there is an intertwining with other disciplines belonging to the world of social sciences, overcoming the reductionist vision of the discipline in the search for its objects. Therefore, there is an increasingly fluid exchange with other disciplines for knowledge production and the daily transformation of reality.

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In this direction, we must continue working to strengthen the interdisciplinary approach, and we are in the process of doing so. It is necessary to review the tendency towards excessive competition and individualism in the production of knowledge, a product of the competitive individualism of neoliberalism. We aspire to build in the production of knowledge what Bourdieu (2000) called the interdisciplinary and international collective intellectual; this is not to deny the interest and/or thematic interests to develop research.

Not only do we refer to the institutional conditions of possibility, but we also aim to highlight the epistemic and conceptual conditions that underpin these conditions of possibility.

The development of a relational view between research and social intervention has allowed us to distance ourselves from positions with an academicist view of research;

we refer to the separation between research and intervention. The relationship between knowledge and ethics brings us face-to-face with reality regarding enquiry, discovery and questioning. Undoubtedly, this implies asking ourselves from what assumptions we investigate; this exercise suggests an act of rupture with respect to the logic of thinking and constructing knowledge in the positivist sense. This act of rupture also means questioning the instrumentalist sense of the production of knowledge, which justifies the social order by making its contradictions invisible: social inequalities, subjection, and subjugation of our view of the world and life. Invisibilising the social order, in short, has led to the separation between science and technology, between theory and practice, between reason and instrumentalisation.

It is essential to break these dichotomies and begin to be uncomfortable with purely descriptive research that reproduces the existing identity between society and nature by verifying the regularities that supposedly exist in social life. The COVID-19 pandemic challenges us to review these ways of thinking and knowing and reconfigure our interventions. With regard to the themes of the doctoral theses, there is a concern to incorporate into the research agenda the issue of the pandemic, the environment, care, the importance of the presence of the state, the weakening of social ties, the consequences of which must be anticipated by the social sciences.

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Radical neo-conservatism: a context of uncertainty for universities and the production of knowledge

The aforementioned thesis topics and the concern for public and human rights constitute an essential agenda for the development of research in the face of the advance of ultraconservative rights in the world and the region; particularly in Argentina, it is necessary to take into account how universities and the production of knowledge are devalued every time authoritarian governments are installed in power. We have seen this during the Latin American dictatorships of the 1970s and in the 1990s, when adjustment policies were introduced, especially in social policies. The social sciences were considered dangerous and unnecessary, and knowledge production was discredited because no objective results could be seen.

With the current advance of the ultra-conservative right, there is a danger of questioning the validity of social science knowledge and the importance of knowledge in the fields of health, education and acquired rights and, in short, diluting the public as a political commonplace. The gap between the state sphere and the preponderance of the

economy is becoming ever narrower. This, in the future, leaves the state without safety nets for citizens. As Eric Sadin (2022), a French philosopher, warns, the contemporary individual who has no faith (he believes in nothing) and without networks to sustain him (which calls into question social protection systems) generates a high level of exposure of his private life, where communication networks are shaping his reality. This, in the future, may transform subjectivities and affect social ties.

On the other hand, Austrian political scientist Natascha Strobl (2022), in an unmissable book on the “analysis of radicalised conservatism”, warns that “conservatism is not a defensive ideology or a counter-ideology, but has its own ideological inventory, in which the idea that inequality is constitutive of a society is central” (p.13). And, he argues, the

Clear hierarchies ensure social order; if this becomes unbalanced, crises arise. From its inception, the hierarchy has been part of this conservative ideology. In short, this radicalised conservatism is anti-egalitarian and anti-revolutionary, defending the absolute freedom of the market and the idea that the state should be limited above all in its social functions. It de-statises the social question that democratic liberalism has brought to the functioning of the modern state. (p.14)

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In this direction, our universities and the education system also suffer the impact of this radicalised conservatism. It is therefore necessary to re-discuss the meanings and purposes assigned to the university, at least to contextualise the challenges of professional training, particularly the production of knowledge in doctoral programmes. Finally, we point out that there are several challenges that we have at the level of doctorates and postgraduate degrees in general: rethinking social policies from a rights perspective continues to be an important line of research for Social Work. On the other hand, the traumatic experience of the pandemic broadens the need to incorporate an innovative agenda for research: paying attention to the politics of care, the strengthening of public institutions, the debate on the public as the shared place of politics, thinking about our exploded institutions, the discussion on the territorial and the presence of the State, but also the attention on the subjectivities of the contemporary individual.

Therefore, the agenda of knowledge production cannot ignore the damage produced by current capitalism: the deep inequalities accumulated since colonisation that subjugated our countries. It confronts us with a reality traversed by economic, patriarchal, hierarchical, racial and gender domination that has shaped a way of thinking and

established relations of domination. On the other hand, the triumph of individualism and market freedom, as Harvey (2005) warned us about the individual as a function of the commodification system and the processes of precarisation of human life, as Isabell Lorey (2016) puts it. And the great reflection made by Judith Butler (2017) when she states

When it is argued that individuals can take care of themselves under conditions of generalised precariousness if not outright poverty, something astonishing is taken for granted, and that is the assumption that people can (and should) act autonomously in conditions where life has become unlivable. (p.23)

It is necessary, then, to make explicit the systems of domination that exclude the significant majorities and are installed in the sphere of power relations, especially in the crystallised bureaucracies that have mechanised the social function of the state. The big question for the social sciences is: how did we arrive at the naturalisation of the conditions imposed by authoritarian governments? Why are progressive perspectives incapable of constructing an alternative, more democratic society where citizens can have a dignified life? These are questions that articulate the meaning of knowledge production and political action. Both are intertwined.

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It is important to insist that it is not only the construction of a research agenda, regarding the consequences of capitalism, around the visibility and problematisation of the effects on everyday life, but also its expression in what is known as academic capitalism (Brunner et al., 2021; Fardella et al., 2020), which installs ways of doing research, its communication and dissemination. Specifically, in the field of Social Work, this is a central issue, as it allows us to understand, in part, the permanent tension between research and social intervention, and those who develop it, which refers to the discomfort generated by the ways of doing and communicating research, and not scientific research itself, which generates distances or gaps in the professional collective. It is the discomfort produced by the regimes of truth regarding the production of scientific knowledge, its standards and its dissemination, as well as how this is transmitted through training (Véliz, 2021). In view of this, we wish to make explicit the political dimension of research work in Social Work that “all research is political, insofar as it makes visible and problematises what is happening in our society as a tool for public advocacy” (Calvo and Véliz, 2021, p. 80).

Dialogue between critical theories

The context also implies some movement with respect to theories, and to the very concept of theory in the broad sense. Alexander (1992) asked what theory is and answered that it is abstractions based on the real world and for the real world. Classical to contemporary authors tell us about our times and each time and/or historical moment has a way of thinking and naming the events that speak about reality. Therefore, it is important to know the historical traditions of thought about social reality, social order and conflict, and how these conflicts play out in society. In-depth knowledge of these conflicts, from a critical and historical perspective, may contribute to the dialogue between essential theories that provide us with categories and concepts to understand and explain the complexity of the particular reality of each country and the world.

Critical theories that are fundamentally born out of the conflicts generated by modern society allow us to understand the character of the contradictions of today's society, to transform situations of injustice into an incessant exercise that relates theory and reality. In this sense, there is a need for debate between critical theories, in the plural (Marxism, Marxisms, theories focused on the explanation of structures and dynamics, post-colonialism, feminisms), which have as a standard starting point the questioning of systems of domination, the defence of rights and a capacity for cultural and political transformation. It is also necessary to debate theories such as theoretical relativism, pragmatism, functionalism, and positivism, to name but a few. We may or may not agree with these approaches, but we know that they are interwoven into the fabric of the social sciences, and certainly in Social Work as part of them. The challenge is to dialogue between these theories and enrich our theoretical repertoire based on argued productions.

This debate has been extensively addressed in the journal *Acción Crítica*, for example, in its issue 27, 1990, in which the discussion on the different theoretical perspectives on vocational training, considered central to subsequent debates, is addressed. Or the work done on how it is possible to operationalise different critical perspectives in research projects (Netto et al., 1992).

This line of discussion is still present today and other aforementioned theoretical perspectives have been added. Regarding the PhD programme in Social Work at the FTS-UNLP, the central area works from different theoretical-epistemological perspectives (Rozas, 2020).

This line of debate deepens critical thinking and contributes to the theoretical and epistemic development of Social Work. It is the critical theories that frame the lines of thought in the general context in which the concepts are inserted, taking their true meaning in the relational dynamics that social subjects establish. At the same time, these concepts have a historicity that gives them a particular and contextual meaning.

The profession of Social Work has at the core of its field the *social question*, precisely generated by social and economic conflicts expressed in a set of social inequalities, which does not ignore the meaning, the fabric and the ways in which social life has been reconfigured with broader social changes. Therefore, the challenge for critical theories is to know that this conjunction is neither linear nor a simple reproduction of concepts; it is, above all, to decipher a reality whose configuration shows aspects that are not always present in the more general account of society.

There is another dimension that organises the critical discourse on the anchorage between Social Work and citizenship: the defence of the public as an expression of the commons whose basis underpins social cohesion; in fact, with the advance of the right, this basis is in question. These categories and the condition of citizenship are a powerful weapon of inclusion in a common space and of the struggle for social rights. Critical and relational theories, in addition to expanding the repertoire of Social Work, contribute to intervention as a process that unfolds in situated contexts and from a transformative perspective.

Critical theories have ideology as an essential dimension, a category rarely mentioned in times of authoritarian conservatism. We know that ideology shapes the vision of life and society, and it is possible that political/ideological processes are at play in this confluence. The challenge for the social sciences in this direction is to detect and identify the articulations that allow for dialogue with other approaches to complex social processes. The conversation between theories enriches the empirical bases of intervention, as well as the multiplicity of diverse demands that emerge from the daily life of the profession. This allows us to value plurality and diversity in order to enrich the production of knowledge.

The increase in productions regarding the debate between theories and their empirical references for Social Work overcomes the vision of a single thought capable of capturing the complexity of reality and false dichotomies. As we all know, science, theory and culture are 'constructors of and constructed by' social processes that have a

level of complexity and require a systematic understanding that allows us to rethink the relationships between subjectivity, singularity and generativity of social and theoretical methods. This process is eminently political because it seeks to explain the complexity of globalisation, the multiple modernities that generate challenging questions about everyday life, the dehumanisation of people's lives and the subjection to processes of precariousness as a way of life.

Therefore, by way of hypostasis, we point out that we are passing through multiple universes of discourse capable of capturing the processes of complexity, which are the scenarios through which the questions that point towards the construction of the research themes pass, and which have a potential for transformation and transfer.

This analysis recovers another aspect in relation to the production of knowledge and the importance acquired by being able to introduce the social question and social policies into our discursive language, as two theoretical coordinates that make it possible to advance in reflections on the relationship between state and society, as well as the revaluation of the public sphere as a space for political construction, especially at this time of the advance of neo-conservatism.

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The social question made it possible to define the coordinates that aim to discover its manifestations in social life, in the creation and recreation of the social agenda of states. It must be taken up again because today the advance of the ultra-right denies the social function of the modern state and negates the recognition of the existence of the social question. The danger includes ignoring the usefulness of the production of knowledge in the social sciences, as we said earlier. This is what we are experiencing in Argentina with the defunding of science in scientific bodies such as the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research, CONICET, and less intensely in Chile, with the lack of basal resources for scientific research, which is sustained almost exclusively on the basis of competitive funds provided by the National Research Agency (ANID).

Another challenge is to question normativised institutional knowledge, which has blocked the possibility of critical thinking. There is a division between knowing and thinking. Modernity became instrumental rationality and led us to accumulate knowledge, standardise knowledge, institutionalise knowledge, and find a refuge from where we believe and dare to relate to other knowledge. Some of this is evident, for example, in the separation made in Chile by the National Accreditation Commission (CNA), which differentiates postgraduate degrees between professional and academic

master's degrees, leaving the latter to produce knowledge in the more classical standards and separating the dialogues between forms of production. To be aware of these and other processes implies deepening critical thinking.

By way of conclusions

The title of this article and its development allow us to recognise the advances in the production of knowledge and postgraduate training, specifically, in the contribution that can be made from Doctoral degrees in Social Work in the current context. And with this, to continue thinking about the following points:

Continue to strengthen postgraduate programmes, especially doctorates, in the training of professionals who can contribute to sustaining the social function of the state in the face of the advance of neo-conservatism. In this sense, the challenge is to advance in a broad and integrating conception of the relationship between the production of knowledge and its transformative and critical potential.

Regarding the debate between critical theories, the challenge is to broaden the discursive repertoire to understand, describe and explain social life as an expression of the complexity of the contemporary social question. Today, the processes we are experiencing are neither linear nor normative; on the contrary, the realisation that there are no good or bad theories allows us to recognise that there is a confluence of critical theories that contribute to the understanding of the complexity of reality.

The challenge for the social sciences and social work is to construct systematic, precise and critical information on the emerging conflicts in our society. The question of the purpose of research, not only for social work but also for the social sciences, is increasingly being asked, and this question leads to a concern for transfer and its various uses – to bring solutions to the reconfiguration of institutions that facilitate people's lives.

However, there is also the challenge not only to do research but also to be able to consume research and its various uses in teaching and academic activities in general. It is also essential to formulate research within the framework of the rules of the game of scientific bodies and the need to carry out formative research in the professorships.

The research we carry out must be oriented towards uncovering the inequalities, poverty and impoverishment of our societies. The ethical dimension implies not only understanding the mechanisms of dehumanisation that occur through the dismantling of the social function of the state, today endangered by neo-conservative theories that propose to show that the state is an enemy to the absolute freedom of the market. The dialogue between critical theories brings together the diversity of perspectives and traditions, linking reflections and dilemmas about our historical present.

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ARTICLE

Systematisation of experiences in Social Work: Practice and knowledge construction from a historical perspective

Sistematización de experiencias en Trabajo Social: Práctica y construcción de conocimiento desde una perspectiva histórica

Claudia Bermúdez Peña¹

Universidad del Valle, Colombia.

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Abstract

This article explores the construction of knowledge in social work, recognising the contribution that the systematisation of experiences has made. It positions practice as an epistemic axis and acknowledges its role in generating situated and transformative knowledge. The objective is to contribute to epistemological reflection by addressing key issues that have shaped debates in the history of social work about discussions in the social sciences: practice as a source of knowledge, the construction of knowledge, and the systematisation of experiences as a research modality.

Thus, from philosophical reflections to decolonial and Global South perspectives, including the contributions of the systematisation of experiences in Latin America, the conceptual problem posed is that, despite the epistemic subordination of practice to theoretical knowledge in the social sciences – which establishes

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¹Contact:: Claudia Bermúdez Peña, Colombia. claudia.bermudez@correounivalle.edu.com
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a hierarchy that limits the recognition of other modes of knowledge rooted in social practices – this knowledge persists and operates within everyday life.

The argumentative development follows a structured approach: first, it examines the philosophical context that situates practice within Aristotelian phronesis; second, it discusses the contributions of Pierre Bourdieu and Michel de Certeau regarding practices; third, it explores debates on the topic emerging from the Global South; fourth, it connects these discussions with the reflections of two pioneers of social work – Octavia Hill and Mary Richmond; and finally, it highlights the debate that took place during the reconceptualisation movement in Latin America, where the systematisation of experiences gained significance as a response to epistemic inequalities. The conclusions emphasise that systematisation, beyond being a bridge between theory and practice, is an exercise in decolonial resistance and a political act democratising knowledge production.

Resumen

Este artículo explora la construcción de conocimiento en Trabajo Social reconociendo el aporte que la sistematización de experiencias ha realizado en ese sentido. Se sitúa a la práctica como eje epistémico y se reconoce su papel en la generación de saberes situados y transformadores. El objetivo es contribuir a la reflexión epistemológica a partir de asuntos que han atravesado algunos de los debates en la historia del Trabajo Social en relación con debates de las ciencias sociales: la práctica como fuente de conocimiento, la construcción de conocimiento y la sistematización de experiencias como modalidad de investigación. Así, desde reflexiones filosóficas hasta las apuestas decoloniales y del s, como las reflexiones que la sistematización de experiencias ha propuesto en América Latina, el problema conceptual que se plantea es que, pese a la subordinación epistémica que la práctica ha tenido frente al conocimiento teórico en las ciencias sociales, y que plantea una jerarquización que limita el reconocimiento de otros modos de saber relacionados con prácticas sociales, estos saberes perviven y operan en los mundos cotidianos.

El desarrollo argumentativo aborda, primero, el contexto filosófico que posiciona la práctica en la *phronesis* aristotélica; segundo, las contribuciones que sobre las prácticas realizaron Pierre Bourdieu y Michel De Certeau; tercero, los debates sobre el tema surgidos desde el Sur Global, para enlazar con las reflexiones sobre el tema que dos pioneras del Trabajo Social -Octavia Hill y Mary Richmond- realizaron; y

Palabras Clave:
Trabajo Social;
Sistematización
de experiencias;
construcción de
conocimiento;
práctica



finalmente, se destaca el debate propuesto durante la reconceptualización en América Latina, en el que la sistematización de experiencias adquirió relevancia como respuesta a las desigualdades epistémicas.

Las conclusiones destacan que la sistematización, además de ser un puente entre teoría y la práctica, es un ejercicio de resistencia decolonial y un acto político que democratiza la producción de conocimiento.

Introduction

This article aims to contribute to the epistemological reflection on issues that have crossed some of the debates in the history of Social Work, in particular, and of the social sciences, in general: practice as a source of knowledge, the construction of knowledge and the systematisation of experiences as a research modality. To this end, I have proposed a historical-critical analysis of how some debates have taken place in this direction.

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Firstly, I trace the debate on practice as a source of knowledge in Western thought, taking up the Aristotelian notion of *phronesis* (practical wisdom) and contemporary debates, in which I highlight the approaches of Pierre Bourdieu and Michel De Certeau, who take up the discussion on practice and place it at the centre of their reflections. In this process, I link with debates arising from Social Work. Secondly, I consider the climate of this debate from the Global South, paying special attention to Latin America.

Thirdly, I place the reflection within the framework of the profession of Social Work, taking as a starting point the reflections on the subject put forward by Octavia Hill and Mary Richmond as pioneers. Hill, with a reflection from practice, and Richmond, with a reflection from and about practice. Then, I highlight the debate in Latin America during the period of reconceptualisation, specifically what was published in the magazine “Hoy en el servicio social”, and particularly the reflections of Herman Kruse at that time.

Practice as an epistemic site in Western thought

In the history of Western thought, we identify moments in which practice has been recognised as a source of knowledge, although it has not always been valued in that place. For example, in the classification of the dispositions of the soul that lead to truth,

Aristotle pointed to *phronesis*² as a mode of “practical wisdom” close to an intellectual virtue, which allows one to discern what is good, both for oneself and for the community (Aristotle, 2005). In this sense, *phronesis* does not relate to the application of abstract principles and instead implies a deliberative capacity, the basis of which is an ethical and prudent judgment. That is, a judgement formed based on knowledge acquired over time in interaction with those with whom life is shared in common, and which is expressed as reflective action oriented towards the greater good within the framework of shared experience. In this sense, *phronesis* refers to practical knowledge that is not necessarily theoretical or universal.

Despite this recognition of practice as a source of knowledge, Aristotle is attributed with a “praise of the *vita contemplativa*”, as he seems to give theoretical reflection a higher place than practice, which would be contained in the *vita activa*.³

This exaltation of *the vita contemplativa* influenced Western modernity and was expressed in the rise of positivism. Theoretical knowledge was positioned, and the practice was relegated to a subordinate role, which was understood as applying theory. By devaluing practical knowledge from everyday life, positivism prioritised the search for objectivity and universality. At the end of the 19th century, the nascent social sciences adopted positivism as a path to knowledge, placing practice secondary to theoretical knowledge.

This epistemological hierarchisation generated tensions that persist in contemporary social science debates, although it has been questioned in recent decades, especially from the Global South. In this framework, social work was understood as a subaltern (Lorente Molina, 2002), given that the discipline found in practice is a central axis for constructing knowledge from reflexive and situated action.

At the end of the 20th century in the West, authors such as Pierre Bourdieu (1991) and Michel De Certeau (2000) took up the discussion on practical knowledge from perspectives different from the Aristotelian one, questioning the hierarchy that subordinated practice to theory and highlighting its epistemological place. We present their approaches briefly.

² There are five dispositions of the soul identified by Aristotle: the *téchne*, the *phronesis*, the *episteme*, the *Sophia* and the *Nóus* (DI Pego, 2019)..

³ This approach is framed by the Greek distinction between *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*. While the former is linked to action and engagement with the affairs of the world, the latter is related to theoretical reflection, which implies taking distance from the world. Contemplation is in this context considered one of the highest human faculties, while practice is understood as an inferior faculty, which also distracts from the possibility of attaining full contemplation.

For Bourdieu, there is a ‘false opposition’ between objectivism and subjectivism, which he describes as ‘ruinous’ (Bourdieu, 1991, p.47). According to the author, both approaches share the same presuppositions of theoretical knowledge, as they imply taking distance from their object of study, adopting an external stance that privileges abstraction over interaction with reality. In this sense, both would be close to the *contemplative vita* as they separate knowledge production from practical experience and participation in the social world.

Bourdieu considers that practical knowledge, closer to the *vita activa*, is at the origin of the ordinary experience of the social world and emerges in everyday participation, silent observation and interactions with others. Its very nature causes it to remain hidden in its evidence, as it operates implicitly in everyday life. In this sense, practical knowledge is only “revealed” retrospectively through an exercise of reflection, which allows the underlying meanings and dynamics implicit in everyday actions to be identified. This approach highlights the tacit nature of practices and recognises them as knowledge builders.

Bourdieu argues that mastery of practice principles is acquired through learning by familiarisation, which does not necessarily pass through discourse or consciousness. It is an “anonymous pedagogical action” (Bourdieu, 1991, p.125), exercised collectively by the environment without the intervention of specialised agents or formalised moments. Incorporating practical schemas occurs implicitly and through everyday interaction with the social world.

For his part, De Certeau called everyday practices “arts of doing”, defining them as “an extensive set, difficult to delimit, which we could provisionally designate under the title of procedures” (De Certeau, 2000, p.50). For the author, it is important to explore a creative and, to some extent, “subversive” dimension since they are not simply passive processes of adaptation to structures but places from which strategies of resistance and resignification are woven. Indeed, in their everyday lives, subjects construct new meanings by re-appropriating hegemonic impositions and transforming them according to their realities and needs. From this perspective, everyday practices are mute procedures, bearers of dispersed creativity that manifests in how individuals use the tools of their environment to intervene in structures and endow them with their meanings. In other words, practical knowledge is not devoid of agency; instead, it is situated knowledge in which individuals transform structures from within with the tools the context provides them.

The authors agree in recognising practices as processes that transcend repetition and position them as an epistemic place, from which not only knowledge is constructed that cannot be reduced to universal categories but also resistance. Bourdieu and De Certeau invite us to rethink practice not as a sphere subordinated to theory but as a negotiation space in which the structures that shape social life are transformed. These reflections are consonant with the systematisation of experiences, which is committed to recovering the knowledge of practice as a constructor of knowledge based on a reflective exercise.

The debate on practice from the Global South

In recent years, the Global South has established itself as a reference point for questioning the hegemonic ways of knowing proposed by the West. Indeed, post-coloniality has questioned and problematised how the West invisibilises, subordinates and delegitimises knowledge from other cultural and historical contexts since the mid-twentieth century. These initial critiques, driven by African⁴ and Asian⁵ intellectuals, set out to deconstruct colonial narratives of knowledge, opening the way for diverse and situated epistemic perspectives.

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In Latin America, the questioning and resistance to the various forms of coloniality – of power, knowledge (Quijano, 2000) and being (Maldonado-Torres, 2007) – have been permanent, almost from the very moment of the so-called “conquest”. This process has been accompanied by criticism and the permanent search for alternatives and proposals to rethink the relations of knowledge and power.

An early example of intellectual resistance and non-European critical discourse was represented by the Indigenous chronicler Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala, who in 1615 wrote “Nueva corónica y buen gobierno”, a work in which he not only denounced the abuses committed by the Spaniards but also presented a proposal for coexistence based on respect and the integration of indigenous knowledge. His text is a key testimony of Indigenous agencies in constructing their narratives and in the dispute for the legitimacy of expertise in the colonial context.

⁴ Such as Franz Fanon, Valentin-Yves Mudimbe, Achille Mbembe, among others.

⁵ Edward Said; Gayatri Spivak, Partha Chatterjee and others stand out.

Similarly, in the 19th century, Simón Rodríguez, known for having been Simón Bolívar's teacher, focused his analysis on the question of the direction of Latin American nations after independence. From there, he stressed the importance of recovering the "knowledge of the people" and reclaiming local traditions to construct emancipatory educational and social projects. In the 20th century, between 1931 and 1940, the pedagogical project of the Warisata School in Bolivia, promoted by Elizardo Pérez and Avelino Siñani, stood out. Their model proposed an education that provided intellectual instruction and recovered the ancestral traditions of the Aymara and Quechua indigenous peoples, integrating work and production as the fundamental pillars of learning.

Similarly, Paulo Freire (1969) reflected on the knowledge of historically silenced sectors, whom he called "the oppressed". He questioned the dynamics of epistemological domination that sought to convince these groups of their supposed ignorance and proposed the "dialogue of knowledge" as a tool for emancipation. For his part, Orlando Fals Borda (1991) put the hierarchies of knowledge under tension through participatory action research (PAR). His proposal, based on collaborative and situated work, questioned the dominant vision of the social sciences and highlighted the centrality of communities as agents of social transformation⁶. In this order, research would cease to be an exclusive exercise of the academy and become a process of co-construction with social actors.

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These examples show that Latin America has been building the foundations for a critical project that not only questions the hierarchies imposed by the West but also vindicates ancestral knowledge and practices as an alternative to modern colonial understanding. In turn, this process has promoted proposals for social transformation, demonstrating that the South is not only a place for the reception of knowledge but also for creation, reflection and epistemological re-signification.

A turning point in theoretical and epistemological deconstruction in Latin America was given a significant boost in 1992 in connection with commemorating the 500th anniversary of the 'conquest'. Intellectuals such as Aníbal Quijano, Enrique Dussel and Catherine Walsh, among others, promoted what became known as the "decolonial turn", which was based on the recognition that coloniality did not end with the independence of Latin American nations but persists as a structure of power and knowledge. Indeed, the "conquest" did not succeed in completely erasing ancestral traditions such as those of Indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants; on the contrary, they continued to be

⁶ A line of facts from Guamán Poma to Fals Borda is proposed by Marco Raúl Mejía in a lecture published on video on June 5, 2024. (International Centre, Other Voices in Education, 2024). A line of facts from Guamán Poma to Fals Borda is presented by Marco Raúl Mejía in a lecture published on video on June 5, 2024 (International Centre, Other



practised clandestinely, “behind the back” of the colonial order, but maintaining their vitality under the guise of subjugation.

The debates in the Global South not only questioned epistemological imposition but also broadened the view that knowledge does not emerge exclusively from academia or theoretical abstraction but also from lived experiences, relations with the environment and everyday acts. In this order, the task is to provoke the emergence of the submerged (Rauber, 2020), i.e., to bring to the surface that knowledge which, although it has been hidden or denied, remains alive and is expressed in practices and traditions. Thus, we are faced with a challenge to universality. What is at stake is to explore other ways of interpreting and transforming the world, to revalue the knowledge of practice as living knowledge, and from that place, to open paths towards a plural and situated understanding of human realities.

This perspective not only looks to the past but also the present, reclaiming practices as a space for creating meaning and knowledge. From this perspective, practice is where power relations are negotiated, identities are re-signified, and knowledge that challenges imposed epistemological hierarchies is generated.

Practice as a knowledge builder in Social Work

Since its origins, Social Work has placed practice as a central axis in its professional practice and the construction of knowledge. In its first formulations in the Global North, it is possible to identify, in the nascent discipline/profession, a concern for the search for alternatives in the face of specific social problems that affected individuals, groups and communities. This work was developed from territorial proximity that enabled a direct approach to diverse realities while generating the need for critical reflection on these experiences. Social Work proposed strategies, built routes, and promoted reflections to understand and contribute to the different social realities from its practical practice. From this place, the practice was configured as a space of knowledge in itself, in which action and reflection were dynamically articulated, challenging the epistemological hierarchy that subordinated the knowledge of practices to theoretical knowledge.

On the other hand, Social Work was introduced in both academic and non-academic circuits for the dissemination and circulation of its knowledge, which allowed it to

establish a dialogue with other fields of expertise and, simultaneously, with the practical needs of society⁷. One of these key spaces was the National Charity Conferences, held in 1874 in the United States. These conferences were spaces for sharing experiences, debating and contributing to decision-making. Their impact transcended the professional sphere, playing an essential role in generating opinion and circulating ideas on social issues. From this point of view, we can affirm that social work debates contributed to the development of social sciences.

Indeed, social work actively participated in the theoretical, methodological and epistemological debates that ran through the social sciences in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. An example is Jane Addams' contribution to the Chicago School of Sociology, whose origins were marked by an interest in the micro-social and an applied approach⁸. Addams not only made a critical written contribution that emphasised reflection on the relationship between theory and practice but also stood out for her feminist sensibility, and ethics guided by principles of social justice, "always within the framework of American pragmatism that she helped to found and expand" (García Dauder, 2010).⁹

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In Latin America, the debates on the relationship between theory and practice acquired a particular nuance based on two intertwined movements: the movement for the reconceptualisation of Social Work and the movement for the systematisation of experiences (Martin Barbero and Hleap Borrero, 2012).

The reconceptualisation movement in Social Work was a self-reflexive and critical process that questioned the conservative foundations of the discipline/profession on which Social Work in Latin America was founded. In this sense, it set out to denounce the influence of functional structuralism, Catholic moralism and charitable practices, which, taken together, were insufficient to respond to the challenges and complex realities on this side of the world. As a result, it prompted a reorientation from which theoretical and political alternatives more aligned with the regional context were tested

⁷ In countries such as England and the United States, social work found a home in universities, but this was not the only training scenario. For example, Mary Richmond, from the Sage Russel Foundation, gave training courses that did not necessarily lead to a university degree. Similarly, Jane Addams, even though she had a direct relationship with the Chicago School, gave lectures in different regions in academic and non-academic settings (Bermúdez Peña, 2016).

⁸ The School was initially interested in generating applied knowledge in micro-social spaces, bringing university students into settings where charitable organisations were present and introducing courses that sought to prepare them to address social problems to establish a relationship between theory and practice (Tolman, 1902).

⁹ This School changed its orientation in 1927, under the direction of William Ogburn, who argued that sociology should distance itself from any kind of social intervention, because, as a science, it should not be interested in "making a better world", but in discovering new knowledge (Ritzer, 1997; Soffer, 1982), privileging theoretical knowledge over practical knowledge.



and explored. As Quintero Londoño (2019) points out, “the old Social Work became insufficient” in the face of emerging demands, giving rise to a plurality of perspectives that inaugurated a cycle characterised by diversity and divergence. This movement not only established a break with imported hegemonic paradigms but also encouraged the search for a social worker committed to social transformations and the recognition of local specificities. Latin American Social Work thus adopted a critical approach that challenged dominant epistemologies and proposed a break with conservative paradigms.

In this context, the systematisation of experiences acquired a central role, consolidating itself as a necessary research exercise to revalue professional practices to advance in the articulation and dialogue with the social sciences and other practices, such as popular education. It is therefore relevant to examine the debates on which this discussion was based and which positioned the systematisation of experiences as a way of constructing knowledge in Social Work by recovering the understanding of practices.

To this end, we have opted for a two-pronged historical approach. Firstly, we approached the reflections of two pioneers of Social Work, Octavia Hill and Mary Richmond, considering that their contributions laid the foundations for thinking about the research-action articulation from reflection on and from practice. Secondly, we explore the debates in Latin America, focusing particularly on the publications of the journal “Hoy en el servicio social” during the reconceptualisation process. We highlight the role played by this publication in the dissemination of key ideas at that time. In particular, we recover the contributions of Herman Kruse, whose reflections were fundamental in promoting the systematisation of experiences as a research exercise within Latin American Social Work.

Octavia Hill: Reflection from Practice

Although we do not find in Octavia Hill’s work a reflection on practice as we understand it today, we can identify in her approaches an early effort to understand poverty in nineteenth-century industrial England through direct intervention. Her reflections *on* practice offer a perspective on how specific sectors of society at the time understood and tackled various social problems, setting a precedent for constructing knowledge from practice.¹⁰

Octavia Hill’s work developed in the context of profound inequalities, especially in the urban context of 19th-century England. From her practice, she constructed a model

¹⁰ She shared the same geographical and historical context with Marx and Engels. And although with different views and aims, their approaches developed in parallel. While Engels documented the situation of the working class in England from a structural viewpoint, highlighting the contradictions of capitalism, Hill aligned herself with Victorian reformist ideas, understanding poverty as a result of individual character, advocated direct action and documented

of intervention that combined improving the housing conditions of “the poor”¹¹ with an educational-moralising approach. Her proposal not only sought to transform the physical conditions of the settlements through the construction of community spaces such as schools and parks but also promoted an idea of reform based on values such as discipline, thrift and sobriety, based on religious principles that were expected to be “transmitted” through the example and “advice” of volunteers, who carried out an educational task. For Hill, it was essential to establish a close and long-lasting bond between the volunteer, who used home visits as part of his strategy, and the beneficiary, based on trust to foster autonomy.

In this sense, her work offers an early reflection on practice as a means to understand and guide action from a meticulous organisation of social aid, combining material reform and moral reform (Bermúdez Peña, 2016).

Hill asked volunteers to systematically record information, including a detailed description of the assistance mechanisms, as well as limitations and errors that could compromise the effectiveness of the process. Therefore, she considered it necessary to train volunteers to observe, document and analyse the action. The planning of assistance, the administration of resources, and the articulation of efforts between official institutions and charitable organisations were other pillars of her work. She also adopted “scientific charity” as the guiding principle of her actions. This approach argued that aid should be based on “objective” scientific knowledge – science and reason – and not on “sentimentality” as a way of combating “indiscriminate charity” (Holmes, 1896, in JAMA Network, n.d.). According to this approach, if all social reformers united and their ideas were scientifically and rigorously examined, it would be possible to determine social laws accurately, allowing for science-based social reform and effective control of social processes.¹²

Hill took her reflections beyond the practical sphere; the lecture “*The importance of helping the poor without alms*”, which she presented to the Association for the Promotion of Social Science in Bristol in 1869, shows this and highlights her interest in establishing a dialogue with the nascent social sciences. Direct management in the

¹¹ We refer to ‘the poor’ as the term of the time, but we assume that it relates to impoverishment and impoverished people, which is why we will use the latter term at some points.

¹² For some authors, the idea of “scientific charity” was a way of covering up eugenic actions, not only because they promoted the control of populations considered “problematic”, but also because through the cloak of science, they sought to legitimise social exclusion. This debate is particularly relevant in the context of the late 19th and early 20th century, “They did not want to see those poor unfortunate souls suffering in the squalor of the streets and in the asylums (...), with the sole purpose of eliminating the defective classes from society so that they could not procreate. The Charity Organisation Societies wanted to isolate the defective class in asylums to prevent them from “reproducing” (Stuhler, 2020, para 2).

territories, home visits, and contact with families reflected her conviction to understand local realities to intervene more effectively. However, her work was not without its critics. She was questioned for her limited focus on the administration and distribution of aid, without addressing the structural causes of poverty or proposing strategies to transform the conditions that generated it. Thus, although her proposal contributed to the professionalisation of social work, her approach remained anchored in a welfare model with a strong moralising component.

Reflection on and from Mary Richmond's Practice

After the home visit, you go out thinking about the letters you want to write, the phone calls you want to make, the visits you have to make to other parts of the city, etc. However, you have to back to the office, after making several visits related to other cases, and all that has, to some extent, faded from your mind.

The only way to get good results is to systematise the information obtained in the first interview, to retain the feeling you had when you left the house, and to set immediately into action. (Richmond, 1917)

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After the home visit, you go out thinking about the letters you want to write, the phone calls you want to make, the visits you must make to other parts of the city, etc. However, you have to return to the office after making several visits related to different cases, and all that has, to some extent, faded from your mind. The only way to get good results is to systematise the information obtained in the first interview, retain the feeling you had when you left the house and set the action in motion immediately (Richmond, 1917).

Mary Richmond was an active participant in the National Charity Conferences of the United States, which had been held annually since 1874. At the 1891 conference, Richmond presented a short paper. She noted that much of her work involved reading and analysing volunteer and visitor reports, articulating the charity's work. This enabled her to understand how the volunteers operated on the ground, the issues they identified, and the strengths and difficulties in their work, which coincided with Hill's work. Richmond highlighted issues that she felt were right and urged collaborative working. She insisted on efficient resource management.

At the 1907 Conference, Mary Richmond presented a dissertation on “the friendly visit”, emphasising its importance as a strategy for generating links between subjects from different realities. Her reflections were based on correspondence with 60 visitors from 12 cities who shared their experiences. Richmond emphasised that the friendly visit should not be understood as an intrusion into the lives of families but as an accompaniment in the search for solutions to crises, always under confidentiality and respect. She also stressed that this exercise not only contributed to the well-being of the families served but also promoted the personal growth of the visitors. She suggested that volunteers, in addition to contact with the families, should connect with the neighbourhood and the city, suggesting a context analysis of particular conditions. She also stressed the need for training courses and the creation of training schools. Finally, she noted the importance of strengthening the training of visitors by creating specialised courses and schools to qualify their work.

We can see in Richmond the first traces of a reflection on practice, which is nourished by the “voices” of the visitors and enriched by the author’s interpretation of her own experience. Richmond sets out what she considers to be the qualities needed to be an effective volunteer. There is an effort to transcend personal experience and engage in dialogue with others. In these early dissertations, she does not explicitly link practice and theoretical knowledge. This link is visible in the *Social Diagnosis* (1917). In this work, we can see more clearly how the author reflected on her practice in dialogue with theoretical knowledge.

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Richmond’s first exercise was to make explicit her place of enunciation as a social worker, her motivations and concerns, and the “behind the scenes” of the publication. She highlighted the relevance of a comparative work based on case experiences using social workers’ accounts. This suggests broadening her perspective and, in a way, a reflection on collective practices. She also reviewed authors from different disciplines (medicine, history and applied psychology) who offered complementary perspectives to her proposal. In this sense, she affirmed that Social Work relied on external frameworks and had its approaches, positioning itself as an autonomous and reflexive discipline (Richmond, 1917, p.74).

Thus, we can see key moments in the methodological process:

1-Gathering accounts of practice: Richmond asked a group of social workers for brief descriptions of their methods and experiences in making decisions and defining a treatment plan (1917, p.27).

2-Formation of a research team: hired two experienced social workers (one in family work and one in medico-social), who analysed reports. According to Richmond, the purpose was to “discover” best practices in social work (1917 p.28).

3-Interviews with social workers: In addition to reviewing reports, they conducted interviews with other colleagues linked to medico-social entities or dedicated to the care of minors (1927, p.28), which enriched the written documents.

4-Editing and reviewing reports: A small number of reports were edited and used by teachers at conferences for academic purposes. They were also subject to peer review. She clarified that measures were taken to preserve confidentiality (1927, p.29).

5-Brief statistical analysis: Richmond acknowledged the limitations of statistical treatment but pointed out its importance as an approximation, which allows us to observe a complementary view and a commitment to methodological integration, albeit incipient, between the quantitative and the qualitative, with all the potential that may derive from this.

In this process, we also note a perspective of complementarity between practical experience, data systematisation and reflective analysis, which somehow manages to position Social Work as a discipline capable of generating knowledge in a process that articulates research and intervention. For the author, the practice of social work requires not only practice and theoretical knowledge but also a “strong personality”. From her perspective, the method should not ignore the individuality of the social worker, which leads her to reflect on a triad at the moment of action: practice, theory and individuality. On the other hand, she stressed the importance of diversifying sources of information and stated that trade unions and co-workers can play an underestimated role. In this sense, she seemed to promote a broad and contextualised view. She said that while the evidence gathered can be used to confirm or refute theories, it is a creative act far from being a mechanical activity.

Although incipient, it is possible to identify in this work several features that we now associate with the systematisation of experiences. Firstly, Richmond treats practice as a



source of knowledge, provided that the social worker's reflective exercise accompanies her action and that sources are diversified. Secondly, she stresses the importance of reviewing theoretical sources and exploring the views of specialists, as well as the willingness to receive criticism.

Although their perspective includes diverse voices (accounts from social workers, specialists and other collaborators), the voices of the recipients of the actions are notably absent, being limited to the exchange between practitioners and academics.

We want to highlight how, in these two pioneers of Social Work, we find an early reflection from and on practice, which leads us to suggest that since its origins, reflection on practice has been relevant in the configuration of the discipline-profession. However, the criticisms of their work show that, in some way, they reinforced a moralising approach to poverty. We, therefore, wonder to what extent, in addition to responding to social needs, their views contributed to legitimising forms of social control of populations, which contrasts with the turn taken by the Systematisation of Experiences in Latin America. Indeed, while Hill and Richmond had institutional hierarchies as a framework for action, in Latin America, systematisation became a critical exercise in the vindication of popular knowledge, promoting a situated and transformative reading of Social Work.

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The systematisation of experiences in Social Work from Latin America

During the reconceptualisation movement, the debate on the relationship between theory and practice took on new dimensions. In the 1960s and 1970s, the discussion was linked to the search for the positioning of Social Work as a discipline with its theoretical foundations and aspirations of scientificity. The systematisation of experiences was assumed as a possibility to face these tensions, understanding practice not only as a space for intervention but also as a source of knowledge. To approach this section, we have considered two scenarios: the setting on the subject which appeared in the magazine "Today in Social Service" and the approaches of Herman Kruse.¹³

¹³ Es importante señalar que para ese momento la disciplina/profesión se reconocía como Servicio Social. Por ello haremos referencia de modo indistinto a la denominación Servicio Social y Trabajo Social.



The magazine “Hoy en el servicio social”, created in 1964, was an essential stage for the approach and circulation of debates and reflections on Social Work in Latin America during the reconceptualisation.¹⁴

From its beginnings, it highlighted the exercise of systematising experiences as a relevant task in analysing and improving professional practices. For example, in issue 1, Clelia de Del Pozo, while describing systematisation as a stage in the process and understanding it as a way of organising information, presents the results as a technical-social report which, from her point of view, would contribute to decision-making. She emphasises that systematisation makes learning and recommendations for other experiences visible (De Del Pozo, 1964-1965).

In issue 4 of the journal (1965), Herman Kruse stated that one of the most significant challenges for Social Work was to systematise experiences to construct a theory of the discipline from Latin America. He said that “in our continent, the practical experience of Social Service is much greater than its theoretical elaboration” (Kruse, *Movilidad social y los cambios sociales en América Latina*, 1965), which limited the potential of Social Work. In the same way, he questioned the application of alien methods, which he considered to be of little scope in the face of the complex dynamics of Latin America. From his point of view, systematisation was not only a methodological tool but also a critical, creative process, a political and epistemological act that made it possible to generate relevant knowledge for the region, to break with imported models and to develop theoretical frameworks that reflected local realities.

Kruse’s call to systematise the experiences sought to make the discipline/profession a social science committed to the continent’s realities. The aim was for social work to respond to needs and questions and contribute to transforming social structures that perpetuate inequality.

In issue 7 (1966), Alberto Dufour summarised the ideas presented by Renee Dupont at the second Latin American regional seminar on Social Service held in Montevideo. Dupont proposed differentiating between research “for” and “on” Social Service. She saw research “for” as operational and focused on what needed to be done to guarantee a more scientific and practical orientation, while research “on” sought to analyse and understand what was already being done in the professional field. It is in this context

¹⁴ La revista “Hoy en el Servicio Social” fue impulsada por un colectivo comprometido con esta renovación, integrantes del grupo ECRO (Esquema Conceptual Referencial Operativo), reuniendo a profesionales que comenzaron a pensar y escribir sobre un Trabajo Social auténticamente latinoamericano. La revista jugó un papel crucial en la difusión de nuevas formas de entender y practicar la profesión, alejándose de modelos importados y promoviendo una perspectiva crítica y contextualizada.

that he suggests “systematising isolated and little-known experiences” (Dufour, 1966), understanding it as a mode of research “on”.

In issue 9 (1967), Dupont expanded on his proposals, pointing out that his objective was to awaken “the spirit of inquiry in the new generations of professionals” (Dupont, 1967), encouraging them to carry out sustained research to broaden their reflection. Dupont, taking as a reference the systematisation of experiences in the United States, highlighted the achievements of the discipline on that side of the continent and recognised the limitations faced by Latin America in reaching those levels of reflection: “systematising experiences, as has been done in the United States, requires a large number of them, developed over long periods and duly recorded, and we are only just accumulating them” (Dupont, 1967). This is relevant, as it shows that the systematisation of experience has been present in the development of the discipline/profession.

In issues 10-11 (1967), Seno Cornely emphasised the need for systematisation at the regional level and proposed the creation of a commission of technicians to study the conditions of our continent, to guide the systematisation of experiences and advance in the elaboration of a Latin American theory of Social Service. Like Kruse, he believed in the search for his theory through the systematisation of local practices, overcoming dependence on external models.

Although the systematisation of experiences in Latin America represented an advance in the recognition of situated knowledge, it also faced criticism. In some cases, it has been pointed out that its narrative nature could generate fragmented knowledge that is difficult to generalise (Jara, 2018). It is also necessary to reflect on how systematisation has been used to validate experiences without profoundly reflecting on the power relations that permeate Social Work. How can we ensure that systematisation documents practice and generates critical and transformative knowledge?

Herman Kruse: systematisation of experiences and theory building

Kruse (1972) reviewed studies that considered the theory-practice relationship in the Social Service. For the author, this reflection had begun 25 years earlier in the United States; at the time of his reflection, it was just beginning to develop in Latin America, partly due to the impetus of the International Solidarity Institute (ISI), financed by the German Konrad Adenauer Foundation. This institute was present in the region

between 1966 and 1969. Initially, it sought to promote the exchange of experiences between German and Latin American social workers. Still, it later supported the reconceptualisation process, considering it a “movement worthy of encouragement”, given its search for emancipation from European and North American influences and the construction of its methodology oriented towards the production of social change. Thus, the ISI invited social workers from the region to systematise their experiences, with “Fieldwork as a source of theory in Social Work”¹⁵ as a reflective axis.

Kruse pointed out that in North America, national social work has identified that social work builds theory from practice by systematising experiences. He highlighted Dupont, Vera R. Holz and the Araxá Document (1967), which, in his view, represented a collective effort of theorising in reconceptualisation. He stressed that critical analysis of practice could be the best way to reconstruct Social Work theory. He called for a writing exercise and, in that sense, drew attention to figures in reconceptualisation who, although internationally prominent, had not written books.

Conclusions

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In the brief historical overview presented in this article, we show that Social Work, since its origins, has had a disposition to reflect on and from practice. This has allowed it to construct knowledge from a different place than that set out in the hegemonic paradigm imposed by the emergence of the social sciences in the West, which subordinated practice to theory. Social Work faced epistemological tensions that led it to be relegated and subalternised by opting for the knowledge of practice in dialogue with theoretical knowledge. However, this option and the use of mechanisms for documenting, analysing and reflecting on and from practice allows us to observe a conception that does not fragment knowledge of action. Recognising this disposition towards the construction of knowledge does not mean ignoring the aspirations of social control and moralising approaches to action.

Now, the Aristotelian notion of *phronesis*, as a mode of practical wisdom acquired in coexistence with others and oriented towards the common good, allows us to identify in practice a way of knowing, which was not valued in its epistemic dimension in the West, as is also shown by more contemporary works such as those of Bourdieu and De Certeau.

¹⁵ This was the same name as the 1971 seminar in Ambato, Ecuador, which was also supported by the ISI. For some authors, this seminar represented a milestone in the discussion because it represented a break with the Pan-American congresses held previously and because it brought together social workers from all over Latin America to present the systematisation of their experiences and to reflect on their theoretical potential (Fallas Jimenez, 2023).



Although it is clear that the systematisation of experiences has been an exercise that has been present since the origins of the discipline/profession in Latin America, it took a particular turn within the framework of the reconceptualisation movement. Indeed, unlike its development in the North, in which systematisation was linked to the search for technical and administrative efficiency, in Latin America, it was assumed to be a critical exercise in the construction of knowledge committed to local realities and social transformation. Authors such as Herman Kruse and the debates in the journal *Hoy en el Servicio Social* show this. Systematisation promoted the recovery and valorisation of professional practices and the construction of interpretative frameworks of its own, putting tension on the dominant epistemologies favouring positivist and external approaches. Thus, it became a political act of democratisation of knowledge and an exercise in resistance to imported theoretical models, participating in social science debates, articulation with practices such as Popular Education, and actively participating in social processes of various kinds.

In this order of ideas, Social Work in Latin America proposed a different understanding of the relationship between knowledge and action. In this process, the systematisation of experiences established bridges between theory and practice, becoming a space of articulation between research and intervention. Systematisation from this perspective reaffirms the need for situated, committed epistemologies and dialogue with social actors.

In short, the construction of knowledge in Social Work has been a continuous and situated process, which starts from practice and returns to it in an exercise of re-signification. From the initial philosophical reflections to the contributions of the Latin American and Global South, this journey highlights the value of practices as a source of knowledge capable of transforming both the discipline/profession and the concrete social realities. Reflections on practice and local expertise are intertwined with a political stance vis-à-vis power structures. Kruse proposed constructing knowledge by breaking with colonial hierarchies by reclaiming practice as a place of knowledge.

As contemporary debates on epistemologies of the South question Western modes of knowledge production, Social Work is challenged to engage in dialogue with these perspectives without losing sight of its situated character and its commitment to social intervention.

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Author biography

Claudia Bermúdez Peña. PhD in Social Sciences, Universidad Nacional General Sarmiento, Argentina. Master in Popular Education, Universidad del Valle. Social Worker, Universidad del Valle, Colombia. Currently, Professor, School of Social Work, Universidad del Valle.

E-mail: claudia.bermudez@correounivalle.edu.com

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7313-9327>



ARTICLE

The emergence of social visitors in Chile 1925-1940: Historical memory of ideology and utopia

El surgimiento de las visitadoras sociales en Chile 1925-1940: Memoria histórica de ideología y utopía

Ingrid Alvarez Osses¹

Catholic University of Temuco, Chile..

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I dedicate this work to my father, Luis Armando Alvarez Inzunza. ²

Abstract

The present historical memory work deals with the emergence of social visitors in Chile that exposes the path from charity to social assistance from 1925 to 1940. In this sense, it is contextualised historically, highlighting the relevance of the labour movement and the pauperistic social, political and economic conditions in the social question. For the same, a theoretical debate is made with different Latin American authors on the history of social work that makes ideology visible. Subsequently, the construction of the first social service schools in Chile exposed the different areas that have opened up to history since the 1920s and the social visitors' different social processes and economic and political memories. Criticism of palliative social service is considered in the development of the same history, values such as social justice, the responsibility, educational role and visibility of social visitors on the devaluation of life in the opposite direction to the economic

Keywords:
historical
memory; social
assistance;
ideology; utopia

¹Contact: Ingrid Alvarez Osses, Chile ✉: ingridal2009@gmail.com

²To my father, for all your support in the process of my thesis, *Contextos sociohistóricos del trabajo social chileno 1925-2008* desde la hermenéutica de Paul Ricoeur
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reason of the social question. It is anticipated that the visitors will be tense with this context and powerful in their social criticism.

Subsequently, it dialogues with the perspectives of ideology in Ricoeur and Marx, giving an account of the social imaginary and the relevance of utopia to the re-signification of social work. To deconstruct social work from the unthought, the utopia should inevitably be based on the sound of social justice in the creative principles of the historical, social and political world and not in its reproduction.

Resumen

El presente trabajo de memoria histórica trata del surgimiento de las visitadoras sociales en Chile que expone el trayecto de la beneficencia a la asistencia social de 1925 a 1940. En este sentido, se contextualiza históricamente, destacando la relevancia del movimiento obrero y las paupérrimas condiciones sociales, políticas y económicas en la cuestión social. Por lo mismo, se hace un debate teórico con diferentes autores latinoamericanos sobre la historia del trabajo social que visibilizan ideología. Posteriormente, se expone la construcción de las primeras escuelas de servicio social en Chile, las diferentes áreas que se abren al alero de la historia desde los años 20 y cómo los diferentes procesos sociales, políticos y económicos van marcando la memoria histórica de las visitadoras sociales. Se pondera la crítica al servicio social paliativo en el desarrollo de la misma historia, los valores como la justicia social, la responsabilidad, el rol

Palabras Clave:
memoria
histórica;
asistencia social;
ideología; utopía

Introduction

Memory questions the conditioning of truth that has reduced the human being only to precariousness. A conditioning that, according to Lévinas (1977), is linked to Modernity imprisoned within itself. Within social work, it is significant to rework memory and question ourselves to illuminate paths towards the resignification of the profession (Alvarez, 2008); we have a journey, a history dense in historical and social experiences that provides us with the foundational basis for working towards utopia, both in the theory of knowledge and in praxis.

In this sense, it can be seen that the social visitors, from the beginning in 1925, held a critical configuration to the ideology of the status quo and the socio-economic conditions. Thus, the relevance of being constituted in history from practice, in everyday life, assuming the complexity of social and material relations in the social question is exposed. The profession's historical development is inalienable from the very dynamics of the social and political reality demanded by the workers' movement in relation to human dignity at the end of the 19th century. The class problem permeates the historical development of Karl Marx.

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On the other hand, according to Ricoeur (2000), historical memory is considered as presence, absence and anteriority. According to the above, "historical reflection in social work from this perspective implies generating questions about the encounters between past and present" (Carballeda, 2006, p.9), updating the present from memory towards utopian becoming.

Background

With the Industrial Revolution in 1760, the emergence of the proletariat changed the political and social scenario due to exploitation and capitalism. Subsequently, with the French Revolution in 1789, there was a social upheaval in Europe in the face of the privileges exposed by the precarious sectors of Modernity. Then, in 1891, *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII's encyclical on the situation of workers, appeared. This encyclical concerns the conditions of workers, their rights to organise in trade unions, their dignity as human beings, and a call for the elites to collaborate and be more aware of the significant abuses towards the workers.

The end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century was when the social uprising of the exploited and neglected sectors emerged in Chilean history from the workers' movement, revealing a political, historical and social situation built on inequality, profit and oppression of the workforce. In Chile, Recabarren talks about the exploitation of workers.

I also want to speak of this progress and these greatnesses, but you will allow me to put them in their proper place and to bring to light all the miseries which are forgotten or hidden or which because they are too commonplace, we do not bother about them (1910, p.1).

The immorality of the bourgeois class for Recabarren (1910) consisted not only in being part of the capitalist order that maintained the misery of the working class over time but also in the emptiness of not recognising moral responsibility. This crisis will lead to essential changes in many aspects, ranging from everyday life to the very conformation of states (Carballeda, 2007, p.37). Jorge Barriá (1971) calls the period 1909-1925 "The Heroic Period" because of the splendour of the workers' movement.

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At the end of the First World War, there was a crisis from 1919 to 1921, which further eroded the national economy (inflation, balance of payments), resulting in unemployment for workers in all sectors, but especially for people working in the saltpetre industry; the national budget was destabilised, causing prices to rise. In 1920, Arturo Alessandri Palma was elected president, and the middle class became a reference point for power. On the other hand, the massacres of workers in San Gregorio in 1921 and La Coruña in 1925 further tarnished the conflict of social inequality that was experienced in the "social question".

The origins of Chilean and Latin American social work date back to this period, when an effort was made to move towards professionalisation in social work. In Chile, in 1925, the first school of social work, Doctor Don Alejandro del Río School, was created, the first in Latin America. The areas of work in the beginning were paralegal and paramedical (Aylwin et al., 2004), starting in 1930 with prison work. This turbulent decade in which social work emerged is inescapable for a historical understanding of the profession.

To paraphrase Carballada (2007), in the origins of social work, from those years onwards, we find a new element: social policy. This will appear, in principle, as a mediator³ between the social inequalities produced by capitalism. However, from Ricoeur's (2001) ideology, there is no neutrality, and the Chilean state will have a great weight on the repressive and remedial context towards the unfinished demands of the people. For the same reason, Netto (2002), Parra (2004), Iamamoto (2006), Montañó (2007), Solyszko et al., (2018), among others, affirm that the emergence of social visitors and their advancement is intimately linked to the development of capitalism. Esquivel (2012) also highlights this context of the social question and concern for impoverished sectors in the beginnings of social service in Europe. In the United States, "Mary Richmond (...) insisted on the creation of a school for social workers. The COS realised this idea in 1898 with the creation of the New York School of Philanthropy" (Di Carlo, 2011, p.49).

The world gave a glimpse of a response through laws, reforms, encyclicals, social policies, etc. In Argentina, in the 1930s, "the logic of confluence of forces and interests is expressed in the decisions, in the rules, in the power structures of the state [...] in that process, decisions have a high ideological component; therefore, the separation between economics and politics is a central strategy" (Rozas Pagaza, 2018, p.46). Morales (2015) also emphasises the social and economic context at the beginning of the social work profession and the acute crisis in Chile at the start of the century.

So, 1925 was characterised by this deep worldwide economic conflict that increased subhuman conditions.

For all these reasons, the researcher agrees with Netto's (2002) definition that the expression 'social question' is an objectification of conservative thought, which reduces what are structural problems of the bourgeois order to a depoliticised expression because it sidesteps the responsibilities of inequality and naturalises socio-economic and socio-political issues, avoiding social transformation (Alvarez, 2008, p.10).

Illanes (2006) highlights the school and the church as an articulator of social and material support. Barrantes (2007) argues that from the 1920s to the 1950s, the institutionalisation of social work was directly linked to the crisis of the agro-export model and the oligarchic states.

³ Mediation not as neutrality

The professional must permanently make theoretical, ideological, political and ethical choices in their professional practice. These choices can open the paths to build an intervention based on values that have emancipation as a goal, recognising the subjects from a historical perspective (Parra, 2002, p.38).

According to Matus (1999), an awareness of theory and praxis should, therefore, be created that neither arbitrarily separates them nor destroys theory through the primacy of practical reason since thinking is a doing and theory is a form of praxis.

Parra (2002) criticises social work's conservative origins and professional ethics because, according to his perspective, it was parameterised in metaphysical and idealistic conceptions. Faleiros (1974) points out that ideology and science are intertwined in a unity of liberation or domination, where the object of Social Work is conceived as the social action of the oppressed and dominated man.

Alayón (2005) argues that for social work, insofar as it is a reproducer of ideology and the dominant scientific knowledge, its action is inserted within the space that the apparatus of domination grants it. "It was also a step on the road to scientificity and was very far from being an attempt at welfarist actions" (González, 2016, p.120).

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Historical memory 1925- 1940: from welfare to social assistance

In ancient times, charity was carried out through almsgiving and social aid with a strong moralistic emphasis, but in isolated events, charity was not worked in a rigorous and/or orderly manner. The theme of charity comes from the social context of the 1800s. Charity, in the words of Lucy Gómez (1995), was transferred to the municipalities with a relative persistence of welfare.

In Chile, in 1932, the Junta de Beneficencia y Salud Pública was created, which influenced the imagination of the social and political elite. The state, therefore, promoted the creation of the Junta, but the Catholic Church also encouraged the creation of charity. Nevertheless, it was the same state that was authoritarian and carried out the massacres of organised workers.

Thus, welfare in Chile is replaced by social assistance, requiring this change to train social visitors and provide them with more and better technical tools, enabling them to work effectively with the social reality in terms of unhealthiness, overcrowding

and social rights. Illanes (2010) also highlights the Beneficencia as an adjunct to the construction of the welfare state in Chile. The idea of the state was to contribute to social stability and control after the laws passed in 1924, which responded to the social and political predicaments in which the labour movement had placed the Chilean state since the end of the 19th century. Historically, the laws and social policy have not been able to provide a comprehensive solution to the status quo.

Paraphrasing Aylwin et al. (2004)⁴, it is acknowledged that the social laws passed during the 1924 dictatorship were the platform for developing the social policies that were later generated in the country. So,

The Compulsory Insurance Fund was born out of a law passed in 1924, in which employers have to insure their workers against the risks of sickness, disability, old age and death. The institution receives contributions from employers, workers, and the state (Aylwin et al., 2004, p.126).

The political and legal context of the social visitors in the field of social policies, according to Gómez Michel (1995), led to the approval of social laws, such as workers' insurance, employment contracts, trade union organisations, environmental health, etc. However, despite their social benefits, they were palliative measures since the economic and social problems persisted.

In this sense, Tocornal Luz (1941), quoted by Aylwin et al. (2004), points out that "it is no exaggeration to say that this is an impoverished country and that the exploitation of the wealth represents a great and constant effort. A set of laws partially compensates this environmental scarcity" (p.124).

Likewise, the constitution of 1925 and the laws passed in 1931 forged strategic assistance from the liberal state, with all its normalisation and order, to moderate the power of the workers, so relevant to the historical and social memory of Chile, which brought to light the social discontent before the social question of the 1930s, which is why this was a period in which there was already talk of prevention in social service. According to Aylwin et al. (2004), this context makes visible an essential achievement in the first stage of social service, such as social legitimisation, which influences the outside world where the profession is in demand.

⁴ I would like to thank Professor Teresa Matus for her influence on my training and her generosity, in 2008, with some books such as, *La reinención de la memoria indagación sobre el proceso de profesionalización del Trabajo Social Chileno 1925-1965* (The reinvention of memory, an enquiry into the process of professionalisation of Chilean Social Work 1925-1965).

In this context, in the institutions and the 1924 laws themselves, there are notions of seeing the other as lacking; although they want to see beyond that, they speak of incapable and misguided. For example, Leo Cordeman (1927) speaks of abnormality, as this situation is naturalised from his interpretation. Although there is an attempt to construct another social service, there are influences of a social imaginary of paternalism, moral superiority and distinction with the people who live in social and material circumstances that are not given but have been historically constructed. In this sense, immense inequality is a historical construction based on the relations between social classes.

However, from the statutes of the Asociación Chilena de Asistencia Social in 1931, it is possible to see the importance of the progress made. In addition, they worked with the General Labour Inspectorate on issues of unemployment and social service in the 1930s and even managed to put forward a discourse on the responsibility of the government of the day about the social problems of injustice that the workers and peasants were experiencing. That is to say, the social visitors, in the midst of the social question, were already proposing responsibility and situated work that would make the complexity of the historical context visible to achieve a whole life. On the other hand, Illanes (2006) exposes the ‘good behaviour’ sought by the social visitors in the village in the 1930s, as well as the social disciplining and the checking of the advances in family issues for judges and courts. Still, there is much more to work for order, the visible and the demonstrable since the social visitors are constituted as subjects through historical development. In the course of social interventions, they build up a critical approach to reality.

Unemployment is interpreted as a political problem beyond the actions of the social visitors, but the discourse is not so much problematised as the professional praxis. In the work of González (2010), the work of the social worker as a mediator and supervisor of the laws to fulfil their function through home visits because there was an unjust system where it was necessary to support families and children in situations of vulnerability and poverty, can be glimpsed.

The concept of visitation embodied this historical dialectic. From our point of view, it was the articulating concept of the first schools. It expressed in them the avant-garde character of a social action that wanted to be more than “mere charity” and, at the same time, reproduced assistance and assumed a passive and dependent subject. (González, 2010, p.24)

In this context, social conditions from the end of the 19th century onwards led to devastating plagues and social repression: smallpox, typhus, venereal diseases and others. Health problems were due to an inordinate extent to the overcrowding of the proletariat, the poor conditions in the tenements and social inequality. Social welfare was central to prevention and social health education under the para-medical approach of the first Doctor Alejandro Del Rio School, established in 1925. The orientation of the profession, which was initially focused on pathology (deficiency), is not surprising, as its founder was a bacteriologist. It is then essential to link certain circumstances that led to the birth of social service in Chile in 1925, such as Dr Alejandro's experience abroad, so much so that he returned with the slogan "health and assistance", and the State establishing the Ministry of Hygiene. Likewise, "the directors of the first Chilean schools of Social Service were *imported* directly from Europe"⁵ (Morales, 2015, p.23). In a modern context where experience had been gained beforehand, "in 1919 the New York School of Social Service had been created and in Europe the first school had been opened in Amsterdam in 1899" (González, 2010, p.24).

Subsequently, in 1929 in Chile, the Elvira Matte de Cruchaga School was founded, attached to the law school, and its vision was para-legal, with a welfare and apostolic perspective. For this reason, the first guidelines of social assistance in Chile were based on the para-medical and para-legal, as shown in the historical works by Aylwin et al. (2004), Illanes (2006), and González (2010) giving an account of the orientations of the schools that emerged at this time.

On the other hand, the socio-economic conditions of the workers' movement remained unresolved, and in the crisis of 1929, they were looking for better job opportunities in Santiago. Illanes (2006) criticises the social workers of the 1930s, such as Adriana Izquierdo, about their economic vision of the international and national crisis. However, what the social worker does is recognise the importance of the world crisis, unemployment, and the volatility of the national economy in the face of national resources, which shows that there is a sensitivity and concern for workers without work. Adriana Izquierdo criticises this and calls it unemployment insurance.

According to García Letelier (2004), the first quarter of the last century from which Chilean social welfare emanated was, from the outset, a response to the needs of the time. However, the social and political elite of the 1920s decided on needs, priorities and demands. The middle class flourished in public activities, which was closely linked to the country's agro-industrial bourgeoisie. In the 1930s, social workers overcame

⁵ Paulina Morales refers to Jeny Bernier, Leo Cordemans and Luise Jörinssen, among other directors of social service schools in Chile.

obstacles, among them the ability to make the society of the time aware of the social and material conditions and the profession of the social workers and their role.

On the other hand, about the reality and ideality in social work, which García Letelier (2004) studies, it is understood that there has been a colonisation of social service training since the origins of the profession in Chile and since the ideas and theoretical underpinnings were taken from other realities in developed countries, such as Belgium and the United States, underestimating the knowledge of Latin American roots.

In the 1930s, social service was active in railway companies, industry and mining, where social welfare work was carried out, as well as in family affairs, caring for workers, nurseries and home visits. It is no coincidence that from 1930 onwards, social work opened up areas in industry, mining and business, as the state, in this context, took on an entrepreneurial role with a clear industrialising role, and in 1939, the Corporación de Fomento de la Producción, CORFO, was created (Alvarez, 2008).

Angélica Errázuriz (1938), quoted by Aylwin et al. (2004), points out that one of the social problems in Chile was the painful economic condition of the peasants, a problem no less severe because of the poor distribution of land. In this context of the late 1930s, an area of work opened up for social service. María Quiroga (1946), quoted by Aylwin et al. (2004), mentions that social service was established in the countryside in February 1937. In this, social service played a transcendental role in the social history of Chile by raising awareness of the rights of farm workers, labourers and day labourers at the time.

Congresses are essential for disseminating and thinking about the profession's work. González (2010) highlights the importance of internships, participation in congresses and the journal of Servicio Social Chile. In the First Pan-American Congress (1945), cited by Aylwin et al. (2004), the extension of rural social service was seen as indispensable for dealing with the peasant problem; a system of subsidies for families in rural sectors was proposed, the farm worker was recognised in their vital function, and the land was made visible as a "human problem", discussing its use as a commodity.

In this sense, Camacho (1934), quoted by Aylwin et al. (2004, p.150), mentions that,

"So far, our work has been only palliative and curative; we have done little preventive and constructive work. We cannot be satisfied with our work as long as it does not result in alleviating the needs of railway workers, as has been the case so far, but also in the effective improvement of their moral, material and social standard of living."

For her part, Hott (1931), quoted by Aylwin et al. (2004, p.151), points out: “Materially it has been an overwhelming task to walk the streets [...] the outskirts of the city, with bad paving, bad addresses, but it should be noted that this task is not one of those that can most satisfy the soul of a social visitor, because it is not by the basic principle of this science. To remedy a pressing need but not to fix a situation is just a poor palliative”.

There is a recognition of the socio-economic context that is intrinsically permeated by a critique of mitigating factors.

Social service in the 1930s and 1940s persevered from the farms and fields to transfigure and broaden employers’ consciences, even before laws were passed to improve the situation of farm workers. There is a constant concern for injustice and a critique of the social structure within the profession. This work is a precursor to raising awareness of essential processes, such as agrarian reform. Although the political imaginaries are not the same, there is a passionate effort on the part of social workers to work in poor sectors; there is a utopia of building another horizon in the face of social injustice.

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As early as 1945, social workers were already working and supporting organisations in the countryside. Amid the developmental context, and with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) already established in Latin America, the principles of justice that underpinned the ethics of social service in the 1940s and 1950s were revived. The social workers went to work in the fields, and there were critical ethical convictions in praxis. In theory, they were influenced by metaphysical ethics, but in practice, they were shaped by the material reality of the country.

Aylwin et al. point out that the documents speak of ethics in a professional-social intervention that refers to principles such as respect for the other, the challenge of a job well done, generating mechanisms for participation, and the safeguarding and privacy of confidential information. Thus, “ethics is at stake not only in the behaviour of professionals but also in the approaches and forms of research and social intervention” (2004, p.385).

On the one hand, in the 1940s and 1950s, ethics and politics were related to helping to solve problems and, on the other hand, in raising awareness, ethics built on social and material contradictions between ideology and utopia.

Lucia Sepúlveda (2004), cited by Aylwin et al. (2004), provides the rationale,

When Doña Luz Tocornal gave me ethics classes, she taught me how to approach social work to achieve respect for rights, translating into better socio-economic and cultural conditions. The ethics of social work are humanist, secular and universal. These values I was taught [...] have been clearly expressed in the fight against social injustice (p.387).

Indeed, it is a context heavily influenced by social repression from the state and its institutions (Videla to the communist party), but the courage of the social workers is light in the fading dusk; there is a commitment and an ethic that will unfold later in transformation in the 50s and 60s, in work with communities. In this way, history is understood in this text as a non-linear process of reconstructing experiences, memories, and imaginaries in a non-obvious way.

Education was a concern of the social context in the 1940s. Compulsory Primary Education places an emphasis on the profession of social education with which it intervenes; even the motto of President Pedro Aguirre Cerda was to govern to educate, for a whole context towards social development:

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With the idea of creating awareness of the need for the services of social workers and the great demand that arose, President Pedro Aguirre Cerda, on 14 May 1940, issued a Supreme Decree, using which the Schools of Social Service of Santiago, Concepción and Temuco, dependent on the Ministry of Public Education, were organised (Gómez Michea, 1995, p.10).

In this context of the 1940s, the social problems of overcrowding persisted, and President Gonzáles Videla implemented an “Emergency Housing Committee”. As Aylwin et al. (2004) point out, this was presided over by Mayor José Santos Salas, in collaboration with the social worker Adriana Doroch de Vergara, whose mission was to build houses with a minimum of hygiene conditions in a short period and with the smallest budget. Of course, the lackadaisical declaration of normativity and imitation is symbolic violence in the social service of the time. Still, the social workers also had an ethical relationship with others that was conducive to greater justice and dignity for people.

Ideology and utopia⁶

The distortion of knowledge of reality is an essential component, a first basis for situating ideology. Ricoeur (2001) argues that the concept of ideology in Marx (2005) places the autonomy attributed to the products of consciousness under suspicion, but deformation is not the only phase. This is why reality must have a specific idea of coherence with the economy, with the materiality of labour and who produces it. This situation can be seen in the emergence of the social workers in Chile in 1925 because there is a questioning of reality and the socio-economic situation of workers, peasants, women, and labour itself. About historical memory, the ideas about people experiencing poverty that came from the elite in the 1920s will no longer be true because the critique of the social workers' social visitors reveals a different imagination regarding the situations of exploitation, materiality, the non-distribution of land in the Chilean countryside, etc.

Ricoeur (2001) proposes that the problem of ideology is not the decision between the false and the true but the deliberation on the relationship between representation and praxis, whose functions are the metaphorical, the critical distance, the historical character and the revival of practical reason. There is a deliberation from the social visitors on the social question, which has a historical character from praxis.

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Ricoeur (2001) draws on Weber and thus considers that ideology moves from deformation to legitimisation. This phase is unavoidable in all social life because others legitimise ideas. This aspect is very relevant because there is a social legitimisation of social workers; an imaginary permeated by the internal connection between ideology and praxis correlates to the integration stage. Ricoeur (2001) considers C. Geertz the integrative function he infers in social practices and processes. Thus, for Ricoeur (2001), every social practice already possesses a symbolic, never objective mediation. My experience in tenements, industries, fields, schools, and hospitals nourishes home visiting as a practice for social workers. It is a mediation but not neutral because ideology is not impartial. It is not possible, then, to understand ideology in the social service of the time without the role of mediation.

Marx (2005), in the German Ideology, alludes to that.

The production of ideas and representations of consciousness is directly intertwined with material activity (...) as the language of real life. Representations, thoughts, trade (...) as a direct emanation of its material behaviour (p.26).

In the 1844 Manuscripts, Marx (1984) alludes that alienation in labour begins by

⁶ The ideology and utopia axis is very relevant in my life. There were some years when disappointment in social work pierced my heart, but I think it is important not to stop believing despite the injustices. To recover the faith that we sowed in different collectives in Temuco with some colleagues such as Víctor Martínez, Jasna Rodríguez and so many others.



accepting the political economy without question. Thus, when the social visitors debate the economy and material circumstances amid the social question, the power against alienation emerges. Alienation goes hand in hand with being an object for Marx (1984); labour becomes an object, but also existence itself, giving power to capital and not to the life of the human being. Thus, the social visitors give power, recognition and importance to the life of those suffering, to the right that should have every worker in the industry and the estates as a vital question of existence and with a critique of the mockery of the laws. There is a de-alienation of the social visitors from labour as an object.

Ricoeur says, “Only based on a utopia – the point of view of the ideal – can we formulate critique” (2001, p.47). Therefore, there is a relationship between these concepts when the social visitors expose their critique because there is an idea of what human life and values, such as social justice, should be from a utopia of comprehensiveness with otherness. It is not an ideology of the existing; it is a utopia towards the future.

By safeguarding the roles of workers, women and peasants, the social workers in the social question were valuing life, a horizon that did not exist. That was the utopia, the unspoken in the face of the normalisation of precariousness and death.

Conclusions

According to Alayón (1989), social inequality was naturalised in the beneficence phase without deliberating the social and political system, which is considered not so assertive, as there was always criticism from the social visitors. Still, the State's context and ideology at the beginning of the 19th century did not accompany them. There is a profound questioning of the social visitors in the 1930s of the palliative social service, as Aylwin et al. (2004) report.

So, where does one go to look for these causes? Meanings and practices are influenced by each socio-historical context (Alvarez, 2008; 2009).

The memory of the social visitors teaches us about the difficulties they had, not only to work but also to agreeing with a profession that imitated expectations and did not solve the situations of the exploited sectors; there is a criticism of the social visitors to the human crudeness that produces an unhappy existence. In other words, there could be

another, fuller life. The experiences of the social workers in the social question opened up history and its challenges from the perspective of others, “recognising the subjects, from a historical perspective”, as Parra (2002) said, and not only “assumed a passive and dependent subject” (González, 2010).

In this article, the utopia of going towards another horizon in the social visitors that could solve so much misery is made visible despite not being transformed into a more contentious professional stance. There is a fissure from the praxis in the face of the normativity of such an unequal society; therefore, the social visitors held a utopian function that expands the reality and the unspoken about the reality itself. On the other hand, three axes stand out concerning historical memory between 1925 and 1940.

The ethical axis is intrinsically related to the commitment and responsibility of women social workers towards social justice: Hott (1931); Angélica Errázuriz (1938); Camacho (1934); María Quiroga (1946); Tocornal Luz (1941), among others as cited in Aylwin et al.

The epistemological axis is the de-objectification of reality from the experience of the social visitors to contribute knowledge contents that hold other ways of knowing that challenge us in the present. Epistemology in a fabric of historical and political relations can project emancipatory challenges, especially considering the failed process of the constituent assembly after the social outbreak.

The political axis is the tension and relationship between education and reality, breaking into the ideology that sustains the economic rationality of capital of inhumanity because it challenges the dominant imaginary of utopia. It would not revolve around the darkness of the ideology of domination but to create another fairer horizon for life from contradictions and utopia.

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Author Biography

Ingrid Adriana Alvarez Osses has a degree in social work, specialising in family and social development and the professional title of social worker, Universidad Católica de Temuco. Master's degree in ethics and human development from the Universidad Alberto Hurtado, awarded by the German scholarship ADVENIAT. Recognition as best graduate student of the Master in Ethics and Human Development by Dr. Pablo Salvat. Between 2010-2013 she was part of coordinating the Grupo Filosofía en Chile. She is a member of the Asociación de Filosofía y Liberación, the Asociación Gramsci, Chile and Filósofas del Sur. She is an ANID scholarship holder. She is affiliated with the

Catholic University of Temuco in the Doctorate of Intercultural Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities.

E-mail ingridal2009@gmail.com

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4547-3544>



ARTICLE

Reconceptualisation in the Argentine university: Experiences of reforms in the schools of

Reconceptualización en la universidad argentina. Experiencias de reformas en las escuelas de Servicio Social (1969-1976)

Renzo Tiberi¹

National University of Rosario, Argentina

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Abstract

This paper deals with a particular aspect of the Reconceptualisation movement in Argentina. Focusing on different areas of professional training in Social Work, it analyses the changes and transformations that took place at institutional and curricular level between the end of the 1960s and the mid 1970s, paying special attention to the curriculum reform processes. The aim is to build a broad and federal view on this phenomenon, recovering the experiences of the Schools of Social Service of Buenos Aires, Rosario, Misiones and Mendoza. This analysis is built on the knowledge accumulated so far, based on previous studies and existing academic productions. From this body of work, new contributions are proposed to enrich and broaden the understanding of the subject. As a starting point, the political and social climate of that period, in which the Reconceptualisation movement was developed, is placed. Subsequently, the

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¹Contact: Renzo Tiberi, Argentina renzotiberi4@gmail.com

influence of this movement on the processes of change that took place in the careers during those years and its link with the political events that determined the debates are investigated. Then, the main transformations that contribute to the understanding of this phenomenon are pointed out. Finally, we seek to warn about some aspects related to the interruption of Reconceptualisation, linked to the advance of conservative and anti-communist sectors within the ruling Peronism, and the arrival of the Military Dictatorship. The comparative view of these experiences is postulated as a contribution to analyse the general implications of the period on the development of different careers, to identify common points and to provide clarity on the impact of Reconceptualisation in professional training.

Resumen

El presente escrito aborda un aspecto particular del movimiento de Reconceptualización en Argentina. Poniendo la lupa en distintos espacios de formación profesional de Trabajo Social, se analizan los cambios y transformaciones que acontecieron a nivel institucional y curricular entre finales de la década 60 y mediados de los años 70, prestando puntual atención a los procesos de reformas de planes de estudios. Se busca construir una mirada amplia y federal sobre este fenómeno, recuperando las experiencias de las escuelas de Servicio Social de Buenos Aires, Rosario, Misiones y Mendoza. Esto fue posible gracias a la recuperación y análisis de trabajos elaborados por colegas sobre la temática (Melano, 2016; 2019; Rodríguez, 2016; Siede, 2015; Barrera y Fuentealba, 2012; Moljo, 2004; Pagani, 2007; Muñoa, 2020). Como punto de partida, se sitúa el clima político y social que acontece en ese periodo, en el cual se desarrolla el movimiento de Reconceptualización. Posteriormente, se indaga la influencia de dicho movimiento en los procesos de cambios que ocurrieron en las carreras durante esos años y su vinculación con los sucesos políticos que determinan los debates. Luego, se puntualizan las principales transformaciones que aportan a la comprensión de este fenómeno. Finalmente, se busca advertir sobre algunos aspectos relativos a la interrupción de la Reconceptualización, vinculado al avance de sectores conservadores y anticomunistas dentro del peronismo gobernante, y la llegada de la Dictadura Militar. La mirada comparativa de estas experiencias se postula como un aporte para analizar las implicancias generales del periodo sobre el desarrollo de las distintas carreras, identificar puntos en común y aportar claridad sobre las implicancias de la Reconceptualización en los ámbitos de formación profesional.

Palabras Clave:
reconceptualización; formación profesional; universidad; trabajo social



Introduction

Studying social work invites us to investigate and analyse the social and historical aspects that influenced its origin and development. It is about looking at the events, actors, institutions, discourses and practices that in a given context gave foundation to its processes.

To this end, this study is based on a history of the present perspective (Castel, 1997). Following Zampani et al., (2017), this approach seeks to understand the present and the future of Social Work, allowing to understand how certain practices emerged and transformed to become what they are today, identifying continuities, ruptures and key moments. Thus, it is not a matter of accumulating data, but of revealing the logic that sustains the profession's practices, its conditions, and the changes that have marked its evolution. As Castel (1997) states, it is a matter of "asking the historical material the questions that historians have not necessarily formulated, and reordering them on the basis of other categories (...) that is to say, using the data that one owes to historians, to create other narratives" (p.15).

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In the history of Argentine and Latin American Social Work we find a particular moment known as Reconceptualisation or the Reconceptualisation movement, which developed between the 1960s and 1970s. Estela Grassi (1994) describes it as a new line of rupture in the professional field that differs from the contents of traditional and technical social assistance, reconceptualising the bases of the profession towards more radicalised positions of a Latin American and anti-imperialist tinge. Following Nora Aquín (2005), we can understand this event as the expression of a disagreement, of a political criticism with the installed knowledge and with the forms of professional practice, giving rise to a questioning and – in some cases – to the removal of the theoretical and ideological perspectives that guided the intervention. For his part, Norberto Alayón (2016) highlights it as the most crucial step in the history of Latin American Social Work, defending its validity to read current debates. It is also important to mention the contributions of María Virginia Siede (2015) who warns that it was a period in which new – and diverse – professional projects were sought to be articulated in line with the competing societal projects, but without any of them being imposed as hegemonic

Considering the above, approaching Reconceptualisation is a challenge, since it is a movement that developed with significant heterogeneity and diversity. In this case, the

analysis focuses on *what happened in professional training spaces, more specifically in the schools of Social Work universities in Argentina.*² Regarding these experiences, authors such as Carina Moljo (2004), María Virginia Siede (2015) and Ana Arias (2012), among others, recover some particularities of this phenomenon at a general level, which allow us to have a broad view of the process. These authors recognise the importance of activism and student and teacher organisation in universities, highlighting that these were significant changes in academic spaces for Social Work. They also note the connection between these spaces and the Reconceptualisation movement in our country, especially with the spaces linked to the Peronist political movement (Siede, 2005).

In this order, this paper addresses an aspect that has not been fully explored so far: the reform processes of the curricula of Social Work careers that took place within the framework of the institutional transformations of their respective schools, between the late 1960s and mid-1970s, coinciding with the radicalisation and expansion of the Reconceptualisation discussions in Argentina. In addition, it aims to offer a broad view of these processes, based on the systematisation of different experiences at the national level.

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For this purpose, the experiences of careers that were – or were incorporated in those years – under the orbit of national universities are recovered. Among them, we looked into those that underwent curricular and/or institutional reforms during the period and about which there was literature produced in this regard. In addition, a broad and federal view – from different regions of the country – was taken. Thus, four relevant experiences were taken: those of schools in Buenos Aires, Rosario, Misiones and Mendoza. This was possible thanks to the recovery and analysis of works elaborated by colleagues on the subject (Melano, 2016; 2019; Rodríguez, 2016; Siede, 2015; Barrera and Fuentealba, 2012; Moljo, 2004; Pagani, 2007; Muñoa, 2020). All these works offer a particular look at each career, without establishing hierarchical connections with other processes that occurred in parallel.

The analysis of the different experiences will allow us to build a general view of these curricular reform processes, noticing similarities and connections, and reflecting how the discussions promoted by Reconceptualisation are incorporated and have an impact on the professional training proposals. All this, crossed by the

² During those years, the names of Social Assistance and Social Service remained in the training proposals of our profession. For practical purposes, in the development of this article we will use the term “Social Work” to refer to the career in a general way and the corresponding names will be taken up again in each particular case.



political effervescence generated by the national and Latin American situation as a driving force for the organisation and protagonism of university youth

In this way, the analysis will make it possible to express the close link between the ideals of Reconceptualisation and the objectives of the national and popular project for liberation, which is installed with the return of Peronism to power under the government of Héctor Cámpora. This connection is what allows, drives and orients the curricular reforms in the experiences surveyed. This close link will also be demonstrated with the sudden interruptions of these reform processes – before the coup d'état of 1976 – produced from the advance of the Peronist right wing (Besoky, 2017), represented by authoritarian, conservative and anti-communist sectors within the government.

The Argentine Reconceptualisation movement

The origin and development of the Argentine Reconceptualisation movement is framed in what Grassi (1994) refers to as the breakdown of harmony in the professional field towards the end of the 1950s. In those years, the first lines of rupture in the Social Work debate were identified, with the entry of the modernising debates and the developmentalist perspective into the profession, materialised with the creation of the Institute of Social Service in 1959, a professional bastion of the developmentalist era (Alayón, 2005). The creation of the Institute, inscribed in the need to overcome the traditional structures of Latin American society, in order to insert it on the road to development, expresses the first rupture in the professional field (Grassi, 1994). Paradoxically, this event also represents the origin of the second, since from its ranks of students and graduates will emerge the group that will drive the Reconceptualisation process in the profession.

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Following the author, it can be affirmed that this new proposal of Latin American repercussion had its origin in Argentina with the formation of the ECRO Group and the publication of the first issue of the magazine *Hoy en el Servicio Social* in 1965, edited by this group. Its members were former students of the Institute and represented a critical voice within the institution (Grassi, 1994). Although they began with a developmentalist orientation, they later moved towards more radical positions. Among the members of this group were Norberto Alayón, Ethel Cassineri, Alberto Diéguez and Juan Barreix, among others. During its development, the ECRO Group will radicalise its discussions and will establish itself as the primary spokesperson of the movement in our country. This is understandable in the heat of the political and social events that shook the world: the French May '68, the Vietnam War, the Cuban Revolution, the



national liberation movements and the African decolonisation process, among others (Servio, 2009). These events brought to the plane the possible need for transformation and boosted the liberation process of the so-called Third World countries (Arias, 2012). Hand in hand with this, the movement is nourished by the contributions of Marxism, the theory of domination and dependence, Paulo Freire's proposal of conscientisation and the postulates of the emerging Liberation Theology, among others (Alayón, 2005).

During those years, the national scenario witnessed a repressive period that began in 1966, with the coup d'état that brought General Juan Carlos Onganía to power. According to Grassi (1994), it was an authoritarian, technocratic government with a strong repressive content, guided by anti-communist, Catholic and nationalist sentiments. During his mandate, strong social control was applied, and the aim was to intervene and weaken the spaces of political and partisan organisations, such as unions and universities³. Moljo et al. (2023) note that this closure of the political scene had as a counterpart the development and strengthening of different actors in the public arena, such as trade unions, the student movement and the grassroots sectors of the Catholic Church. This is reflected in a strong process of mobilisation and popular resistance to the repression deployed by the government: "the more the spaces of popular expression were prohibited, the more radical the actions of the youth, the neighborhood militancy, the unions, the world of culture, etc., became" (2023, p.15). The social conflict will determine a turning point, weakening the dictatorship in power and generating the conditions for the subsequent democratic opening in 1973, with the return of elections. In this process, the student movement took a leading role, while the universities and training centres entered a moment of unprecedented political agitation.

Schools of Social Work in Argentina

The upheaval of this period determined a change of course in the professional debates with pronouncements on the need to reconceptualise Social Work, although from very diverse and even irreconcilable positions (Siede, 2005). In this regard, the author recovers the role of the International Catholic Union of Social Service (UCISS), which entered the debate in search of hegemonising the professional discussion and openly confronted those sectors that promoted an updating of Social Work. Thus, the discussion ranged from the most conservative positions – as represented by the UCISS – to the most progressive and radicalised positions (Siede, 2005).

Along the same lines, the ECRO group strengthens its position of rupture with the

³ This event, known as 'La Noche de los Bastones Largos' (The Night of the Long Batons), led to the arrest of many teachers and students and expressed a precise determination to weaken the spaces for student political organisation (Melano, 2019).

traditional proposal of Social Work by incorporating a perspective oriented by a political and ideological content in tune with the transformation processes taking place in the country and in the world, and reaffirming its opposition to the reformist tradition (Siede, 2015).

In this way, the debates began to spread to the areas of professional training, reaching the universities and feeding a student movement that was a protagonist in the process of resistance to the dictatorship. The first experience to be recognised is that of the Misiones School of Social Service in the city of Posadas, which, as of 1968, had come under the orbit of the National University of the Northeast after depending on the General Council of Education of the province. This career was one of the first to receive the influence of Reconceptualisation, with great prominence of the members of the ECRO Group and being the venue of the VI Jornadas Argentinas de Servicio Social held in 1972 (Siede, 2005). The author highlights this event, since it marks a change of direction in the professional debate, promoting a more explicit political linkage of the professional profile with the Latin American socio-political situation and with the process of liberation of the people, as stated in the final document of these Conferences:

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We understand that the Social Service needs to be implemented from an ideological change that leads man to rationally and critically analyze his situation, allowing him to freely decide his own destiny, from a process of participation in the popular mobilization, as an organized, solidary and self-generated expression of the people themselves that leads us towards the goal of integral development (Siede, 2005, p.15).

In 1970 Juan Barreix – member of the ECRO group – intervened in the school and promoted, as director, a reform of the curriculum. During his term of office, Barreix promoted the extension of training to four years, with the granting of a Bachelor's degree, encouraged the creation of new departments of Theoretical Research, Practical Work and Teaching Theoretical, and renewed the teaching staff by incorporating members of the group such as Norberto Alayón, Luis Fernández, Ethel Cassineri and Luis María Früm (Rodríguez, 2016).

At the same time, the School of Social Service of Rosario also underwent an institutional

change: in 1971, after having developed under the Ministry of Social Welfare of the Province of Santa Fe, the career became dependent on the National University of Rosario. At that time, the career was undergoing a reform process initiated in 1968, which aimed at introducing changes in the developmentalist matrix and extending its duration to four years. The school was then one of the academic units that had most faithfully adopted the modernising perspective in its training, aiming at a “technical” profile with knowledge and tools of the social sciences (Pagani, 2007). It is possible to observe the presence of subjects such as Community Development, Social Welfare Administration, Sociology, Social Research, Social Psychology and Social Economics, among others. In turn, the training objectives are oriented towards “planning social welfare programs”, developing potentialities to “use them for the benefit of the community” and “contributing to the formulation of social policy and national development planning” (Pagani, 2007). In this line, Muñoa (2020) also highlights in the Academic Works presented between 1968 and 1973 the presence of the Community Organisation and Development method as a recurrent tool in the intervention proposals, as well as recurrent conceptualisations around the notion of development, community and integration, as primary theoretical scaffolds.

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However, political events and the arrival of the first discussions of the reconceptualising movement began to open questions on some aspects of training. Within the framework of professional practices, there was an encounter with the subjects and experiences of the city’s popular neighbourhoods: students mobilised by the climate of the time began to learn about the reality of these sectors and became involved in the processes of community organisation. This insertion allowed the link with political militancy, as well as strong criticisms to the curricular proposals of the internships and the supervision methods (Pagani, 2007). This event reflects what Ana Arias (2012) refers to as the process of radicalisation of the middle sectors, led precisely by the approach to popular realities within the framework of the commitment to community development and the experiences of grassroots militancy that were developed in those spaces. The political radicalisation of these sectors will be an inevitable consequence.

In turn, at the National University of Buenos Aires we can find other particular aspects of the period. Here, the School of Social Service was already under the university orbit, under the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences. However, it occupied a relegated place, under the hegemony of the legal paradigm. María Cristina Melano, who was part of this process, warns that the career functioned under a schooled logic and at the margin of political debates, without registering curricular or institutional reform processes until 1973 (Melano, 2019). In this context, the role of a group of students and



graduates organised in the *Nuevo Servicio Social (New Social Service)* group stands out, from where new debates with a strong political content were promoted, which, up to then, were absent in the training. The author emphasises that “they advocated social work committed to the historical moment and to the most dispossessed sectors, to the construction of the new man and a new society, while at the same time they fought for the professionalization and technification of the field” (Melano, 2019, p.229). This group promoted the need to hierarchise academic training and to dispute against the strong para-legal character. Likewise, they sought the incorporation of theoretical perspectives linked to liberation processes, allowing the entry of reconceptualising debates, especially the discussions promoted by the ECRO Group.

Finally, the experience at the Mendoza School of Social Service once again puts the student body at the centre of the scene. Following the contributions of Barrera and Fuentealba (2012), it is interesting to highlight the Seminar called *Restructuring of the Social Service Career*, in September 1972, which had Juan Barreix as guest speaker. According to the authors, this event was promoted by the students of the career and expressed the need to discuss this issue in view of the possible democratic opening. They also reconstruct that the renowned member of the ECRO Group presented in his speech a new proposal for the organisation and operation of the school, which laid the foundations for the curricular reform project that would be carried out the following year, under his leadership: democratisation and student protagonism were its main axes (Barrera and Fuentealba, 2012).

Observing these experiences, as we approach the brief democratic experience of 1973, movements appear within the different careers, with a strong student protagonism, motivated by the social and political events of the region and influenced by Reconceptualisation. These debates promote changes and transformations in the curricula and open the questioning of the matrices considered traditional in the profession. In some cases, they will be accompanied by institutional movements, as in the schools of Rosario and Misiones.⁴ In this line, the events of March ‘73 will have a strong impact on the development of these processes.

⁴ By 1973 several of the schools that trained professionals had been incorporated into public universities, abandoning the tertiary character of training. Between 1971 and 1973, 12 national universities were created in Argentina (Rio Cuarto, Salta, Catamarca, Lomas de Zamora, Luján, Junín, Misiones, Patagonia (Comodoro Rivadavia), San Juan, San Luis, Santiago del Estero and Entre Ríos), two provincial universities were transformed into national universities (that of Neuquén, which was transformed into the National University of Comahue, and that of La Pampa) and two provincial universities were created (of La Rioja and Jujuy), thus achieving considerable expansion and growth (Moljo, 2004).

Democratic openness

On March 13, 1973, the elections were resumed after seven years of democratic closure in our country, with a high turnout that resulted in the victory of Cámpora-Solano of Peronism (FREJULI).⁵ This event put an end to the stage of the Argentine Revolution, which witnessed the Peronist resistance, the expectation for the construction of a national socialism and a strong protagonism of various sectors of the Argentine youth (Siede, 2005). It is also a turning point in the development of our profession, which will take a new impulse.

Following Moljo (2004), we can observe expressions of this impulse in the profession's journals. In the editorial note of issue number 27 of the magazine *Hoy en Trabajo Social*, in 1973, this new stage is analysed, stating that for the discipline it could be the immediate possibility of its insertion at the grassroots level, together with a people beginning the path of liberation and national construction. In the same vein, in issue number 19 of *Selecciones del Trabajo Social*, of the first four-month period of 1973, it is stated that the electoral result.

It seems to demonstrate the generalised will of a people towards the recognition of human values and the dignity of all men without irritating and unjust exclusions [and that] a convergent parallelism could well be established between these objectives and those explicitly proclaimed by the growing movement of the new Social Service. (quoted in Moljo, 2004, p.256).

The opening also meant the beginning of a new cycle for the university. Just days after taking office, Héctor Cámpora appointed Jorge Taiana as Minister of Education, who intervened in the university. In the decree of intervention, it is expressed that the project of national liberation demands to definitively put the national universities at the service of the people, being therefore necessary for the reformulation of the objectives, contents and teaching methods with the participation of all the sectors linked to university life. With the advance and support of the youth and student sectors, the proposal was to change the public university, incorporating a vision of service towards society, seeking the use of science and technology in the service of production and promoting the

⁵ These elections symbolized the return of Peronism to power after almost 18 years of proscription. During the previous months, the agitated social and political situation forced the de facto government (at that time under the command of General Lanusse) to promote a Great National Agreement (GAN) and to call for national elections without proscriptions for 1973. In this context, Juan Domingo Perón, the main political figure of the country and of Peronism, decided not to run and to delegate his candidacy to Héctor Cámpora, a man of extreme confidence of the former president. Within this framework, Peronism ran again in elections in a front called FREJULI (Frente Justicialista para la Liberación). The formula formed by Héctor Cámpora and Vicente Solano Lima obtained more than 6 million votes (49%), leaving the radicalism formula in second place with 21% of the votes.

liberation process (Melano, 2019). These changes gave rise to intense student activism, concretising the curricular reforms brewing in previous years.

Schools of Social Work and reform processes

University intervention reached many of the schools of Social Work. In the aforementioned issue No. 20 of *Selecciones del Servicio Social*, recovered by Siede (2015), it is recognised that the assumption of the new government meant a profound change and that all the Social Service schools dependent on universities or ministries had intervened or were in the process of renovation⁶. These interventions enabled initiating – and sometimes deepening – curriculum reform processes.

The National University of Buenos Aires was one of the first to feel the repercussions of the change of course in national university policy. Rodolfo Puiggros, coming from the Marxist tradition and a referent of a new left wing of Peronism, was appointed rector⁷. His project aimed to build a national and popular university, promoting student and teacher participation in constructing an academic and pedagogical project for liberation (Melano, 2019). His arrival made it possible to promote an unprecedented reform in the Social Service career of that university. The kick-off was the arrival of Marta Cantorna as intervener delegate after a strong demand from teachers and students. For the first time, a social worker took over the direction of the school, starting a new stage by aligning herself with the national project promoted by Cámpora's government. This is what she said in her first speech:

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A rectifying course had begun to be generated since March 11, when the people said enough to a dependent, inhuman, mercantilist and incapable of satisfying man's material and transcendental needs. This is why we propose, through the University, to participate in the popular government to create a new country that enables a society of solidarity, social justice, economic freedom, and political sovereignty. (Melano, 2019, p.232).

Cantorna belonged to a group of teachers and graduates who approached the intervention through a project committed to the guidelines of the national government and linked to the ideals of the Reconceptualisation movement, as stated in an excerpt from issue No. 21 of *Selecciones del Servicio Social*:

In the specific field of our career, we intend to eliminate the welfare social service to build social work at the service of the country and its people. Of the country, to contribute through research and action to the liberation process. Of the people, enabling their conscious, free, but organised participation in government decisions as a means of access to power. Therefore, all subjects and careers must be analysed, questioned, and rethought. This task will involve teachers, non-teaching staff, students and graduates who wish to collaborate. We intend to boost our careers to prepare the new social workers that the country will require in quantity to carry out its revolution. (Melano, 2019, p.232).

The first step was to renew the teaching staff, which included many professors from the legal field and with a conservative tradition. At the same time, the Third Chairs were created and established: parallel chairs that students were free to take and in which professors aligned with the objectives of the popular government participated. In these spaces, students entered into dialogue with the theories of Marxism, the theory of dependency and the contributions of Paulo Freire, among others. Along the same line, proposed training courses for teachers, such as *Liberation or Dependence*, are the alternative of this hour (Melano, 2019).

Secondly, progress was made in the draft of the new curriculum, approved in 1974. On its pages, it announces the search for a professional profile committed and militant of the popular struggles and the causes of the people who intervene with those groups that have the possibility of leading the transformation process in the processes of awareness, education, training, organisation and popular mobilisation, to “integrally develop the solidarity personality to eliminate dependence and oppression, strengthening the formation, organisation and action of the same” (Melano, 2019, p.235). New philosophical and epistemological paradigms are incorporated, and the historical character of social processes is deepened through subjects of world, Latin American and Argentine history, to broaden its approach to social sciences and the theories that interpret social phenomena in their structural, historical and conjunctural aspects. The draft project sought to put a brake on the subordination of the career to the hegemony of law: from five annual subjects on law, there will be only two semesters, and thus, subjects such as Philosophy, Epistemology and Political and Economic Doctrines will be introduced, which allow the understanding of power structures and the relationship between the



central and peripheral countries. Along the same lines, subjects such as Sociology of Liberation and Social Psychology appear. The aim is to contribute to the search for a new Social Work that can be validated and legitimised within the social sciences.

In line with what happened in Buenos Aires, the Mendoza School of Social Service quickly felt the impact of the change of government. Following the research of Barrera and Fuentealba (2012), after Alberto Martínez Baca took office as the new governor of the province, the students decided to take over the school to request its immediate intervention and to implement the restructuring project that had been proposed in the 1972 seminar. From then on, Juan Barreix was appointed director and focused on addressing the student demand, promoting curriculum reform and restructuring the teaching staff (Barrera and Fuentealba, 2012). The authors recover a speech by the Undersecretary of Education, Carricondo, in which he explains the fundamental guidelines that led to the restructuring of the school:

We consider that the Superior School of Social Service had functioned perfectly and harmoniously with the complementation of objectives within the educational apparatus's key postulations, an instrument of domination of the exploiting classes. In this particular case, dedicated to the training of welfare technicians, with professional objectives of mere adjustments of man to the unjust system; professionals who, acting from a supposedly neutral perspective, but deep down deeply oppressive, served to conceal contradictions and superficially and temporarily soften the particular effects of a globally unjust system. (Barrera and Fuentealba, 2012, p.99)

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The authors go on to explain the objectives of such structuring, highlighting the need:

To converge two projects, the first – of a fundamentally pedagogical nature – oriented in the direction of a “liberating education” and the second of a political order according to the horizon of “national liberation (...) the aim was to combine an education “liberated” from the constraints of the domination of the school apparatus, with a highly politicised professional education committed to the project of “national liberation” postulated by those partisan groups. (Barrera and Fuentealba, 2012, p.99)

These objectives are clearly expressed in two aspects of the new curriculum. On the one hand, the incorporation of new subjects, such as Regional Geography, Contemporary Political Doctrines, Introduction to Philosophy, Argentine and American History and Sociology of Change. On the other hand, and fundamentally, in incorporating a new modality of work, known as Didactic Community, a type of unschooling and democratising operation inspired by Freirean education. This novel proposal aimed at overcoming the paternalistic relationship between teachers and students, competitive relationships through cooperative and supportive group action for the achievement of a common goal and the implementation of joint and reciprocal forms of evaluation; it also encouraged the participation and active involvement of students (Barrera and Fuentealba, 2012). This was the name adopted by the school's working group, whose objectives are expressed in a document they produced called *Memoria Crítica* and published in *Hoy en el Trabajo Social*:

Suppose our objective is to achieve liberating Social Work. In that case, the educational reality of the School must create the appropriate conditions to experience the values that allow the Social Workers to insert themselves in the liberation process that America demands (...). It is about the professional knowing how to live, communicate, and dialogue with groups and communities and, with an attitude of existential commitment, knowing himself, to place himself in a genuinely conscientizing role (...) to serve his people. (Barrera and Fuentealba, 2012, p.105)

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The traditional forms of teaching and practice of Social Service must be definitively ended because they disassociate the students from the realities where they will have to work. The new education must be a praxis of liberation, not preparing for liberation, but already a liberating action. (Barrera and Fuentealba, 2012, p.103)

The Didactic Community had another relevant aspect: the Total Workshop experience, a weekly meeting and debate space for students, teachers and administrators, where they discussed the projects previously addressed in an academic council. These were considered instances of collective learning and complete expression of the horizon of a liberating educational practice. The idea of “totality” is aimed at having the different



faculties work in an integrated, open, and collective manner on all the issues of interest to the institution. Finally, the authors emphasise that, in the new curricular proposal, there is a commitment to field practices to conceive them as an opportunity for the university to provide a service to the people in response to the needs of the communities (Barrera and Fuentealba, 2012).

In Rosario, the return of Peronism to power also found a convulsed university: mobilised and organised students took over the school and achieved the resignation of its director, who Néstor Ciarnello, a man of Peronist militancy and affinity with the youth movement, replaced. This new administration would propose an Emergency Academic Plan that would function as a transition plan until the arrival of the new Curriculum, approved in April 1974, the result of the work of teachers and directors with the support and participation of students.

Following Pagani (2007), we notice, in the first place, the criticism of the previous curricular proposal. On the one hand, in the ministerial resolution approving the Emergency Plan⁶, it is stated that it covers a need that the previous plan did not cover: the understanding of the socio-political and economic reality of the country since, without it, students could not approach the field of work in the community. On the other hand, in the text of the '74 Plan, the criticism is deepened by arguing that:

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As a result of the training given so far at the School of Social Service of Rosario, the professional practice of the social worker has been limited to palliative and welfare action in general, not by the real needs of the country and the popular sectors (...) These methods, individual social cases, groups, and communities imported from other countries, were applied to your reality and had little to do with theirs. (Pagani, 2007, p.118)

Based on this diagnosis, the new plan advances in the construction of new objectives linked to the national liberation process and the objectives of the new government:

To teach students the fundamental principles of the disciplines and give them the necessary tools to deepen the development of a critical and committed practice that has as its final objective the liberation of man in society (...) The systematisation of a new methodology of social work, not

⁶ Moljo (2004) indicates that at that time the Escuela Superior de Servicio Social of Mendoza and the schools of Social Service of Río Negro, Posadas, La Plata, Olavarría, La Rioja, Neuquén, Comahue, San Juan, Santa Fe, Rosario, Córdoba and Bahía Blanca were intervened.

adopted from compartmentalised social sciences, but fundamentally based on the continuous analysis of reality made in the field of work itself and then transferred to the classroom, elaborated with the contribution of the social sciences, should tend to the systematisation of a new methodology of social work, not adopted from compartmentalised social sciences, but fundamentally from the continuous analysis of the reality made in the same field of work and then transferred to the classroom, elaborated with the contribution of the social sciences. The school's academic structure must guarantee a permanent confrontation between methodological learning and learning of the theoretical framework (Pagani, 2007, p.119).

Following the analysis, the search for a new way of teaching the profession, situated in the local reality and linked to the horizon of liberation, is noticed. The new curriculum contained workshops where students carried out their practices, seeking to get closer to the concrete, objective reality and contributing to understanding those structures that condition man and, therefore, needed to be transformed (Pagani, 2007). New subjects such as Social Structure, Critical Analysis of Social Service, Argentine Socio-Political Reality, Analysis of the Third World, History of the Workers' Movement, Ethics and Philosophy were incorporated. In line with the other experiences, these were theoretical tools for understanding reality and sought to enhance the scientific nature of the profession.

Finally, the Misiones School of Social Service will also experience a decisive turn. In 1973, students and teachers who supported the new government demanded the resignation of the then-director. They succeeded in having him replaced by Alberto Diéguez, who was elected to the assembly as the school's "popular intervener" (Rodríguez, 2016). At this point, a new proposal of Social Work begins to take the shape of a critical nature, framed in a stage of reconstruction and national liberation, based on a new social work model:

Deep commitment and knowledge of national problems from a central objective: to eradicate our dependent structure and build a society free from any form of exploitation (and) to assume as one of the objectives the insertion of the social worker in the specific problems of the region and in those areas where his intervention will be more beneficial for the popular sectors. (Okada, 1973, cited in Rodríguez, 2016, p.298)

In addition, the creation of the so-called non-curricular Chairs is highlighted, which allowed the incorporation of students from outside the academic environment: neighbourhood leaders, workers, and political and union activists occupied the classrooms, forming a new and disruptive space that allowed the exchange of experiences and knowledge on issues of social and political reality. It was an experience because of the horizon of the construction of a university of the people (Rodríguez, 2016).

Finally, it is also worth mentioning that the new study plan was implemented in 1974. This proposal included a five-year course with novel subjects, such as Economic and Social History, Social and Economic Planning, Social and Cultural Anthropology, World and Latin American Issues, Guaraní I and II, among others, in addition to the presence of Philosophy, Economics, Sociology and Political Science. Rodríguez (2016) recovers a note from the newspaper *El Territorio* entitled “Carreras que se dictarán en el ‘75 en la Facultad de Ciencias Sociales”, dated November 18, 1974. From there, he retrieves a definition of Social Work:

‘A social technology that applies the knowledge of social sciences to social reality, to transform its being its primary objectives, according to the same reference source: ‘to investigate and formulate the general principles that make the conformation of social problems; to elaborate social technology aimed at intervening in the solution of social problems; to carry out processes aimed at social education tasks tending to raise the level of awareness of the population, for social transformation’. (Rodríguez, 2016, p.304)

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Turning point. The advance of the right and the coup d’état

These unprecedented reform processes were interrupted in the short term. These were years of great political upheaval not only in Argentina but also in the region. The implementation of the Condor Plan, under the economic interests and military deployment of the USA, contributed to the advance of the armed forces in the power spaces of Latin American nations. Examples of this are the coups d’état in Bolivia (1971), Chile (1973), Uruguay (1973) and Argentina (1976). National processes linked to Latin American liberation horizons were interrupted in this context.

In Argentina, the optimism generated by the new government was dampened by internal conflicts and the political crisis. Only a few months after Cámpora’s inauguration, the advance of conservative and right-wing sectors⁷ within the ranks of the national

⁷ Under his administration, it will be renamed the National and Popular University of Buenos Aires.



government took place in a transparent and open dispute against the spaces that raised the banners of the youth and the national and popular horizon of liberation.

Within this framework, the university received one of the first impacts. The consolidation of the most conservative sectors paved the way for the development of repressive actions to achieve the so-called anti-communist “purge” and the displacement of the left-wing sectors of Peronism. This purge deepened in the universities after Jorge Taiana was forced to resign and was replaced by Oscar Ivanissevic, a character who came to express the need to close the subverted universities to clean them up, order them and normalise them, explaining that what it is about is to “sanitise an organism that is recognised as suffering from serious anomalies” (Besoky, 2017, p.146). This opened a dark period in the Argentine university, with intense persecution and repression of students and teachers. These changes occurred quickly, interrupting experiences that had begun not more than a year before.

At the University of Buenos Aires, a few days after taking office, Ivanissevic appointed Alberto Ottalagano as rector, a figure representing the most conservative and reactionary sector of Peronism⁸. His arrival will put an abrupt halt to the reform process that was being promoted in the university. In October 1974, Rodolfo Carlos Barra was appointed as intervener director of the school, proceeding to change the curriculum once again and forcing the resignation of the then director Marta Cantorna and her team, who left behind the reform project, which could not be fully implemented.

Mendoza will also suffer the advance of the Peronist right-wing sectors in his government, which will consequently impact his social service career aligned with his administration. The pedagogical and organisational model of the Didactic Community continued to operate in uncertainty until the end of 1974, when the closure of this experience occurred, implying the end of the reform process initiated and the consequent return to a traditional schooling system within the framework of a profound political-ideological reorientation (Barrera and Fuentealba, 2012).

For its part, the Misiones School of Social Service will not be the exception in this setback. According to Rodríguez (2016), in the same year the new curriculum materialised, the school was transformed into the Faculty of Social Sciences and is incorporated into the scope of the National University of Misiones. This moment coincides with the appointment of Raúl Lozano as interim rector and the subsequent appointment of Horacio Belastegui as dean-normaliser, accompanied by Enrique Aderrechea as

⁸ Resolution 556/73 (Expte. No 19.109) of 5 October 1973, which Pagani (2007) retrieved in his work. This document leaves without effect the last modification of the 1972 curriculum and recognises the Emergency Academic Plan until the curriculum for the academic year 1974 is presented.

academic secretary, which represented, according to the author, a clear advance of the most conservative and orthodox sectors of Peronism (Rodríguez, 2016).

Finally, on March 24, 1976, the national coup d'état was consummated by the Armed Forces, initiating what became known as the National Reorganisation Process. This dictatorship would be the bloodiest in the history of our country. One of the most atrocious aspects of the process was the construction of a legality around the extermination of people, that is, the normalisation of the annihilation of the different, problematic and fundamentally politically dissident other (Trachitte et al., 2005), from which the actions of violence, repression, torture and annihilation of thousands of people are justified, silencing and immobilising society through terror. The policies designed for the university focused on ideological control and political persecution of large university sectors: students, professors and researchers were persecuted and tortured, and many of them were killed and/or disappeared. Hand in hand, the prohibition of authors, publishers and contents of different texts and publications was implemented.

Social Work was directly affected by these events. On July 18, 1976, Luis María Früm, a member of the ECRO Group and an outstanding teacher at the school of that city, was murdered in Villa Mercedes (San Luis). In addition to this event, Barreix and Ander Egg were exiled, and Alayon, a magazine member, was imprisoned. The magazine would publish two more issues the following year until the de facto government finally banned it. Many of the books published by this group were also forbidden. For its part, the journal *Selecciones del Trabajo Social* stopped publishing in 1978.

Schools also suffered from this development. Out of a total of forty-five schools of Social Work that existed in our country up to that time, fourteen were closed or suspended, among them those of Rosario and Mendoza (Moljo and Moljo, 2006). In the first case, the career was closed on October 20, 1976. In Mendoza, also that same year, the closure and the interruption of the reform process that the Comunidad Didáctica had carried out was consummated. Peculiarly, training was restarted the following year, leaving behind all the aforementioned advances and with a new curriculum, which granted the degree of Social Worker for three years. "In the training, the epistemological and theoretical foundation of the professional work was placed, purely and exclusively, in Christian morals and ethics, of course, of the most orthodox kind. This explains the existence of subjects such as General Ethics, Ethics and Social Doctrine of the Church and Professional Ethics" (Barrera and Fuentealba, 2012, p.111).

Conclusions

This article deals with the reforms of the curricula of Social Work careers at the university level, which took place within the framework of the institutional transformations of their respective schools between the late 1960s and mid-1970s in Argentina.

This analysis helps to understand how the climate of the time impacted the Social Work profession and the development of training proposals in those years. Student protagonism gained momentum with the regional political events to initiate a process of questioning and reforms that reached the Social Work careers hand in hand with the Reconceptualisation debates. Within this framework, the democratic opening allowed the radicalisation of these experiences.

The research carried out so far has concentrated on the recovery of the histories of each career or school in particular. In this paper, the systematisation of the experiences of the different works made it possible to go beyond individual analysis and offer a broad and federal view of this process. In this way, it was possible to detect common characteristics and axes that marked these curricular reforms:

- The importance assigned to organisational processes, with a strong democratising and collective content, based on student and teacher protagonism and the active participation of all stakeholders.
- Adopting new teaching and work methodologies, mainly inspired by Freirean pedagogy, aimed at overcoming the hierarchical relationship between teachers and students.
- The incorporation of new debates and theoretical and political perspectives, which are reflected in the latest subjects.
- The reconfiguration of professional practices, which begin to express a social and political commitment with the popular sectors in constructing the road to liberation.

In this sense, the paper reflects how these curricular reform processes allowed the ideals of the reconceptualisation movement to be closely linked to the objectives of the national and popular project of the Peronist government. In addition, it provides a broader and national conception of this process. These were not isolated experiences or the impulses of specific sectors or local governments. Instead, it was a bet on a project that sought to reconceptualise the profession under the ideals of national liberation and install a change of direction for Social Work throughout the territory.

It is important to note that this strong linkage was also reflected in the impact that the political crisis and the right wing's advance had on the dissolution of the reform processes in a very short time. A direct relationship between the two movements can be observed. In this way, we can see that the interruption of the Reconceptualisation movement in Argentina began sometime before the 1976 coup d'état. This can only be explained by the linkage above.

It can be affirmed, then, that the experience of the Reconceptualisation of Social Work in university training environments was determined, both in its gestation and in its dissolution, by the fate of the Peronist project of national liberation that came to power in 1973. In this way, the work allows a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, permitting a dialogue between the national socio-political processes and the particular experiences of curricular reforms. In addition, it opens the possibility of expanding this line of research, incorporating the experiences of other schools and careers in the country that went through similar experiences.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that with this interruption, the lines of work and reflection promoted in the curricular reform processes were practically aborted, eliminated from the professional debate, giving way to a method of consolidation of traditional perspectives and a repositioning of conservative sectors in the hegemony of the professional field.

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We would have to wait for the next democratic opening, in 1983, to see how the debates opened by the Reconceptualisation would be taken up again under the impulse of the new airs.

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Author Biography

Renzo Tiberi has a degree in Social Work from the National University of Rosario. He is currently Head of Practical Work in the Social Work career at the National University of Rosario.

E-mail: renzotiberi4@gmail.com

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-6215-9756>



ARTICLE

Denaturalisation and Norma-tension: two demands on contemporary social intervention

Desnaturalización y Norma-tensión: dos demandas a la intervención social contemporánea

Juan Saavedra¹

Universidad del Bío – Bío, Chile.

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Abstract:

The initial question of this article is how social work can prevail in an adverse neoliberal regime. This neoliberal context tends toward individuation, the disciplinary control of the most vulnerable groups, and the contraction of the institutions responsible for addressing these issues. In search of an answer, a theoretical argument is constructed, based on the assumption that social intervention is a relevant topic for the profession-discipline. Through a review of texts published by P. Garret, G. Muñoz-Arce, R. Cortés, among other sources, it is suggested that social intervention should transition towards a space of active resistance in favour of social justice and the inclusion of marginalised groups. The reflection shows how social intervention is conceived as a device of institutional power, subjected to neoliberal logics that prioritise efficiency over social justice. It proposes the denaturalisation of these discourses to challenge uncritical

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¹Contact: Juan Saavedra, Chile  : juan.saavedra@ubiobio.cl

intervention and promote reflective practice in social work. Additionally, norm-tension emerges as a contradiction that enables strategies to foster resistance to normative control, reorienting the profession-discipline towards the pursuit of structural transformations. It concludes that both discursive denaturalisation and norm-tension allow for a departure from intervention notions aligned with neoliberal grammars.

Resumen

La pregunta inicial de este artículo es cómo el trabajo social puede prevalecer en un régimen neoliberal adverso. Este contexto tiende a la individuación, el control disciplinario de los grupos más vulnerables y la contracción de las institucionalidades responsables de afrontar dichos problemas. En busca de respuesta, se construye una argumentación teórica, bajo el supuesto de que la intervención social es un tópico relevante para la profesión-disciplina. A partir de la revisión de textos publicados por P. Garret, G. Muñoz-Arce, R. Cortés, entre otras fuentes, se plantea que la intervención social debería transitar hacia un espacio de resistencia activa en favor de la justicia social y de la inclusión de los grupos subalternizados. La reflexión muestra cómo la intervención social es concebida como un dispositivo de poder institucional, sometido a lógicas neoliberales que priorizan la eficiencia por sobre la justicia social. Se propone la desnaturalización de estos discursos, con el fin de impugnar la intervención acrítica y fomentar en el trabajo social la práctica reflexiva. Además, la norma-tensión surge como una contradicción que posibilita estrategias para promover la resistencia al control normativo, reorientando a la profesión-disciplina hacia la búsqueda de transformaciones estructurales. Se concluye que tanto la desnaturalización discursiva como la norma-tensión, permiten abandonar las nociones de intervención afines a las gramáticas neoliberales.

Palabras Clave:
Intervención
social; neoliberalismo; dispositivo; desnaturalización; norma-tensión



Introduction

As we commemorate one hundred years of social work in Chile, revisiting the recognisable theoretical links between the discipline and social intervention is interesting. A quick review of indexed bibliographic databases shows that intervention provides a field of meaning shared by the social sciences. However, in social work it has been argued that in this concept lies a sense of identity, as the traces of intervention are inscribed in various moments of professional history (Castañeda-Meneses, 2024).

In this sequence, the anchoring of social intervention can be observed at different moments in the century-long trajectory of social work, from its beginnings in 1925 to the present day. This itinerary is delimited by different junctures, from the crisis of the oligarchy in the second decade of the 20th century through the partial implementation of the welfare state model in the middle of the previous century to the events that mark the last quarter of the last century. This temporal review cannot avoid the fact that a turning point in the history of social work in Chile is the fateful times of Pinochet's civil-military dictatorship (1973-1990) and the subsequent transitional process that followed once the authoritarian government ended. For this reason, the historical illation of social work must consider the socio-political regime as a key analytical dimension. This framing confers theoretical and factual assumptions linking social work and intervention. For this reason, understanding the weight of neoliberalism in the 21st century is important for understanding social intervention. This condition of contemporaneity should imply the continuity of the neoliberalisation of public policy and the institutions where social work professionals are inserted. The question that arises is how social work can prevail in the neoliberal context, which tends towards the individuation of structural problems and the disciplinary control of the most vulnerable groups and, at the same time, reduces the public-institutional role to face such scenarios.

In this theoretical review, two social work demands will be examined to think about the scope of intervention on the horizon of the 21st century. This article is based on a relevant and comprehensive literature review using material from indexed databases (Scopus, Wos-Isi, Erih Plus, Scielo). We also accessed books in digital and printed formats available in libraries. The purpose of this reflection is to problematise the way in which social work intervention is thought of, taking into account the contradictions that arise from the neoliberalisation of contemporary public policy. The paradoxical link between social work and intervention (Saavedra, 2017) helps to understand why this discipline is advantageous for critically observing the phenomena of intervention in

society. Based on the centenary, and thinking about the projection for the coming years, it could be believed that the neoliberal substratum generates ethical, theoretical and methodological discomfort for social work. As a result of this task, two possibilities were explored in the conceptual displacement of social intervention in the usual mutations of neoliberalism. For this purpose, access will be gained through the notion of *demand*, as it expresses those requirements posed by that identity character that represents the intervention for social work. This polysemic expression has meanings in diverse fields such as law, psychology and economics. In this reflection, it will be understood that the demand is an illocutive speech act, inviting debate and recognising the scope of social intervention. This idea seeks to make visible in social work the contextual requirements that entail some urgencies for academic discussion and curricular training plans in the coming years. The first of these demands refers to the denaturalisation of statements in intervention devices, while the second alludes to the resistance expressed in the quality of the norm-tension. This proposal invites us to rethink social intervention as an analytical category, both from the perspective of social policies and in articulating a critical university education for the coming decades.

Thinking about social intervention in (un)mediated neoliberal contexts

Social intervention is a common topic for the social sciences, given its theoretical and methodological ramifications. Several Latin American authors in the field of social work have studied the concept of intervention, such as Carballeda (2002; 2019), Ortega (2015; 2017), Saavedra (2015; 2017; 2023), Falla (2019), Muñoz-Arce (2020), Camelo (2024), among others. The various bibliographical sources include a diversity of definitions, ranging from those that highlight it as a formal and organised practice (e.g. Fantova, 2018; 2019) to forms of restructuring power relations in socio-spatial contexts (Saravia, 2019). In this account, we find those that relate social intervention to the notion of dispositif (e.g. Carballeda, 2002; Hernández, 2020). As Moreno and Molina (2018) point out, intervention is imbricated in diverse historical-contextual coordinates, which have focused on understanding this issue from the perspective of devices. The same authors point out that the classic tools of social assistance have mutated in neoliberal frameworks. In this sense, immersed in neoliberal regularity, the intervention would gradually weaken its capacity to sustain social cohesion.

Neoliberalism encompasses economic, political and cultural dimensions (Harvey, 2007), so it must be called a *socio-political regime* (Han, 2022), given its totalising

character. This term captures its complexity better than words such as model, system or ideology, all encompassed within the meaning of regime. Brown (2015) argues that neoliberal economic rationality absorbs politics, subjecting democracies to rules that economise social life, a position shared by Muñoz-Arce and Pantazis (2019). From this perspective, Sánchez (2016) indicates that in neoliberalism, a) the market is the locus of truth, and b) governmentality transfers the risks of living and biographical responsibilities to individuals, reducing state capacities. Globally, neoliberalism has managed to adapt to its crises. This helps to understand that this regime has skilfully integrated the conservative and dehumanising theses that resurfaced during the 21st century in the United States, Europe and recently in Latin America. Garret (2019, p.9), in this regard, notes that a “rhetorically recalibrated neoliberalism” has emerged. Santander (2024) believes that, although representative democracies are maintained in the countries, neoliberal radicalisation uses authoritarian and communicational techniques to prevail. Following Katz’s (2023) opinion, the rhetoric of *Trumpism* is key to analysing the emergence of an ultra-conservative right-wing in the continent, with authoritarian traits that promote punitive and xenophobic actions in public policy.

Global social work is immersed in these modern problematic contexts described by Donnelly (2004), while Morley and O’Bree (2021) have pointed out that the profession is influenced by neoliberalism. The same is observed by Hyslop (2016), who study in social work practice through neoliberal efficiency and political control that tend to restrict, among others, the pursuit of social justice. This pushes professional collectives to prioritise the performance of institutional management indicators over addressing structural inequalities. Garret (2021), for his part, denounces the dominant narratives in contemporary social work, insofar as neoliberalism has transformed social work. In this context, management efficiency prevails over ethical principles, affecting the dynamics of support for vulnerable families and the possibilities of increasing gender equity. In Latin America, neoliberalisation scenarios maximise collective uncertainties in the face of accelerating financial deregulation. This, coupled with fierce power struggles in the various territories of the continent, contributes to the social deterioration of these countries (Costantino and Cantamutto, 2018).

The concept of dispositif in social intervention is significant for this review. This notion reveals the conjunction of a series of discursive and non-discursive elements connected through multiple formats, which aim to exercise various forms of power over the population. Castro (2017), from his in-depth readings of Foucault’s work, distinguishes sovereignty devices from more disciplinary ones, assigning the family and the asylum as their respective archetypes. Raffnsøe et al. (2014), for their part, indicate that the basic

modalities of the devices are law, discipline and security arrangements. This responds to the Foucaultian conception that attributes dispositional capacity to a heterogeneous set of elements (Raffnsøe et al., 2014). For Gil-Claros (2020), social intervention operates as a strategic device that functions at the edges of the social. Following Foucault's proposal, the author thinks that the discursive capacity of intervention provides possibilities for the institutional reintegration of individuals. In this, it must be considered that ideological and methodological criteria mediate social intervention, as it is not limited to an interpersonal relationship between the professional collective and those who access its services (Karsz, 2023). Therefore, Moreno and Molina (2018, p.20) point out that the intervention deals with "forms of relationship that are developed within devices that constrain the possibilities of action and are oriented towards the control of divergences". In agreement with Villadsen (2021), this implies understanding that social intervention devices allude to certain discursive and subjectivation practices.

Social intervention mechanisms are part of the repertoire of power strategies, even when the socio-political regime changes. However, neoliberalism has co-opted the more traditional welfare mechanisms. It is reformulating them, as happened, for example, with the social security health institutions that existed before the dictatorship in Chile. But it has also created new dispositive forms for the disciplinary control of the population, resignified in technological tools (Rubio, 2020). In this sense, Castro (2023) points out that the devices are genealogically reconstructed in space, health and subjectivity. The strategic character of these devices is visualised in the configuration of neoliberalism as a technology of power.

In the current neoliberal scenario, it is relevant to discuss the identity references, methods of action and axiological frameworks of social work. Under the assumption that social intervention is one of these disciplinary identity categories, it should contain disruptive transposition options that allow it to face future societal challenges. From this place of displacement, the following demands are made from social work towards the concept of intervention.

Denaturalisation of social intervention discourses

The first demand for social intervention refers to the *need to denaturalise discourses*. For this purpose, it will be understood that the naturalised character refers to the enunciative assignment of negative attributes to specific individuals, groups or undesired situations.

Naturalisation is related to the establishment of certain discursive hegemonies. In the 1960s, Alvin Gouldner identified that discriminatory narratives are sustained in legitimised discourses, such as politics or science (Fraga, 2022). According to Angenot (2010), discourses are shaped by enunciative prescriptions that delimit what can be thought and said at a given historical moment. Discursive naturalisation belongs to such argumentative schemes, which eventually allude to different forms of stereotypes and prejudices that are related to social cognition and the reinforcement of self-image (Baron and Byrne, 2005). This strains the profession, which has historically promoted ethical integrity in society. Although there are controversies about how these topics were addressed in the founding of Mary Richmond and Jane Addams (Verde-Diego, 2022), social work has historically opposed pernicious rhetorics that are connected to racism, violence and discrimination based on gender, age or social class, among others (e.g. Sherwood and Kattari, 2023; Silva-Córdova et al., 2024). There is a broad international consensus on the relationship between social work and human rights, as it is a globally shared purpose (Rubilar-Donoso, 2018). Despite the above, this aspect should be critically reviewed to amplify better results in discursive denaturalisation from the profession-discipline. For example, in research carried out by the team headed by Reyes-Pérez, the social work curricula in the country were analysed, concluding that “human rights education is rather scarce and diffuse” (Reyes-Pérez et al., 2020, p. 278).

It should be noted that these discursive naturalisations do not only operate in the spheres of everyday life. These forms are also expressed in the enunciations provided by governmentality, affecting the different specificities in which social intervention is observed. Examples of this problem can be found in Riedemann et al. (2020) and Ortega et al. (2022), among others. In this regard, Healy (2001), following Foucault’s view, understands discourse as contextual, linked to power and having practical implications. Therefore, for welfare/social control institutions, its performative efficacy lies in its capacity to provide order and circulation to the statements desirable by the socio-political regime. These discursive forms are coupled with other rhetorics based on stereotypes and prejudices that manage to infiltrate the technical argumentation of neoliberal social policy as a substitute.

For Alzola-Molina (2022), discourses in society are legitimised by institutions. These define what kind of truth is capable of securing governmental power and dominating the behaviours of the population. In this process, discourse in social intervention responds to dominant models of sovereignty – such as neoliberalism – by limiting issues that

can be questioned and avoiding counter-hegemonic enunciations. At this point, it is interesting to identify how social work is subjected to the rules of the new public management. Renau et al. (2023) highlight these changes in professional practice due to the penetration of neoliberalism in its practices. The intrusion of managerialism in public institutions has meant a change in the priorities of intervention processes. According to the authors, the emphasis on fulfilling performance indicators generates demotivation in professional teams in the face of the need to bring about structural social changes based on social justice. Similarly, Hozven and Sisto (2021) conclude that this neoliberal discursive framework transforms professional practice when efficiency is prioritised and depersonalised action is favoured. This leads to the limitation of critical perspectives in disciplinary training.

Faced with discursive naturalisation, social work should aspire to the persistent questioning of those dehumanising enunciations that are in tune with neoliberal culture. Critical reflexivity is the basic condition to address this problem, as it helps to deliberate on oppression in social work (Aguilar, 2023). It is important to address the questioning of professional reflection on both its conceptual categories and emerging practices. In recent years, scholarly efforts have been made to forge reflexivity from the history of practice. For example, Castañeda-Meneses and Salamé-Coulon (2022) contribute to rescuing the memory of social work based on the events of the dictatorship and the practices of forgetting the trauma experienced.

In contrast to Ferguson (2018), social workers should not respond to the deficit of reflection by invoking the emotional aspects of professional practice related to the stressful situations they must process. Rather, reflexivity would be absent with respect to the power-related aspects inscribed in discourses of institutions and their consequent juxtaposed narratives. In agreement with Hall (2019), it is more feasible for social workers to link different narratives of power from the intervention site. He points out that narratives are discursively adjusted over the population through selective framing and ethical-emotional appeals, whereas the Foucauldian conception of power is interactive and relational. It is in this purposeful framing of discursive denaturalisation of social intervention that denser frames are required to help observe the necessary unveiling and displacement of statements.

Standard-voltage

The second demand for social intervention is the production of *norm-tension* as a form of resistance. This issue is related to the normalising function of intervention, which is externalised in the institutional contexts in which social work is carried out. This characteristic has been studied indistinctly in various disciplinary contributions, such as García (2017), Saavedra (2022), Manthorpe and Samsi (2023), among others. The category of norm-tension is proposed as a complement to the options of professional resistance expressed, among others, by Cortes-Mancilla (2018), Muñoz-Arce (2020) and Garret (2021). This condition seeks to examine those discourses that shift the discourses of intervention into a field of contradicting forces. This demand for intervention is inscribed in the relationship between frameworks of normality and social work practices. Institutions sustain their operational definitions around standards for intervention that tend to homogenise the population, which are deployed to ensure social order and hinder the risk of subversion.

From Foucault's (2021) reading, it is possible to approach the ideas of norm, normality, and normalisation. The *norm* is a juridical-instrumental attribute of power necessary to differentiate what is normal from what is considered abnormal. The latter can be seen as a deviation that legitimises certain types of individuals' separation and disciplinary control (Martín-Rojo, 2020). *Normality* operates as a pattern or measure that allows the classification of individuals and populations according to a specific indicator. *Normalisation* produces both individual and collective conciliation concerning the framework of norms that regulate the order and cohesion of society (Carballeda, 2002). Through this triad, power ensures its survival in society, mediating the constant individual and collective adjustment to the regular order. In this, the various institutions present in the public offer play important roles, including those of the school, psychiatric and prison types. According to García (2017), social workers participate in these processes through double-sided strategies that combine the punitive with the educational in their professional action. It has been indicated that one of the functions associated with social intervention is normalisation (Saavedra, 2022). This aims to produce socially adequate individuals for economic, political and moral integration. In contrast to the other functions (transformation and adjustment), this function has a more intense semantic charge, attentive to its theoretical and political connotation. In this sense, it is illustrative to understand the normalising potential of intervention based on the ideas outlined by Jacques Donzelot.

Donzelot (1998) points out that the *guardianship complex* comprises a system that safeguards potentially at-risk subjects (mainly children) through judicial and educational intervention. Donzelot thinks that social work represents one of these available mechanisms for control assistance, which intervenes in the groups labelled as most vulnerable. The author points out that the action of the guardianship complex is limited to the exhaustive recording of information. For this purpose, complete research processes are carried out on the families that have been defined as being at risk. The information collected and systematised has the strategic purpose of serving as an interface between repressive and assistance actions. In this way, Donzelot points out that assistance measures adapted to the case are identified to limit the tendency of power towards acts of kindness and the use of judicial sanctions to regulate certain behaviours. In this respect, Donzelot developed a critical view of the configuration of European welfare states in the 20th century. According to the author, a blocking strategy was implemented in France to defend the foundations and beliefs that supported a cultural and political order: “The state had imposed progress outside society, without its participation” (Donzelot and Cardozo, 2007, p.152). This reasoning is relevant to understanding the recent political crises in Chile. The last decades have implied that the neoliberal imprint functions, as Garret (2019) points out, as a kind of counter-revolution to welfare capitalism. As a result, 21st century neoliberalism generates limited policies in favour of the population, increasing inequality and financial debt, leading to the poorest groups only surviving (Sagredo, 2022). Chaves-González (2023) points out that, in the configuration of the neoliberal subject, dialectics are neutralised, and distinctions between transgression and norm are eliminated, preventing the rise of forms of resistance to this regime. As Guadagno (2022) warns, neoliberalism implies an ethic of individualism, flexible markets and personal self-management. Social life is commodified (Brown, 2015), reducing it to living in a fiction of freedom. The events of October 2019 in Chile showed the need to reach avenues for emancipation from the neoliberal regime. The possibilities of social unblocking were thwarted after the constituent process, where the communicative tactics of sectors aligned with neoliberalism were emphatic in the criminalisation of protests, the justification of police repression and the defence of the totalising hegemony of the market (Basulto et al., 2023).

The arguments above would indicate that the function of normalisation in intervention devices constitutes a substantive problem for social work. This is aggravated because “neoliberal rationality is a specific form of normative reason” (Muñoz-Arce, 2018, p.35). It is essential to mention that the pressure of routine in professional practice prioritises the semi-automatic verification of requirements and indicators of entry to welfare

services. Following Peralta's (2020) opinion, professional training should visualise in this scenario the teaching of forms of intervention with critical capacity, with the aim of enhancing ethical commitment to social transformations. Cortés-Mancilla (2018), for his part, proposes ways to destabilise the devices of power in social work. The idea of *political bodies* is helpful for critically disputing the discursive space with those dominant narratives to rethink the ideation of normality in social intervention.

The *norm-tension* is a contradiction that evidences the ethical-theoretical conflict that is visible between the normalising function of social intervention and the historical and intrinsic values of social work. In order to produce this contradiction, the norm is not only a set of standards contained in legal norms or protocols of technical action. Its meaning must be projected towards the shaping of specific instruments of power, aimed at establishing what will be accepted as usual. With this extension, the behaviour of individuals and collectives is moulded through governmental institutions. In social work, the tensional component is generated when the dissonance between the professional-ethical reservoir and the institutional pressures contained in the devices constructed for intervention is unleashed. The interest in the norm-tension lies in reflexively confronting this rigidity. Otherwise, the ideals of social justice and transformative action risk being permanently reduced by the tasks of bureaucratic management in social programmes. This requires social work to be aware that its action operates in a place of contradiction with the neoliberal regime. On the one hand, there is the governmental structure, which needs to be in charge of the tools of regulatory control of the population. On the other hand, the professional collective assumes as an ethical obligation principles such as human dignity, the emancipation of people and the defence of human rights.

Discussion and Conclusions

Social intervention is the disciplinary subject of social work, whose functions are transformation, adjustment and normalisation (Saavedra, 2017). In the traditional imaginary of the profession, intervention is represented as a tool linked to practical work. However, social intervention in the 21st century is part of the strategic repertoire of disciplinary power (Foucault, 2021). In the context of present-day Chile, this concept faces significant tensions in the face of the deepening of neoliberal policies. In accordance with this assessment, Castro-Serrano et al. (2023) argue that *cartographic intervention* calls for new epistemological approaches that refute the rigidity and homogeneity of more traditional forms of intervention. This approach is close to the ideas proposed in the demands on social intervention for the coming decades, as it is also presented as acts of resistance and strategic conciliation to the current neoliberal context.

In agreement with Garret (2021), it is necessary to study the purposes and contradictions relevant to social work in the neoliberal framework. As Cortés (2017) points out, it is possible to rethink social intervention as a rupture with the established order, which positions social work on the stage of mobilisation of new and urgent transformations in society. Social work should assume this view to the extent that it distances itself from the nostalgic impulse about the professional past (Colin et al., 2018), which immobilises the exploration of new disciplinary routes. Therefore, this article proposes to discuss the denaturalisation of the discourses of intervention, recognising that the norm-tension provides a new category that contributes to making this contradiction visible in social work.

The literature review revealed a consensus on the negative consequences of the neoliberal culture on the design and implementation of social policies. In this scenario, social intervention increases the risk of being undermined by this socio-political regime. Following Morley and O'Bree (2021), neoliberal rationality hinders the possibilities for transformation. This aspect is also addressed by Urquieta et al. (2021), who warn that social intervention is reduced in Chile's public policies to implement technical procedures.

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For this reason, it is essential to denaturalise the statements of intervention to rescue it from the alienation to which neoliberalism subjects it. From a social work perspective, this implies a resistance to the frameworks rooted in technocratic views that provide a highly bureaucratic and decontextualised form of normative intervention. Denaturalisation suggests a critical approach to university social work training. Instead of teaching unreflectively about the functions assigned to the profession from neoliberal politics, it is proposed to encourage a more complex reflection that allows us to understand that social intervention can become an uncomfortable category (Danel, 2020) in constant tension with the structures of power. This also requires learning other ontological and epistemological keys, which, in the terms proposed by Aguayo and Marchant (2020, p.16), have "linguistic capacities that seek in dialogue with the other a form of communication in solidarity".

For one, this work generates essential debates about how the subsistence of social work is dealt with in the neoliberal framework. These disagreements in the literature explored may affect how the claims of denaturalisation and norm-tension are understood. Maylea (2021) suggests that neoliberalism has already absorbed social work, becoming ineffective in the face of the social question that gave rise to the profession at the end of

the 19th century. The author proposes that abandoning the profession in its current form is necessary, as it operates more as a form of containment of the population than as an identity that enables change. In contrast, Garrett (2024) proposes to reconsider the issue of *common sense* in the language of social work. According to the author, this avenue facilitates reframing the transformative character that has historically inspired the profession-discipline. In agreement with Garrett, it is relevant to challenge the neoliberal hegemonies and ordinary sense that guard the classical view of social intervention. In this vision, the denaturalisation of practices contributes to the empowerment of the critique of the professional status quo. Unlike Maylea, Garrett favours the internal reinvention of social work, insisting on a path that leads to the renewal of the ideological bases and methodological responses that make social change viable. Garrett's position also coincides with the need to denaturalise the discourses of intervention to put tension on the common meanings alluded to by the author.

The answer to the question of the continuity of social work in neoliberal contexts necessarily invites attention to related theoretical aspects. *Firstly, there is a need to denaturalise the enunciation* of social intervention to question the scope of neoliberalisation. Social intervention should be detached from the practical formalism of a technical-normative nature to reconfigure itself as a theoretical category of a critical-reflexive order. In this proposal, enunciative denaturalisation also implies an act of epistemological resistance. Social work is expected to rigorously study the premises that sustain neoliberal governmentality for the design and execution of social programmes. *Secondly, norm tension makes the constant contradiction of intervention in the neoliberal context visible.* The duality between the technical requirements of management efficiency and the ethical-political commitment attributed to social work emerges. This tension, initially uncomfortable for the profession, constitutes an interesting space for broadening political advocacy and epistemological openness. Taking Muñoz-Arce's (2019) approaches as a reference, the normative-tensive contradiction would imply that social work collectives consider the means to negotiate, adapt and challenge the normalising function of intervention circumscribed in neoliberal frameworks. This aims to construct a socially just but, at the same time, effective response to the various specific social problems of the coming decades, taking into account their structural complexity.

Finally, the consideration of discursive denaturalisation and the visualisation of the norm-tension encourage the gradual abandonment of conceptual versions of social intervention that respond more to the management of disciplinary control of the



population. In the light of the first hundred years of social work, what is of interest is to conceive scenarios for future epistemic, ethical and political disputes that contribute to forging new professional-disciplinary resistances. The proposed categories open up an explanatory horizon in which social work will find itself in the coming years, influencing the space of dispute and vindication of the social.

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Biography

Juan Saavedra is a Social Worker from the Universidad de Valparaíso, a Master in Human Development from the Universidad de La Frontera and a Doctor in Human Sciences from the Universidad Austral de Chile. He is an academic in the Department of Social Sciences at the Universidad del Bío-Bío, Concepción, Chile.

E-mail: juan.saavedra@ubiobio.cl

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9188-8126>



ARTICLE

Social intervention and social work: an inalienable link. A survey of the scientific literature in WoS, Scopus and SciELO

Intervención social y trabajo social: un vínculo inalienable. Estudio a la literatura científica en WoS, Scopus y SciELO

Ronald Zurita Castillo¹

Universidad Autónoma de Chile, Chile.

Victor Yáñez - Pereira

Universidad Autónoma de Chile, Chile.

Valentina Contreras - Vera

Universidad Autónoma de Chile, Chile.

Nataly Muñoz - Salinas

Universidad Autónoma de Chile, Chile.

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Abstract

Social work and social intervention have an indelible link, and both are an epochal fruit: they do not exist outside the context of modernity. This article presents the results of a bibliometric study, focusing its work on a construct of conceptual units. Three approaches were made to the scientific literature in WoS, Scopus and SciELO databases, revealing significant differences in the volume of publications, sources and periods covered. Annual scientific production

Keywords:
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tion

¹Corresponding author: Ronald Zurita, Chile. ✉ ronald.zurita@uautonoma.cl

shows a sustained increase, although with different patterns. The predominant languages are English and Spanish. The analysis of the scientific output by country identifies that, in WoS, Spain stands out, followed by the USA and the United Kingdom; in Scopus, production is led by the USA, the United Kingdom and Spain, while in SciELO, Colombia appears in first place, followed by Brazil and Chile. The analysis of categories and thematic areas reveals that in WoS, the most represented discipline is Social Work; in Scopus, the dominant thematic area is Medicine, and in SciELO, it is interdisciplinary social sciences. In the analysis of the sources of publication and application of Bradford's Law, it stands out that in WoS, the leading journals linked to the dissemination of discussions related to social intervention belong to the discipline of social work, in Scopus medical and multidisciplinary journals predominate, and in SciELO social science and interdisciplinary journals appear with a more significant presence.

Resumen

El trabajo social y la intervención social poseen un vínculo indeleble, y ambas son un fruto epocal: no existen fuera del contexto de la modernidad. Este artículo presenta los resultados de un estudio bibliométrico, centrando su quehacer en un constructo, vale decir, en unidades conceptuales. Se realizaron tres aproximaciones a la literatura científica en bases de datos WoS, Scopus y SciELO, revelando diferencias significativas en volumen de publicaciones, fuentes y periodos cubiertos. La producción científica anual muestra un alza sostenida, aunque con patrones diferentes. Los idiomas predominantes son inglés y español. El análisis a la producción científica por países identifica que, en WoS destaca España, seguido por EEUU y Reino Unido, en Scopus la producción es liderada por EEUU, Reino Unido y España, mientras que en SciELO aparece en primer lugar Colombia, seguido por Brasil y Chile. El análisis de categorías y áreas temáticas revela que en WoS la disciplina más representada es Trabajo social, en Scopus, el área temática dominante es Medicina y en SciELO es ciencias sociales interdisciplinarias. En el análisis a las fuentes de publicación y aplicación de la Ley de Bradford, destaca que en WoS las principales revistas vinculadas a la difusión de discusiones relativas a la intervención social, se adscriben a la disciplina de trabajo social, en Scopus predominan revistas médicas y multidisciplinarias, y en SciELO aparecen con mayor presencia revistas de ciencias sociales y humanidades. Los hallazgos invitan a reconocer y reafirmar que para trabajo social su objeto disciplinar es indefectiblemente la intervención social.

Palabras Clave:
trabajo social; intervención social; bibliometría; Ley de Bradford; producción científica



Introduction

For Agamben, terminology “is the poetic moment of thought” (2019, p.14), referring to the importance of terminological questions in philosophy. From linguistics, the terminology is the expression set that names “the notions that form a thematised area of knowledge” (Lerat, 1997, p.17). Terms are double-sided symbolic units: that of expression, morphological structure, and content, in which the notion or concept referred to by the denomination is represented (Cabr , 1993, p.195). Discursive objects are not independent of the context and place of enunciation; to enunciate presupposes the linguistic use of the word, whose function is to mobilise language. To enunciate is to present a point of view, including the non-explicit, so there are experiences of knowledge and, therefore, pretensions of validity (Y   ez-Pereira, 2021). Hence, without words and terminology, the concept is truncated, trapped in the idea, and without the possibility of definition.

Naming is the way of calling an object or class of objects by name (Lerat, 1997). However, naming is not summed up in the denomination or the concept since it implies designation in the enunciation. Naming makes appear, lets us see since the meaning is not found in their descriptions, but in their significance, that is, in what they create (C rdenas-Mar n, 2016; Santamaria, 2001).

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Strictly speaking, when we name, we put tension on the terms, their concepts and their definitions; in enunciation, we hope to establish an interface of communicative understanding with the other and its othernesses. Wittgenstein (2001) and Kripke (1995) point out that by naming, we validate an object and give it meaning. For Frege (2002), such objects find a place. Now, names and the words that project them will mean nothing if they are not recognised within utterances because only there their intentionalities are well expressed (Searle, 2017). By naming, then, we can expand the terms and thus provide them with observable references (Putnam, 1996).

In light of the above, this paper explores the concept of social intervention, recognising it “as a thematic, discursive, technical and political field” (Mu  oz Arce, 2018b, p.6) and as a field of analysis and action for various disciplines and professions (Berm  dez-Pe  a, 2012; Carballeda, 2002; Estrada, 2010), but with special and central interest for the discipline of social work, since social intervention, both in its ethical, epistemological and methodological dimensions, stands for the discipline as a founding milestone (Zurita-Castillo, 2021), source of identity, and *leitmotiv* of disciplinary existence

(Saavedra, 2017), anchored in the historical dimension of disciplinary construction (Rubilar-Donoso, 2009).

In this case, the term social intervention will be assumed as a construct, that is, a conceptual construction with explanatory validity which, possessing a theoretical definition and, therefore, referential, can also be observable through epistemic and methodological mediations (Yáñez-Pereira, 2007).

As a construct, in social intervention, there coexist multiple enunciative places around its nature (Saavedra, 2017); these have been collected by Saavedra (2015) and synthesised into four arguments about the concept of social intervention. The first group of arguments includes the voices that claim it as a practical action: the most notorious authors who are situated in this line have been Ander-Egg (1995), Kisnerman (1997) and Aylwin (1976). Many voices claim it as a discourse, anchored in its character as a device coded in a Foucauldian key (Saavedra, 2015). A third line of argument can also be distinguished, which situates the nature of social intervention as an essentially interpretative process: “There is no intervention without social interpretation” (Matus, 2001, p.27). A final line of argument is woven by defining social intervention as a distinction of functional social systems, translating social intervention as the capacity for “communicative selection of systems and their self-regulated viability” (Saavedra, 2015, p.141). In this line, Robles (2002) and Mascareño (2011) are grouped under the general umbrella of Luhmann’s postulates.

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In the multiplicity of previous voices, it could be said that today there is a consensus; social intervention stands as an epochal fruit: it does not exist outside the context of modernity (Muñoz, 2011; Saavedra, 2015), overcoming today’s debates of the last century, which strained the nature of intervention (and of the discipline of social work), linking it with protoforms of charitable actions. Social intervention is anchored in the ideology of modernity, assuming “a logic of understanding the real that is opposed to sacred, immobile and ontological conceptions” (Muñoz, 2011, p.86), questioning the social order as given, immobile or unalterable, but rather assuming it as a space that can be modified and transformed by human action, but within the framework of asymmetrical power relations (Méndez, 2012).

There have also been many attempts to define social intervention conceptually. Perhaps one of the most recurrent in the last decades of the previous century was that proposed

by Ezequiel Ander-Egg, describing it as “the set of activities carried out in a more or less systematic and organised way, to act on an aspect of social reality to produce a determined impact” (1995, p.161). Close to this line is the operative definition proposed by Fantova, who defines it as “an activity that is carried out in a formal or organised manner, attempting to respond to social needs and, specifically, to significantly influence people’s interaction, aspiring to public or social legitimisation” (2007, p.183); a definition with apparent similarities with the proposal of Corvalán, who conceives it as “the organised action of a group of individuals in the face of unresolved social problems in society, based on its basic dynamics” (Corvalán, 1996, p.4), while distinguishing two types of intervention: charitable-assistance and socio-political, a distinction that highlights two possibilities in social intervention: its disciplining character and, as a counterpart, its emancipating character. In agreement with the above is Carballada’s definition, when he affirms “a set of assistance and insurance devices in the function of maintaining the order or cohesion of what we call society” (2002, p. 97-98).

Departing from the previous conceptualisation searches, we find the definition proposed by Margarita Rozas Pagaza, who understands “intervention as a *problematic field insofar* as it constitutes the daily scenario where the manifestations of the social question are objectified and which reconfigure the social world of the subjects” (Rozas-Pagaza, 2010, p.46). Bermúdez Peña (2012) agrees with this proposal, locating social intervention as a field in a Bourdieusian key. Both proposals are in favour of clarifying the disciplinary field of social work, which, in one way or another, gathers conceptualisations that can be exported at least to other social sciences. Social intervention would then be a key construct for problematisations, discussions and disciplinary stakes.

Particularly relevant for this study is the lucid and synthetic definition proposed by Muñoz Arce, who defines social intervention as “the epistemological and politically constructed and planned process for the achievement of a change that is considered desirable” (Muñoz, 2011, p.85), and she goes on to point out that social intervention is constructed and unfolds, while at the same time, it is tensioned by two opposing logics: “rights (...) and the conditions produced by capitalism, as a model, and the market, as its operator” (Muñoz, 2011, p.87). In short, it represents a key to interpreting the relational and intentional processes in which social work participates, based on the production and reproduction of everyday life, deciphered as demands for change. In this regard, as Karsz (2009) would say, along with rescuing its places of enunciation from social intervention, it is possible to proliferate theoretical, ideological and subjective registers that favour understanding for social transformation, as it is configured and reconfigured

within complex dialectical tensions, between systems and lifeworlds (Habermas, 1989), structures and citizens' lives (Yáñez-Pereira, 2016).

In short, the article is located in the heart of the discipline's discussions, recognising that these are fundamental for the comprehensive analysis, not only of what intervention designates but also of the way of understanding it and giving it meaning, in its relations with the past and the contemporary, giving meaning to the processes of incidence and social transformation that social work promotes. Consequently, the scientific review of the propositions and positions from which social intervention is thought and projected imply diametrical differences when conceiving it as operations within a procedural structure (Fernández, 2008) or as a "thematic, discursive, technical and political field" (Muñoz-Arce, 2018, p.6). Such issues undoubtedly respond to a constant work of knowledge production for its proliferation (Facuse, 2003), that is, for the elaboration and theoretical recreation of its innovation (Yáñez-Pereira, 2023).

In short, problematising intervention is necessary for legitimising its enunciative potential, not only at a historical level but, above all, in its everyday implications in the disciplinary task.

Methodology

The issue of scientific knowledge is marked by each historical period (Foucault, 2009); currently, academic journals (Muñoz-Arce and Rubilar-Donoso, 2022) are one of the most common means of disseminating scientific research results (Rubilar-Donoso, 2024; Martínez Sánchez et al., 2014). Based on the above, it was proposed to analyse the concept of *social intervention* in academic publications and scientific journals by means of a quantitative (Letelier et al., 2005; Sánchez-Meca, 2010), cross-sectional (Hernández-Sampieri et al., 2014) and exploratory/descriptive (Chamblas et al., 2001) research, seeking to serve as a starting point for future research on the concept.

The research used a bibliometric methodological design (Hinojo-Lucena et al., 2019; Zurita-Castillo et al., 2024), favouring a retrospective enquiry to research publications that favours the search, selection, analysis and synthesis of information (Sánchez Martín et al., 2022), recognising its potential for analytical fruitfulness (Mukherjee et al., 2022). The bibliometric design follows the guidelines proposed by Massimo Aria and Corrado Cuccurullo (2017), taking up the contributions of Öztürk et al. (2024), focusing on a specific domain that is manifested in a construct (Mukherjee et al., 2022) of conceptual units.

Three bibliometric scans were carried out on 18 March 2024 to: [1] Web of Science main collection, in indexes: Science Citation Index Expanded (SCI-EXPANDED), Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), Arts & Humanities Citation Index (AHCI) and Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI), [2] Scopus catalogue, and [3] SciELO collection database, specifically the SciELO Citation Index, [on WoS platform], using the search equations detailed in table 1:

Table 1. Search equations by database

Database	Search equation
[1] WoS	(TS=(“social intervention”)) OR TS=(“social intervention”)
[2] Scopus	(TITLE-ABS-KEY (“social intervention”) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (“social intervention”))
[3] SciELO	(TS=(“social intervention”)) OR TS=(“social intervention”)

The three search equations are synthesised in the investigation of the concept of *social intervention* in Spanish and English, in title, abstract and keywords [in WoS *Keywords Plus* is added], without adding other exclusion criteria, such as years, disciplines, countries, or others, to broadly characterise the concept and its use in the scientific literature.

Data analysis

Once the set of studies that made up the analysis corpus had been detected, bibliometric information was extracted from the databases used. These data were exported in *Bibtex* (Bib) and *comma-separated values* (CSV) format. The Rstudio software was used for the analysis, specifically the R package Bibliometrix, which includes the Biblioshiny graphical interface (Aria and Cuccurullo, 2017; Donthu et al., 2021; Rodríguez-Soler et al., 2020).

Method of analysis

A descriptive statistical analysis of the scientific landscape around the concept studied was carried out, following the guidelines of Rodríguez-Soler et al. (2020), using the scientific mapping by standard flow (Aria and Cuccurullo, 2017), which included a general description of the results, an analysis of the evolution of the annual scientific production, followed by an examination of the scientific production by language and country. Fourthly, a descriptive analysis is made of disciplinary, thematic areas and categories linked to the concept of social intervention.



Fifthly, using publication sources as the unit of analysis, a descriptive analysis is carried out of the most relevant journals regarding the number of papers published on the concept studied. For the same unit of analysis, their impact is examined in terms of their *h-index* (Hirsch, 2005). The *h-index* is often preferable to other numerical criteria, as it better expresses the visibility value of research productivity (Chacín-Bonilla, 2012), establishing “a measure of position, (...) in which the volume of citations is less than or equal to the article’s rank in a descending distribution of citations” (Scimago Group, 2006, p.304). Complementarily, the *g-index* is used, which “compensates for the impact of articles with several citations higher than the *h-index* (...) and the *m-index*, which divides *h* by the number of years of research career, to prevent new researchers from being disadvantaged” (Túñez-López et al., 2014, p. 897-898).

The central analysis of the study is carried out with the application of Bradford’s Law (1934), also known as the “law of dispersion of scientific literature” (Patron et al., 2019, p.29). This law allows for identifying the core of the most relevant journals in a field, illustrating the distribution of scientific production in 3 zones, based on the total number of papers published by each source, where each of the zones contains an equivalent number of articles (Desai et al., 2018) but with an unequal number of associated sources. Journals placed in zone 1 are identified as central and most relevant to the field. Bradford’s central hypothesis states that most papers “may be being published by a few journals especially dedicated to that subject” (Alvarado, 2016, p.53).

Taking the group of journals identified as central by Bradford’s Law in WoS, Scopus and SciELO, a review of the journals’ websites was carried out (Muñoz-Arce et al., 2021), analysing their general definitions framework, identifying whether they explicitly state a link with the discipline of social work.

Results

General information

The results reveal significant differences in the volume of publications, sources and periods covered. The analysis indicates that Scopus hosts the most important results, with 3,396 documents, followed by WoS, with 914 results, and SciELO, with 328 papers.

Concerning the time interval covered by the explorations, it is important to point out that the three bibliometric surveys cover the entire period available in their respective databases, with Scopus being the database hosting results over the longest time interval,

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from 1959 to 2024. WoS computes results from 2008 to 2024. Finally, SciELO records results from 2002 to 2023.

About the sources associated with the results, 557 were found in WoS, while 2,140 were identified in Scopus. In SciELO, the sources recorded a total of 201 appearances.

The figures indicate that Scopus has the highest coverage regarding several documents, periods and sources, which could be related to its interdisciplinary and geographical breadth (Gregorio Chaviano et al., 2021). In the future, it could enable a deeper historical analysis of the development and evolution of the concept.

Table 2. Synthesis of explorations in WoS, Scopus and SciELO

Main information	in WoS	in Scopus	in SciELO
Time interval	2008 2024	1959 a 2024	2002 a 2023
Sources (magazines, books, etc.)	557	2.140	201
Documents	914	3.396	328
References	39.322	140.830	7.784
Keywords Plus (ID)	1.607	8.075	-
Author keywords	2.782	7.374	1.063
Authors	2.924	10.812	630
Types of documents			
Article	787	2.461	308
Books	-	53	-
Book chapter	-	230	-
Reviews	62	442	6
Other	65	210	14

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Annual scientific production

In all three cases, production shows a sustained increase, although with different patterns; in WoS, it is observed that from 2019, production has increased significantly, exceeding 100 publications per year. Scopus shows an earlier increase, starting in 2012 with a frequency of more than 100 articles per year, reaching a peak in 2023 with 308 publications. In the case of SciELO, although the general trend is upward, fluctuations are observed; the year 2021 records the highest number of publications with 33 results.



Figure 1. Annual scientific production in WoS

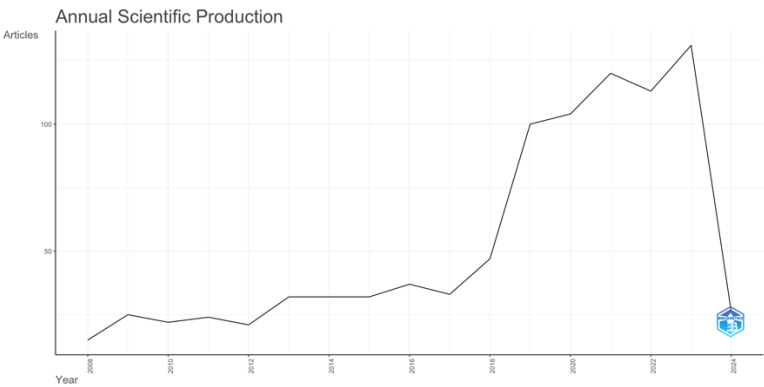


Figure 2. Scopus annual scientific production

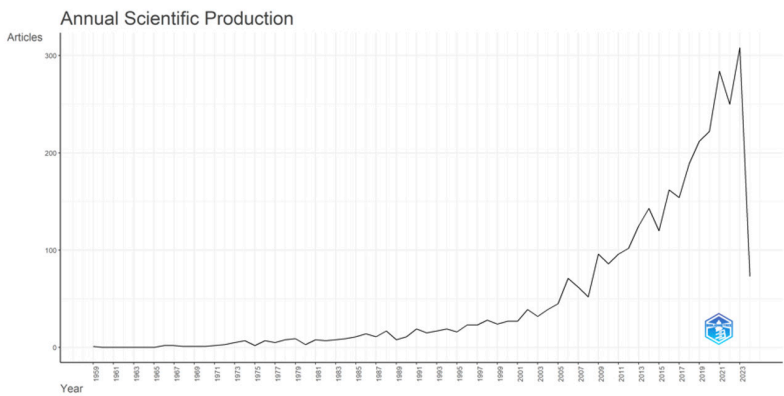
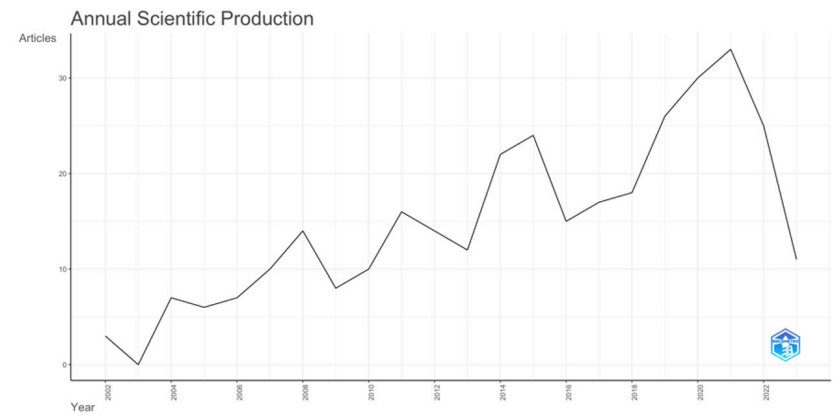


Figure 3. SciELO annual scientific production



Scientific production by language and country

The analysis of scientific production according to language reveals that the four most prevalent languages are English, Spanish, Portuguese and French, the order of which varies depending on the database consulted: English predominates in Scopus and WoS with 2,823 and 683 results, respectively, which is to be expected with the hegemony of this language in scientific communication (Ramírez-Castañeda, 2020). In SciELO, on the other hand, English-language production registers 18 results.

As for the Spanish language, the production is more balanced; 251 results are computed in Scopus, 230 publications in SciELO, and 179 results in WoS. As for the Portuguese output, a lower frequency is observed; only 26 results are found in WoS, 62 in Scopus, and the highest number is recorded in SciELO, with 79 records. Finally, the Gallic language records only results in WoS and Scopus, with 10 and 85 results, respectively.

Table 3. Publications by language in WoS, Scopus and SciELO

Languages	in WoS	in Scopus	in SciELO
English	683	2.823	18
Spanish	179	251	230
Portuguese	26	62	79
French	10	85	-
German	5	38	-
Italian	4	28	-
Afrikaans	1	-	1
Croatian	1	5	-



Table 4. Scientific production by country in WoS, Scopus and SciELO

WoS		Scopus		SciELO	
Country	Quantity	Country	Quantity	Country	Quantity
Spain	667	United States	1.649	Colombia	93
United States	457	United King- dom	1.184	Brazil	85
United King- dom	349	Spain	618	Chile	79
Australia	167	Canada	404	Argentina	35
Canada	150	Australia	397	Mexico	34
China	146	France	313	Spain	29
Portugal	120	Italy	289	Portugal	22
Chile	108	China	252	Ecuador	13

Using the nationality of the authorships as the unit of analysis, it is evident that in WoS, Spain leads the list with 667 entries, followed by the United States with 457 and the United Kingdom with 349. When the same analysis is carried out in Scopus, the order of the countries varies; the United States leads the list with 1,649 authorships, followed by the United Kingdom with 1,184, and Spain with 618, showing a considerable decrease with the previous ones.

SciELO shows a different reality to that observed in the databases linked to the global north. The countries with the most publications are Colombia, which has 93 authorships; Brazil, which has 85; and Chile, which has 79 results.

Disciplinary categories and subject areas

Analysing the disciplinary categories (in WoS and SciELO) and subject area (in Scopus), in which the papers analysed fall, yields diverse results. In the case of WoS, the discipline that is most represented is social work, with 156 documents, which suggests a strong association between the concept of social intervention and this discipline. It is followed by the disciplinary category of Occupational Environmental Public Health, with 85 publications, with Interdisciplinary Social Sciences and Psychiatry in third and fourth position, with 75 and 72 results, respectively.



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In Scopus, the dominant subject area is Medicine, with 1,453 results; Social Sciences, with 1,388; Psychology, with 661 results; and the Arts and Humanities category in fourth position with 370 publications. It should be noted that the social work category does not exist in Scopus.

In SciELO, the most represented disciplinary category is Interdisciplinary Social Sciences, with 66 results, and Educational Research and Sociology, with 37 results. The fourth position is the Multidisciplinary Humanities category, with 32 results.

Table 5 summarises the total frequency of publications by disciplinary category and subject area.

Table 5. Total frequency of publications by disciplinary category and subject area in WoS, Scopus and SciELO

WoS categories	Total	Subject area in Scopus	Total	Categories in SciELO	Total
Social work	156	Medicine	1.453	Interdisciplinary Social Sciences	66
Public Environmental Occupational Health	85	Social sciences	1.388	Education Research	37
Interdisciplinary Social Sciences	75	Psychology	661	Sociology	37
Psychiatry	72	Arts and Humanities	370	Humanities Multidisciplinary	32
Education Education Research	52	Nursing	192	Multidisciplinary Psychology	24
Multidisciplinary Psychology	47	Computing	159	Public Environmental Occupational Health	23
Sociology	29	Business, Administration and Accounting	151	Anthropology	21
Environmental Science	27	Environmental Science	118	History	20
Geriatrics Gerontology	25	Economics, Econometrics and Finance	96	Social work	18
Clinical Psychology	25	Engineering	95	Psychology	14



On analysing the set of appearances of the concept and its link with the disciplinary categories and subject areas, it stands out that, as the subject area of social work does not exist in Scopus, implications and difficulties arise for the visibility and recognition of the discipline at an international level (Martínez-Sánchez et al., 2014). In WoS and SciELO, social work is a disciplinary category. Still, disparities are evident in the results: while in WoS, the category of social work occupies first place with 156 results, representing one-sixth of the total number of papers found by the search, in SciELO, the disciplinary category of social work appears in ninth position with only 18 results.

Magazines

Most relevant journals by total frequency of publications

In WoS, the three journals with the most publications explicitly state their link to the discipline of social work. These are the journal *Cuadernos de Trabajo Social*, affiliated with the Complutense University of Madrid, Spain, with 28 results, followed by the *European Journal of Social Work*, affiliated with Taylor & Francis, UK, and the journal *Prospectiva*, affiliated with the *Universidad del Valle in Colombia*, both with 18 publications. Notably, five of the eight journals with the highest number of publications are explicitly linked to the discipline of social work. This reinforces the discipline's centrality in the discussions around the concept of social intervention in this database.

In Scopus, the four journals with the highest number of publications are *Plos One*, published by the *Public Library of Science (PLoS)*, USA, with 34 publications, followed by the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, published by the *Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute*, Switzerland, with 26 publications. In third place, *Springer's Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* and the *European Journal of Social Work* (UK), both with 22 results. In Scopus, only two of the eight journals at the top of the list with the highest number of publications are explicitly linked to the discipline of social work, namely the *European Journal of Social Work* (UK) and the journal *Alternatives* from the University of Alicante, Spain.

In SciELO, the journals with the highest number of publications are the Colombian journal *Prospectiva*, with 18 papers, followed by *Revista Cs of the Universidad Icesi* with eight publications, and the Brazilian journal *Katálisis*, from the Federal University of Santa Catarina, with seven publications. In SciELO, of the eight journals with the highest number of publications, only three are explicitly linked to the discipline, with *Prospectiva* (Colombia), *Revista Katálisis* (Brazil), and the journal *Serviço Social & Sociedade*, published by *Cortez Editora Limitada* (Brazil).

Table 6. Journals with the highest number of publications WoS, Scopus and SciELO

in WoS	Total	in Scopus	Total	in SciELO	Total
Social Work Notebooks	28	Plos One	34	Foresight	18
European Journal of So- cial Work	18	International Journal of Environmental Re- search and Public Health	26	Cs Magazine	8
Foresight	18	Journal of Autism and Developmental Disor- ders	22	K a t á l y s i s Magazine	7
International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health	15	European Journal of So- cial Work	22	Psychology & Society	6
Alternatives. Social Work Notebooks	12	Social Science and Medicine	21	Psychosocial Intervention	6
Journal of Autism and Developmental Disor- ders	12	Alternatives	18	Moebio Tape	5
Social Prism	12	Bmc Public Health	17	Journal of So- cial Studies	5
Trabajo Social Glob- al-Global Social Work	12	Frontiers in Psychology	17	Social Service & Society	5

In WoS, the leading journals linked to disseminating discussions on social intervention belong to the discipline of social work. In contrast, medical and multidisciplinary journals predominate in Scopus, suggesting that other disciplines prefer talks on social intervention. In SciELO, on the other hand, journals from the social sciences and humanities appear to have a more significant presence.

Impact indices by journals

The analysis of impact indices makes it possible to quantify the influence and relevance of journals in a field. Table 7 shows the five journals with the highest impact indices according to citation indexes.



Table 7. Journals with the highest impact in h, g, and m indexes and total citations in WoS, Scopus and SciELO

in WoS	Index h	Index g	Index m	Total ap- pointments
Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders	7	12	0,438	313
European Journal of Social Work	6	9	0,4	99
Bmj Open	5	10	0,357	102
International Journal of Environmen- tal Research and Public Health	5	10	0,5	108
Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing	5	6	0,385	44
in Scopus	Index h	Index g	Index m	Total ap- pointments
Social Science and Medicine	16	21	0,4	1.518
Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders	13	22	0,464	1.355
Plos One	13	21	1,083	474
Bmc Public Health	11	17	0,579	927
British Journal of Psychiatry	10	11	0,227	1.533
in SciELO	Index h	Index g	Index m	Total ap- pointments
Moebio Tape	3	4	0,214	17
Interface - Communication, Health, Education	3	4	0,143	22
Psychosocial Intervention	3	6	0,158	41
Journal of Social Studies	3	4	0,143	20
Cadernos de Saúde Pública	2	3	0,087	10

Special attention should be paid to the predominance of publications in English, occupying the top positions in terms of impact and influence in the field, especially in databases associated with the global north. In the three bibliometric explorations, the only journal linked to the discipline of social work is the *European Journal of Social Work* (United Kingdom), which is included in the WoS index. Similarly, in dialogue with the previous results, the journals that occupy the top positions in WoS and Scopus are preferably linked to health, medicine or multidisciplinary areas, and only in SciELO do journals from the humanities or social sciences appear.



Bradford Law

The Bradford's Law formula identifies the journals in Zone 1 as central and most relevant to the concept under study; these journals occupy a prominent position in disseminating research related to social intervention. Figures 4, 5 and 6 contain the graphical representation of the law in WoS, Scopus and SciELO, respectively.

Figure 4. WoS Bradford's Law

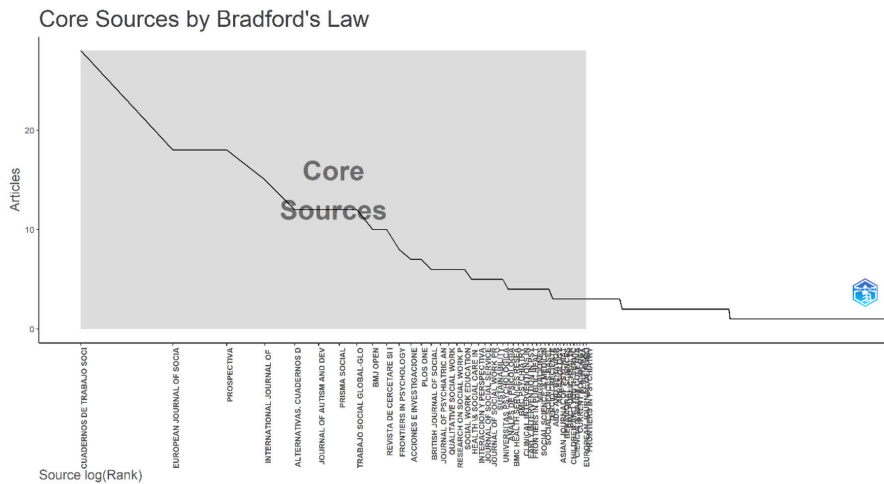


Figure 5. Scopus Bradford's Law

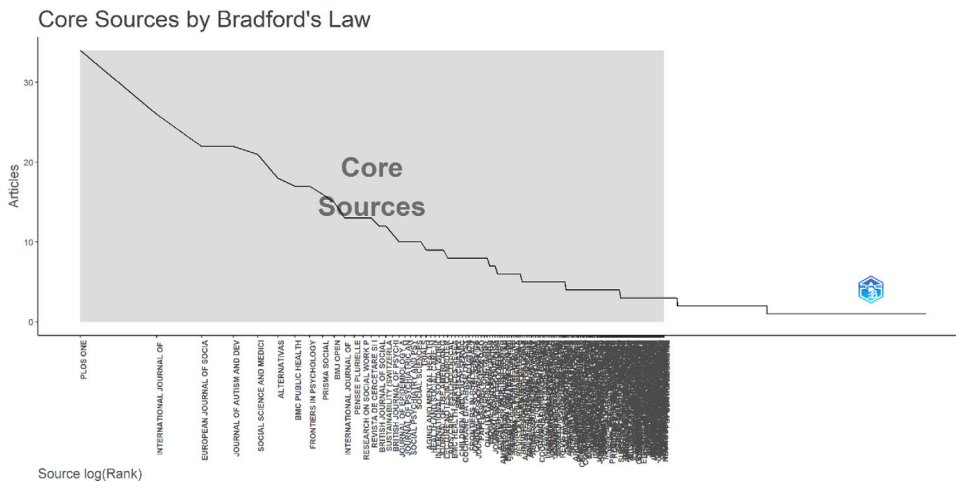
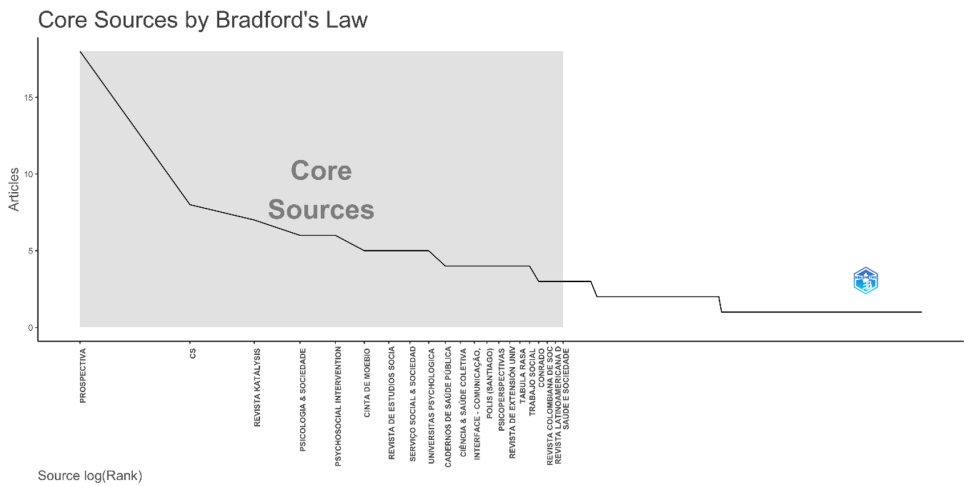


Figure 6. SciELO Bradford's Law



In WoS, of the 557 sources in which the concept of social intervention is mentioned, the analysis of Bradford's law allows us to identify a group of 45 journals grouped in Zone 1, which together publish 302 papers. The journal *Cuadernos de Trabajo Social* (Spain), with 28 entries, and the *European Journal of Social Work* (United Kingdom) and *Prospectiva* (Colombia), with 18 entries each, have the highest number of papers.

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In Scopus, the analysis of the 2,140 sources identifies 199 journals grouped in this area, which together publish 1,122 papers. In terms of frequency of publications, the following journals stand out: *Plos One* (USA), leading with 34 papers; *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (Switzerland), with 26 published papers; and the *European Journal of Social Work* (UK) and the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* (USA), both with 22 published papers.

In SciELO, of the 201 sources analysed, Bradford's law identified a group of 21 journals that together publish a total of 109 papers: the journal *Prospectiva* (Colombia) leads the panorama with 18 papers, followed by *Revista CS* (Colombia) with eight contributions, and in third place appears the journal *Katálysis* (Brazil) with seven publications.

Primary sources, according to Bradford Law

The analysis of the manifest content, derived from the review of the institutional web pages of all the sources identified by Bradford's Law as central [Zone 1] in WoS,



Scopus and SciELO, allows us to identify the journals that declare an explicit link with the discipline of social work.

WoS identifies that 15 of the 45 journals grouped in Zone 1 by Bradford’s law state that they are linked to the discipline of social work, i.e. in one out of every three sources. In Scopus, of the 199 journals identified in Zone 1, only 16 are explicitly linked to social work, translating into a ratio of one to twelve. Finally, in SciELO, of the 21 journals identified in Zone 1, only five are explicitly linked to social work, a ratio of almost one to four. This is summarised in table 8.

Table 8. Journals in Zone 1, according to Bradford, linked to social work in WoS, Scopus and SciELO

Zone 1, according to Bradford	Declares link with social work	Does not declare a link with social work	Total magazines
Zone 1 in WoS	15 (33,33%)	30 (66,66%)	45
Zone 1 in Scopus	16 (8,04%)	183 (91,96%)	199
Zone 1 in SciELO	5 (23,8%)	16 (76,2%)	21

Discussion and conclusions

The bibliometric analysis reveals the concept of social intervention in different disciplinary traditions and its multidimensional use in connection with various fields of knowledge. The comparative study of the three databases consulted shows particularities: Scopus hosts the most significant number of documents and sources and covers a more extended period. It also has the highest h, g and total citation indexes (Gregorio Chaviano et al., 2021). On the other hand, in WoS, the discussion of the concept of social intervention appears especially linked to social work.

Special attention should be paid to the findings relating to the analysis by languages and countries of publication and indexes of journals with the highest impact, which reveal a marked asymmetry in publications in English and Spanish, with a pronounced preponderance and hegemony of publications in English (Ramírez-Castañeda, 2020), reproducing hierarchies of domination, colonialities of knowledge (Quijano, 2000), and the geopolitical order of knowledge (Muñoz-Arce et al., 2021); this is most noticeable in databases associated with the global north (Martínez-Sánchez et al., 2014; Muñoz-Arce et al., 2021).



Of particular interest is the impact and influence of the sources with the highest impact indices, where it is observed that in WoS and Scopus, there are no titles in Spanish, which is not consistent with the journals with the highest number of papers. Similarly, it should be noted that the only journal that is linked to social work, and which appears in second place by impact index h in WoS, is the *European Journal of Social Work*, which denotes a disciplinary challenge located from Spanish-speaking discussions to the scientific problematisation and theorisation of knowledge on intervention, especially in Latin America, to make the definitions and relationships that give meaning to its understanding and innovation more complex (Cohen and Gómez, 2019).

The findings relating to disciplinary categories and thematic areas, as well as the analysis by total frequency of publications and the content analysis of the institutional web pages of the sources identified by Bradford's Law, reveal that in WoS, discussions of the concept of social intervention appear preferentially in social work journals; in Scopus, its discussion appears more linked to medical and multidisciplinary journals, which is explained by the non-explicit recognition of the discipline of social work in this database; In contrast, in SciELO, the discussion of the concept is found in journals linked to social sciences and humanities, which could be due to the lower presence of social work journals in this database (Muñoz-Arce et al., 2021, p.151).

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The results invite us to recognise and reaffirm that social work's disciplinary object is unfailingly social intervention (Yáñez-Pereira, 2007; Zurita-Castillo, 2012), which stands as a particular domain of knowledge (Suárez-Sánchez, 2022), as a distinctive field of professional action (Muñoz-Arce, 2019) and as the primary meaning and signifier of its identity (Saavedra, 2017). The study's findings invite us to recognise social work as the backbone discipline of social intervention. It aims to dispel the questions surrounding its disciplinary status, moving towards a more precise delimitation of the concept.

Intervention, for social work, is a fruitful object in its meaning or a non-trivial object (Morín, 2001), around which it is essential to confront the risk of its reification and deterministic simplification. We speak of an epistemological construction, always nascent in its theoretical and methodological relations (Bourdieu and Passeron, 2013) because from it, the discipline names, problematises, and produces options for transformation in the social, according to its use and reflexive appropriation as a node of knowledge.

The lines opened up by the study include the possibility of deepening quantitative approaches to the concept using spectroscopic analysis of references by year of publication (RPYS) (Bornmann and Haunschild, 2023; Thor et al., 2016; Yeung and Wong, 2019), seeking to identify the historical roots of social intervention in social work. On the other hand, the possibility emerges of fostering qualitative approaches, particularly through systematic reviews (Barquero Morales, 2022; Estarli et al., 2016) that aim to identify their places of enunciation (Karsz, 2009), from which the social interventions (Muñoz-Arce, 2018a) of the discipline are founded (Muñoz-Arce, 2018a).

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in the conduct of this study. The results presented are independent and have not been influenced by the funding body.

Authors' biographies

Ronald Zurita-Castillo is a social worker at the University of Concepción. Master in Social Management, Universidad de la Frontera, Chile. PhD Candidate in Social Work, Universidad Nacional de la Plata. Diploma in Promotion and Integral Protection of Children and Adolescents. Academic lecturer, Ibero-American Institute for Sustainable Development, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universidad Autónoma de Chile, Talca.

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E-mail: ronald.zurita@uautonoma.cl

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6585-6438>

Victor Yáñez Pereira, Social Worker, Bachelor in Social Service. Master in Social Work and Social Policies, Universidad de Concepción. PhD in Social Work, National University of La Plata - Argentina. Post-doctorate in Social Work, Universidad Nacional de la Plata - Argentina. Diploma in Mediation, Diploma in Intervention, Diploma in Innovation and Collaborative Management for Teaching in Higher Education. Academic Director of Postgraduate Studies at the Universidad Autónoma de Chile.

E-mail: vyanezp@uautonoma.cl

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6963-236X>

Valentina Contreras-Vera is a social worker with a specialisation in public policy management at Universidad Autónoma de Chile, Talca. Master's student in Social Work at the Universidad Autónoma de Chile.

E-mail: valentina.contreras4@cloud.uautonoma.cl

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8210-4400>

Nataly Muñoz-Salinas, Licentiate in Social Work, Universidad Autónoma de Chile.

E-mail: nataly.munoz1@cloud.uautonoma.cl

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8210-4400>



ARTICLE

Knowledge production in the master's in Social Work at the University of Chile: A thematic and methodological analysis

La producción del conocimiento del magíster en Trabajo Social de la Universidad de Chile: análisis temático y metodológico

Tânia Krüger¹

Federal University of Santa Catarina, Brazil.

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Abstract

The text aims to identify and produce a critical analysis of the thematic emphasis, methodological and theoretical reference of the Theses and Equivalent Formative Activities (AFE) produced as a course conclusion work by students of the Master of Social Work at the University of Chile. This is a bibliographic investigation using the systematisation of two titles, keywords, abstracts and fluid reading of theses and AFE published in the institutional repository of the library of the University of Chile between 2020 and July 2024. It is a brief look at 6 years in the life of the Master of Social Work. We identify that there is a qualified expansion of scientific production in the area of social service linked to social policies in the areas of childhood, gender, education, and the prison system, in particular, followed by issues related to changes in the world of work. Social work as a training area and occupational social space has been poorly studied. Finally, we consider a punctual and localised study of scientific production in social work necessary for research on post-graduation in Chile and Latin America.

Keywords:
social work;
postgraduate
studies; knowle-
dge production;
research

¹Contact: Tânia Krüger, Brasil. ✉: tania.kruger@ufsc.br

Resumen

El texto tiene como objetivo identificar y promover el análisis crítico del énfasis temático de las referencias metodológicas y teóricas de las Tesis y Actividades Formativas Equivalentes (AFE) elaboradas como trabajo de graduación de los estudiantes del Magíster de Trabajo social de la Universidad de Chile. Se trata de una investigación bibliográfica realizada por medio de la sistematización de los títulos, las palabras clave, los resúmenes y la lectura oscilante entre las tesis y las AFE publicadas en el repositorio institucional de la biblioteca de la Universidad de Chile desde 2020 hasta julio de 2024. Resulta ser solo una breve revisión de los seis años de vida del Magíster de Trabajo social. Se identificó que en el programa está ocurriendo una expansión calificada de la producción científica en el área del servicio social, vinculada con las políticas sociales específicas de infancia, género, educación y sistema carcelario principalmente, así como también, con temas relacionados a los cambios en el mundo laboral, aunque el área de formación y espacio socio-ocupacional han sido poco estudiadas. Finalmente, se le considera como un estudio específico y enfocado en la producción científica en el área del servicio social, en el que existe la necesidad de que el alcance de las investigaciones indique lo que ofrece el posgrado en Chile y en América Latina.

Palabras Clave:

*servicio social;
posgrado;
producción de
conocimiento;
investigación*



Introduction

Producing scientific and technical knowledge in social service through postgraduate programmes and institutional and inter-institutional research networks has expanded significantly since 1990 (Yamamoto, 2021; Schwartzman, 2022). “Current productions are already part of our professional development and research, in turn, is part of our professional culture; nowadays, we do not have to argue about whether it is necessary to do research” (Pagaza, 2024, p. 138). This maturity of the area results in the socialisation and dissemination of scientific and technical knowledge and what is obtained from this product, which increased considerably during the period and occurred through scientific events (local, regional, national and international), academic journals and the specialised publishing market.

The undergraduate and postgraduate training of the last decades of Latin American social service created the conditions to carry out dialogues with other social sciences and overcome a perspective that limited the professional practice of social work only to immediate or individual actions. Such intellectual maturity allows us to think critically, providing us with elements for intervention and training, which condense aspects of the present and the past understood in the accumulation of the debate with critical theories (Lara and Martins, 2023; Pagaza, 2024). Undoubtedly, these are the determining elements for the strengthening of the disciplinary debate and the consolidation of the knowledge produced by generations of social workers who opened fields of study together with universities and development agencies, building spaces for the dissemination of knowledge and theoretical, political and methodological debate (Brazilian Association of Social Service Teaching and Research, 2017; Lewgoy and Maciel, 2021; Muñoz-Arce et al., 2021).

Postgraduate studies in Latin American social service date back to the 1970s in Brazil and the 1980s in Argentina, for example. Both currents give value to the work of science and higher education based on a framework of training and academic production that responds to the social and technical demands of the different territories and institutions (Lara and Martins, 2023; Pagaza, 2024). During its academic trajectory, social service in Latin America, far from any linearity, has been influenced by the University Reform of Córdoba, by the regulations imposed by the military dictatorships, by the regional socio-political climate of the democratisation of the 1990s, as well as by the neoliberal programming of the recent period (Suasnábar et al., 2018).

In different periods of the 20th century, Latin American public universities were under pressure to develop knowledge that was capable of generating solutions to the socio-economic problems faced by the countries of the region, to collaborate with regional and national development, as well as to promote the democratisation of access to higher education (Prolo, Lima, Moniz, 2019). In the 21st century, on the other hand, despite all the territorial and regional differences, there was a decline of a good part of the progressive governments and, in particular, there was the rise of right-wing forces that promote an agenda of “neoconservative” changes aimed at limiting or reversing the redistributive policies and the expansion of rights that took place in the previous stage. In higher education, the global trend is towards universalisation, which replaced the traditional formulation of the right to education conditional on merit and is once again in paradigmatic conflict with neoliberalism (Suasnábar et al., 2018). Likewise, one emerges from neoliberal references:

Obscurantist era, in which a new theology of the market dominates everything and in which the public, anaesthetised by mass media, is incapable of understanding what is happening and of reacting against those who, shamelessly and brazenly, when they exercise power, weaken and destroy the institutions of higher education and research that are fundamental for the construction of sovereign and independent nations (Díaz, 2018, p. 31).

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At the same time, in the field of human and social sciences, postgraduate studies in social service suffer and resist the economic tensions of the disqualification and negationism of science, especially those already mentioned, as well as the public defunding of research and the attack on the autonomy of public universities. In this context of affirmation and tensions of postgraduate social service in South America and the Caribbean, this article aims to identify and elaborate a critical analysis of the thematic, methodological and theoretical structure of the Theses and Equivalent Formative Activities (AFE) carried out as graduation work by the students of the Master's in Social Work at the University of Chile². It turns out to be a determined and specific study. Still, it intends to show the importance of postgraduate research rather as creators of knowledge for social service and to elaborate questions for broader future reflections. The production of postgraduate knowledge is the fundamental element investigated in this work because visibility, legitimacy and potential social impact are obtained in the final works of this

² The development of this article occurs under the condition of Visiting Professor Abroad - Senior (PVE), between May and July 2024. The possibility of exercising this position at the University of Chile occurred through the registration and subsequent approval of the postdoctoral fellowship in the Notice 27/2023 PROPG/UFSC (publication of the Federal University of Santa Catarina), with the results of the selection of candidates for the remaining quotas of visiting professor abroad - senior level - of the CAPES project (Coordination of Improvement of Higher Level Personnel).



level of academic training (Carvalho, Stampa, Santana, 2020). It can be added then that it is an aspect that is highlighted in the Regulations of the Master's Degree in Social Work: "The Degree Thesis and Equivalent Formative Activity are the most important activities of the Master's Degree Programme in Social Work" (Reglamento Magíster Trabajo Social Universidad de Chile, 2017).

This programme was created by University Decree No. 0042081 of 8 November 2017, subsequently approved by the Regulations and Training Plan (University of Chile, 2017) and began its academic activities in 2018, linked to the Department of Social Work at the University of Chile. It is located in the Faculty of Social Sciences (FACSO), and its "mission is to train graduates in the academic and professional field of Social Work, who possess knowledge and skills to research and intervene in complex social phenomena from a critical and reflective perspective" (Reglamento Magíster Trabajo Social Universidad de Chile, 2017).

The general objective of the master's degree is "to train graduates in the field of Social Work, who understand and deepen the disciplinary discussion, with the ability to carry out basic research and applied intervention, based on the social problems existing in contemporary society" (Regulations of the Master's Degree in Social Work, University of Chile, 2017). Based on this objective, the programme is attributed a mixed character, i.e. academic and professional, allowing "students to opt for a profile oriented towards scientific research or the improvement of social interventions, choosing in each case a research thesis or an Equivalent Training Activity (AFE) as the final graduation product³".

To present some elements of Higher Education in Chile, of which the Master's programme in Social Work forms part, some indicators for the year 2024 are described. Total enrolment in Higher Education is 1,385,828, considering the undergraduate and postgraduate levels *lato sensu*⁴ and *stricto sensu*⁵, respectively. The enrolment of people belonging to one of the Indigenous peoples is 150,953, although, at the postgraduate level, it reaches 2,820 (1.9%). Percentage-wise, undergraduate studies account for

³Article N°26: "The Thesis must contribute creatively to the deepening of a subject of scientific knowledge, using epistemological, theoretical and methodological resources, in a coherent manner with the approach assumed and whose elaboration considers in a balanced way, if required, an empirical component. The Thesis must be developed mainly within the Programme's research lines, in the proposed structure of nuclei".

Article 27° - "The Equivalent Training Activity refers to a work of knowledge application, supported by the central epistemological, theoretical and methodological resources taught in the Master's Programme in Social Work. It is

⁴Latin expression referring to "in a broad sense".

⁵Latin expression referring to 'in the strict sense'.

92.2%, and postgraduate studies *strictly account* for 3.8% of total enrolment. In the case of *stricto sensu* doctoral studies, between 2020 and 2024, it increased by 14.5%, of which 85.6% corresponds to enrolments in master's programmes and 14.4% to postgraduate programmes. Regarding gender distribution, women represent 53.2% at the undergraduate level and 48.8% at the postgraduate level (Under-Secretary for Higher Education, 2024).

In the 21st century, higher education in Chile is moving from focusing on educating elites to a mass system. During the last decades, access to higher education has increased for previously excluded socio-economic and cultural groups, which has implied a diversification of the social origin of the student population. As an example, the University of Chile (2025), by national policy guidelines, has since 2014 adopted Special Admission Processes with offers of places for various social segments, as well as for people belonging to indigenous groups, people with disabilities, and gender equity, among others. On the other hand, "The expansion of enrolment and institutional diversification of Chilean higher education has occurred under a particular modality of development, characterised by the intense operation of an educational market, with strong pre-eminence of private supply, predominance of subsidies to demand and low capacity for state regulation (Cepeza, Bizama, Casanova and Olivia, 2019).

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Suppose the programme is situated in the context of segmented access to higher education. In that case, ignoring the historical fractures the service suffered in the country is impossible. The training of Chilean social workers, particularly the Department of Social Work at the University of Chile, was hit for years by the measures taken by the dictatorship. The School of Social Work activities were closed during the second half of the 1970s (Sepúlveda, 2016) and thanks to a collective effort to promote training in a public university, the course was reopened in 2014.

The reopening was painful, gradual and undoubtedly foundational. It involved a process of recognition and memory of those students who were detained and disappeared during this period and the altered trajectories of many others who were exonerated, expelled from university classrooms or whose educational processes were truncated. It is a legacy we live with, with all its contradictions and expectations as a Public University (Universidad de Chile, 2024).

In March 2015, the first group of undergraduate social work students entered the university after almost four decades without students in the university halls. With the



same impetus to qualify for social work in Chile and at the University of Chile, a group of academics, teachers, and students came together:

In May 2018, the first cohort of Master's students did the same, joining the graduates of the University of Chile, which shows that Social Work is a discipline that takes place in the logic of the times of transformation in which we live. This allows us to confront, once again, with renewed knowledge, the inequality that inhabits us and to open the way to better forms of social redistribution and public recognition of legitimate and plural forms of life (Universidad de Chile, 2024).

In this context of young undergraduate and postgraduate careers in social service (with an extensive historical trajectory of training and social intervention – from the commemoration of the centenary of Social Work in Chile in 2025), this work is concerned with describing and analysing the thematic, methodological and theoretical structure of the Theses and Equivalent Formative Activities (AFE) produced by students as graduation work for the Master's Degree in Social Work at the University of Chile. Therefore, the production of this text considers only six years of the Master's programme. Still, it also reflects on the production of social work knowledge throughout Latin America.

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The development of this work is presented as follows: as a first item, the methodological procedures used for the assessment and evaluation of the Theses and Equivalent Formative Activities (AFE) are presented, as well as the profiles of these final works. Next, the Theses and AFE topics were grouped and counted according to the thematic axes of the XXIII Seminar of the Latin American Association for Teaching and Research in Social Work (ALAEITS), which took place in 2022. In this sub-theme, the 168 keywords were grouped into 18 thematic categorisations. The third item refers to the studies' methodology or methodological framework, subdivided into a) approach and type of study, b) data production/collection technique, c) participant selection criteria, and d) data analysis techniques. Finally, the fourth item systematises the theoretical-conceptual elements, the normative and documentary references of the public policies underpinning the formulation of the problem, the research question, and the contextualisation of the state of the art of the Theses and AFE.

I - Methodological procedures for the analysis of Theses and Equivalent Formative Activities (EFAs)

To respond to the general objective of this research, which is to identify and carry out a critical analysis of the thematic, methodological and theoretical structure of the Theses and Equivalent Formative Activities (AFE) prepared by students of the Master’s Degree in Social Work at the University of Chile, access was gained, through the digital repository, to the public information of the final works related to the Programme. For this exploratory study, elements for systematisation and analysis were sought in the titles, keywords, summaries, methodological references, search techniques and theoretical-conceptual elements of the theses and EFAs.

To begin with, we sought to identify and characterise the Degree Theses and the EFAs, as “they are the most important activities of the Master’s Degree Programme in Social Work”. This means that both “the Thesis work and the Equivalent Formative Activity will culminate in an individual written document in which academic-research (Thesis) and professional (AFE) competencies are demonstrated using epistemological, theoretical and methodological resources, consistent with the conceptual approach assumed” (Universidad de Chile Reglamento Magíster Trabajo Social, 2017).

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Table 1. Number of Theses and Equivalent Formative Activity (AFE) per year between 2020 and 2024 in the Master’s programme in Social Work, U. de Chile.

Year	Theses	AGE
2020	2	1
2021	6	1
2022	11	6
2023	5	1
2024 ⁶	8	
Total	32	9

Source: Universidad de Chile. Institutional Repository. Library. Theses and AFE of the Master’s programme in Social Work FACSIO. Consultation between May and July 2024. Own elaboration.

It can be seen from the table that the students have prioritised academic training over professional (technical) training since 32 (78.0%) of the works presented are theses and 9 (21.9%) were AFE.

⁶ The 2024 theses and AFE considered were those published up to July.



All of the work, i.e., the 41 previously individualised assignments, was divided among 14 lecturers, thus providing the Master’s students with ample theoretical references for teaching and research activities.

It should also be noted that this programme is organised into systematic curricular activities, which correspond to what is established in the study plan, i.e. visits to subsidise the preparation of the Thesis or respective AFE, as well as the degree exam. The R&D Nuclei (Research and Development of Intervention Proposals) stand out among these compulsory curricular activities.

The Nuclei are structured to dynamise and strengthen research and intervention. This instance has been conceived as a space for small groups of academics where a team that relates directly to the students is formed, offering a space for research and intervention.

In this sense, this space operates as a pedagogical system where students will be guided in selecting topics in terms of the project and developing the Thesis or Equivalent Formative Activity. This solves a persistent difficulty in terms of adequate pedagogical support, a consistent academic discussion, and favouring the completion of the thesis or equivalent training activity within the timeframe established by the programme (Universidad de Chile Reglamento Magíster Trabajo Social, 2017).

The relation of the R&D Nuclei and the number of linked theses and FEAs are presented in the sequence.

Table 2. Several theses and AFE following the R&D Nuclei, between 2020 and 2024, in the Master’s Programme in Social Work, U. of Chile.

R & D Cores	N. Thesis or AFE
Effective public policy innovations	13
Complex territorial systems	5
Diversity and Gender: Intersectional Feminist Approaches	3
Interdisciplinary studies in social work	13
Socio-economic relations and social struggles	7
Total	41

Source: Universidad de Chile. Institutional Repository. Library. Theses and AFE of the Master’s Programme in Social Work. FACSOC. Consultation between May and July 2024. Own elaboration.



The R+D Nuclei, in terms of spaces for professional and academic training in social service, both for undergraduate and postgraduate students, present a quite diverse amount of work associated with them. For this reason, the number of teachers linked is vast. The thematic demands of the students and other internal elements of the course organisation are beyond the scope of this study.⁷

The information on the final works was collected based on the author's name and whether female or male authors wrote the work. Thus, the number of theses and FEAs written by women reached 29 (70.7%) and 12 (29.2%) by men. Therefore, congruencies were found in the percentages obtained in the sample of the study by Reyes, García and Donoso (2018):

In the Master's programmes analysed, the majority of students are women. The responses of the respondents continue the trend: 80 per cent (out of 32) in the Master's program in Social Work and Social Policy at the Universidad de Concepción and 64 per cent (out of 28) in the Master's program in Social Work at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (p.409-410).

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In Brazil, for example, data from 2022 suggest that the gender composition of the teaching staff was 500 female (76.1%) and 157 male (23.9%). For the student body, the gender distribution was 2,265 (77.41%) for females and 661 (22.59%) for males (Fundación Coordinadora para el perfeccionamiento del Personal de Nivel Superior, 2023).

The data from both countries are relatively similar. However, the male presence in postgraduate social services in Chile seems to be slightly higher. However, the numbers are somewhat different when looking to characterise the female and male presence in social service in general in the two countries. When considering social service training and graduation in Chile, the percentage of women at this level of training is higher, according to Aspeé and Campos (2018, p.178):

Of the number of people enrolled and graduated from 2007 to 2016 in all levels and types of institutions where social work certifications are taught in Chile. The study concludes that 81% of social work students (Technical and Professional) were women and 19% were men, a proportion closely replicated in degrees that accentuates the gender gap.

⁷ For more information on the cores, see: <https://www.trabajosocialuchile.cl/nucleos-id/>



Studies in Brazil indicate that women's presence is more significant than in Chile. In the mid-2000s, the percentage of female social workers was 97% (Federal Council of Social Services, 2005), while in the search for a new professional register in 2022 (Federal Council of Social Services, 2022), 92.92% of professionals identified themselves as female, as opposed to 6.97% who identified themselves as male. "Other gender expressions" accounted for 0.10%.

A study at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA) on the gender demographics of students in 2012 identified that 93.6% were female and 7.3% were male, out of a total of 2014 people. In 2017, females accounted for 89.2% and males for 10.7% out of 2112 students. As for the social service faculty, in 2012, it corresponded to 330 professionals, 74.5% women and 25.46% men (Nebra, 2018).

This set of data on the group of social service professionals, made up mostly of women, continues to reveal the historical feminisation of the profession, which has implications for the construction of the profile, cultural valuation and insertion in the labour market. However, it is striking that when it comes to postgraduate studies and teaching, the presence of men is proportionally more significant than the number of students and professionals in general, which leads to social values considered masculine and feminine.

After this quantitative survey of the works, we sought to qualify the themes of the Theses and FEAs by analysing the title and keywords, which are presented as a description of the methodological instruments and the theoretical foundations of the works.

2- Systematisation of Theses and AFE topics

To better systematise and analyse the themes of the Theses and AFE of the Master's Degree in Social Work, references were sought from the Chilean Association for the Teaching of University Social Work (ACHETSU)⁸. As it was impossible to find the guidelines for formulating the thematic axes for social work research and intervention in the ACHETSU, such references were sought in the Latin American Association for Teaching and Research in Social Work (ALAEITS), unfortunately without success. Thus, it was decided to extract the thematic axes from the XXIII ALAEITS Seminar, which took place in Montevideo in November 2022 (ALAEITS, 2022).

⁸ The Asociación Chilena para la Enseñanza del Trabajo Social Universitario (ACHETSU) was preceded by the Corporación Chilena para la Enseñanza del Trabajo o Servicio social (ACHETS), created in 1999.

Table 3 presents the systematisation that followed the thematic axes of the above-mentioned ALAEITS seminar, i.e. the criteria requested for the registration of papers. As these axes are very broad, the table below links the Theses and the AFE by thematic approach; moreover, for identifying the themes, the Theses were not separated from the AFE, so the table is representative of all the academic and professional works.

Table 3: Thematic linkage of the Theses and AFE elaborated by students of the Master’s Programme in Social Work, U. of Chile, between 2020-2024, with the thematic axes of the XXIII ALAEITS Seminar, 2022.

N°	Thematic Themes of the XXIII ALAEITS Seminar	Quantity	%
1	Globalisation, nation-states and reform processes	2	4,8
2	Social Inequalities, Poverty and Social Protection	10	24,3
3	Broadening citizenship, power and human rights	9	21,9
4	The use of space	3	7,3
5	Social work social policies and subjects of intervention	9	21,9
6	Undergraduate training	-	-
7	Postgraduate training	-	-
8	Research in Social Work	7	17,0
9	Social work occupational space	1	2,4
To-tal		41	100

Source: Universidad de Chile. Institutional Repository. Library. Thesis and AFE of the Master’s Programme in Social Work. Faculty of Social Sciences. Consultation between May and July 2024. Own elaboration.

The table shows the thematic centrality of the Master’s degree students’ final projects in issues related to social policy, social rights, citizenship and social service intervention. The subject of undergraduate and postgraduate training without social service has not been the subject of study and the socio-occupational space, only timidly.

In the sequence, the systematisation corresponds to categorising the keywords of the theses and FEAs. These, in addition to representing the thematic emphasis, indicate, according to the study of the summaries, the perspective and direction of the theoretical, political and technical references of the analyses contained in the works. One hundred and sixty-eight keywords were identified in the theses and AFE of the Master’s Degree in Social Work at the University of Chile. An artisanal exercise was carried out to categorise this set of elements so that the systematisation was representative of the works analysed. In this way, each keyword was assigned according to the context of each thesis and topic and AFE, resulting in the categorisation shown in Table 4.



This wide range of keywords was grouped into 18 categories that are reasonably representative of the scope of the research and the Chilean social service intervention, as well as the theoretical and empirical references of the Master’s work.

Table 4: Categorisation of the keywords of the Theses and SFAs elaborated in the Master’s Programme in Social Work, U. of Chile, between 2020-2024.

N°	Keywords grouped by theme	MTS/UCHile	%
		Theses and AFE	
1	Justice, penal and prison system	21	12,5
2	Work and technology	19	11,3
3	Social service, performance and vocational training	17	10,1
4	Women, feminism, gender and masculinity	14	8,3
5	Research and intervention methodologies	13	7,7
6	Social rights, Human rights and social policies	13	7,7
7	Childhood and adolescence	12	7,1
8	Education, university and rights policy	11	6,5
9	Habitability, territory, urban and rural space	8	4,7
10	Health policy and services	6	3,5
11	State, capitalism, poverty and inequality	6	3,5
12	Family	6	3,5
13	Geopolitical and economic reference (continent, countries and states)	4	2,3
14	Functional diversity, people with disabilities, universal accessibility	4	2,3
15	Social movements, trade unions	3	1,7
16	Social welfare policy and services	3	1,7
17	Migration (Human Mobility)	2	1,1
18	Other	6	3,5
Total		168	100

Source: Universidad de Chile. Institutional Repository. Library. Theses and AFE of the Master’s Programme in Social Work. FACSOC. Consultation between May and July 2024. Own elaboration.

The quantitative organisation of the keywords of the theses and SFAs in this table reveals a wide range of studies and professional social service interventions. It shows its link with public policies, social programmes, and the protection of the social rights of the most impoverished and vulnerable segments of the population. These aspects coincide with the emphasised axes in Table 3 of social policies and rights but also detail the services and social segments of the social policies privileged in the studies, highlighting the judicial, penal and prison system; women and gender; children and adolescents; and education.



In relation to the themes considered as foundations in the contemporary social service debate, the following percentages are found: 11.3% of the keywords are related to work and technology, 3.5% to the state, and 3.5% to capitalism, poverty and inequality. With regard to social service, the Master's training area, only 10.1% of the keywords were linked to the systematisation of social service, performance and professional training.

Looking at this table of thesis topics and AFE (limited to the title and keywords), it can be affirmed that the Master's in Social Work responds to some aspects of the mission and general objective of the programme, such as "to train graduates in the academic and professional field of social work, who research and intervene in complex social phenomena", as the work is linked to "social problems existing in contemporary society" (Universidad de Chile Reglamento Magíster Trabajo Social, 2017).

When considering the systematisation of the topics reviewed in Tables 3 and 4, it can be seen that there is harmony and predominance of the topics dealt with in the final works of the Master's Degree in Social Work. In this way, we can observe research linked to various beneficiary segments of public policies, due to the historical inequality and lack of social protection, as well as the non-recognition of social rights in Chile and Latin America.

In both tables it is possible to recognise empty spaces and/or timid references to issues that underpin social policies in social relations and the capitalist mode of production; for example, globalisation, the state, neo-liberalism, reform processes, privatisation of public assets and the financing of social policies. Other issues, which also cut across multiple policy services, but which are absent, are: ethical and racial issues, indigenous peoples, ageing, social security and pensions, environmental issues, famine.

3- Methodological references and research techniques

By means of a reading of abstracts and an oscillating reading among the papers, we tried to identify the methodologies and techniques included in the elaboration of the theses and AFE. Both types of work, elaborated by the Master of Social Work candidates, presented in their abstract an individualised item for the methodology or methodological framework. There is no difference in the structure of the presentation of the two types of final work in the programme.

In general, the presentation of the methodology or methodological framework consists of the following elements: a) approach and type of study; b) data production and collection technique; c) participant selection criteria; d) sample design; e) data analysis techniques; and f) ethical aspects.

It is important to mention that this item of methodological references and research techniques does not represent the overall totality linked to the 41 Theses and SFAs studied. The quantitative result of the tables below is what could be identified, since the elements of the methodology have a quite diverse text; for example, in the methodological approach, some of them present two or more indicators of approach. Thus, Tables 5, 6, 7 and 8 show what was characterised as an approximation of the methodological references and research techniques.

Table 5. Focus and type of study of the Theses and AFE elaborated by the students of the Master’s Programme in Social Work, U. of Chile, between 2020-2024.

Methodology or Methodological Framework of Theses and SFAs	
Approach and type of study	Quantity
Qualitative approach	28
Quantitative and qualitative approach	2
Quantitative approach	2
Biographical approach or life stories	6
Descriptive study or narrative approach	6
Exploratory research	8
Non-experimental research	4
Systematic literature review	2
Case studies	2
Evaluative research	1
Dialogical knowledge construction perspective	3
Phenomenological perspective, interpretative phenomenological approach	5
Systems theory perspective. Constructivist systems perspective	3
Epistemological contributions from a post-structural and feminist perspective	1
Comparative analysis, Charles Ragin: QCA ⁹ (qualitative comparative analysis)	1
Methodologies that allow for more in-depth research: Policy framework analysis (Bustelo and Lombardo, 2007), ¹⁰ which identifies the explicit or implicit internal logics of the interpretative frameworks behind policies and process tracing (Collier, 2011), ¹¹ a fundamental part of qualitative analysis, which defines it as a systematic examination.	1
The Boolean method	1
Hanlon Method (uses technology by means of a problem and resource ranking tool)	1

Source: Universidad de Chile. Institutional Repository. Library. Theses and AFE of the Master’s Programme in Social Work. FACSOC. Consultation between May and July 2024. Own elaboration.

⁹ Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA)

¹⁰ Policy frame analysis

¹¹ Process tracing



It can be seen from Table 5 that, as an approach and type of study, qualitative research predominated with a total of 28 papers, in contrast to the two that indicated a predominantly quantitative study. Regarding the qualitative nature of the works, many theses or AFE were conducted as biographical, narrative or exploratory studies. Therefore, the authors, when indicating the type of research study, proceeded to explain the form and the theoretical-methodological perspective of its realisation. The table above shows a wide variety of approaches, perspectives and methods of study, predominantly qualitative, followed by exploratory and biographical.

To continue with the systematisation of the methodology or methodological framework of the Theses and AFE, Table 6 below describes the techniques for the production/ collection of information and the criteria for the selection of participants.

Table 6: Technique of production/collection of information and selection criteria of participants in the Thesis and AFE of the students of the Master’s Programme in Social Work, U. Chile, between 2020-2024.

Methodology or Methodological Framework	
Data collection/production technique	Quantity
Open-ended, in-depth, semi-structured interviews (taped, face-to-face or remote, electronic form)	30
Desk study, secondary data and publicly available registration systems	10
Biographical experience	3
Group interview	1
Academic search engines: Google Scholar and Redalyc	1
Criteria for the selection of participants	Quantity
Non-probability, purposive probability sample	7
Professionals, activists or people with representative trajectories in institutions, neighbourhoods or social movements	8
Managers, experts and public policy planners	4
Professional and technical controllers	3
Snowball	3
Source triangulation technique	1
Selective transcription	1

Source: Universidad de Chile. Institutional Repository. Library. Theses and AFE of the Master’s Programme in Social Work. FACSOC. Consultation between May and July 2024. Own elaboration.



For the collection of empirical research material, the interview was the most frequently used method by 30 postgraduates. Those with a semi-structured guide proved to be the most recurrent. During the period of the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as in the post-pandemic context, the use of digital platforms (Zoom, in particular) seems to have facilitated the process for both the researcher and the social subject being interviewed. Documentary research proved to be unrepresentative as a primary form of empirical data collection, but as a secondary source, it was used in 14 of the studies. With regard to the selection of participants for the research sample, this was intentional, that is to say, it was aimed at the social subjects who could potentially respond better, as well as representing the study’s main objective, including: professionals; activists; people with representative trajectories in institutions, neighbourhoods or social movements; directors; experts and public policy planners, among others.

Table 7: Data analysis technique presented in the Theses and AFE of the Master’s Programme in Social Work, U. of Chile, between 2020-2024.

Methodology or Methodological Framework of Theses and SFAs	
Data analysis techniques	Quantity
Content analysis	18
Categories coded using Atlas.ti software	11
Thematic analysis technique or elaboration of categories. Organisation of the stories into categories and through a process of saturation of concepts	10
Triangulation of information	3
Analysis based on symbolic interactionism, a theory inspired by meanings and social interaction	3
Statistical test, statistical test of correlations	2
Discourse analysis	2
Methodology of analysis with a feminist character. Qualitative analysis from an intersectional feminist perspective	2
Interpretative theories	2
Critical Narrative Analysis - conjunction of discourse analysis (CDA) with narrative analysis	1
Typology of reason	1
Charles Ragin’s Comparative Qualitative Analysis (CCA), Boolean Algebra, Boolean Multiplication of Combinations and “Combinatorial Logic” ¹²	1
Analysis of measures of effectiveness – form of RNR model mediation associated with reintegration with recidivism or risk of recidivism	1
Inductively constructed analysis matrix	1

Source: University of Chile. University Repository. Library. Thesis and AFE of the Master’s Programme in Social Work. FACSO. Consultation between May and July 2024. Own elaboration.

¹² Combinatopical Logic.



Content analysis and category development are among the most frequently used data analysis techniques: 11 and 18 papers, respectively. The use of the Atlas.ti programme (and other artificial intelligence tools – AI) as support for the analysis of empirical and documentary material is also significant, as the *software* was cited in approximately 25% of the studies.

The Equivalent Formative Activities (AFE), which correspond to 9 (21.9%) of the final works of the master’s degree in the period of analysis, differ from the theses especially in the methodology, with regard to the item of data analysis, as they describe the form of the elaboration of protocols, typologies, intervention procedures and evaluation of social programmes. In this case, in the production of intervention tools, a predominance of this option was not identified, so the table below describes the methodological process present in the AFE.

Table 8: Data analysis technique presented in the AFE of the Master’s Programme in Social Work, U. of Chile, between 2020-2024.

Methodology or Methodological Framework of EFAs	
AFE - Techniques for data analysis and protocol development	Quantity
Mixed methodology for service design	1
Typological Distinctions for Effective Intervention (DISTIE)	1
Construction of action protocols, definitions of procedures and tools, areas of application, descriptive indicators of Crisis Intervention and critical points	1
Building the Effective Social Innovation Prototype	1
Evaluative research on Management Indicators of Legal Aid Corporations and evaluative research from a human rights perspective	1

Source: Universidad de Chile. Institutional Repository. Library. Theses and AFE of the Master’s Programme in Social Work. FACSO. Consultation between May and July 2024. Own elaboration.

Finally, care with ethical protocols in the research process was not the subject of special analysis for this study. However, it is noted that the Theses and AFE dedicated sections in the text to make references to how the research process provided for requests for permission for the participants (different social subjects) to continue the study, by means of informed consent.



4- Foundations of the Theses and EFAs: theoretical-conceptual elements, normative and documentary references of public policies

In the continuity of the reading of the summaries and the oscillating reading between the Theses and the AFE, we sought to map the theoretical-analytical elements that underpinned the elaboration of the final works of the programme. In this process, it was identified that the works have three types of foundations: a) theoretical-conceptual elements (literature); b) references to laws and regulations; and c) public policy documents (programmes, projects).

These three modes of substantiation are present simultaneously in the Theses and SFAs; however, one of them predominates in the texts.

In order to better observe and analyse the thematic approaches to the foundational modalities of the final papers of the course, the findings were once again systematised by thematic blocks and sub-themes. These were organised according to their incidence: a) theories or analytical perspectives; b) state, neoliberalism, labour and conjuncture; c) social policy; d) justice and prison system; e) population/users and social segments; f) women and gender; g) territory; and h) social work.

Once again the quantitative in the table below was what was identified, therefore it was characterised as an approximation of the theoretical-conceptual elements present in the Theses and AFE.

Table 9. Theoretical-conceptual elements presented in the Theses and AFE of the Master’s Programme in Social Work, U. of Chile, between 2020-2024.

Theoretical-conceptual elements	Quantitative
Theories or analytical perspectives	
Niklas Luhmann’s Systems Theory. Functional systemic theory. Systemic perspective and the notion of complexity, complex and multidimensional thinking.	9
Social field theory, symbolic discrimination and violence (Pierre Bourdieu)	4
Vulnerability theories	3
Phenomenology	3
Theoretical Risk Model	2
Hanlon Method (a technology, a tool to classify issues and resources)	1
Subtotal	23



The state, neoliberalism, labour and the current situation	
Inequality in Latin America and Chile, poverty, dynamics of inclusion and exclusion	8
Neoliberalism, Capitalism, working class	7
Work, work process, transformation of the world of work. Precarisation of labour. Employability and Entrepreneurship in Chile, labour empowerment.	6
Covid-19 pandemic	5
State and Citizenship, Human Rights, Disciplinary Populism	4
Technological revolution, digital government. Technology	4
Social movements, socio-political participation and activism, company unions and civil servants' associations	3
Affections. Emotions. Resistance. Violence	3
Subtotal	40
Social policy	
Social protection, social programmes and social assistance programme	9
Child protection system. Servicio Nacional de Menores (SENAME) ¹³ and Servicio Nacional de Reinserción Social Juvenil. National Service for the Specialised Protection of Children and Adolescents. Specialised Programme on Sexual and Commercial Exploitation of Children. Protocols for action in the face of child sexual abuse and crisis situations. Protocol for Effective Social Innovation (IS) and Accredited Collaborators (OCAS).	6
Public Policies and Intersectionality, Equity and Inclusion	4
Higher education, University	3
Front-line professional	3
Primary health, Mental Health	3
Education Policy, National Policy on School Coexistence	2
Management of social intervention	2
Social policy: outsourcing and privatisation	1
Subtotal	33
Judicial and penitentiary system	
Reintegration and Effective Reintegration, concepts of re-education, rehabilitation, re-personalisation, re-adaptation, post-penitentiary concern.	5
Criminology and levels of public security	3
Prison system	3
Access to justice	1
Restorative Justice	1
Subtotal	13

¹³ This service will only be available in the regions of Valparaíso, Metropolitana and O'Higgins.



Population/users and social segments	
Functional Diversity. Person with disabilities and universal accessibility	5
Families living in poverty, care	4
Profile of “naturally” at-risk carrier populations	1
Street population	1
Subtotal	11
Women and gender	
Women and work, women and family	4
Feminist movements, feminist theories	3
Sexism and social corporealities	2
Feminisation of poverty	1
Gender and intersectionality	1
Gender diversity (LGTBIQ+ community)	1
Sexual division of labour	1
Subtotal	13
Territory and habitability	
Territory and community	1
Transition from rural to urban	1
Territory and daily mobility	1
Camps and settlements in Chile	1
Housing policies and housing shortages	1
Subtotal	5
Social work	
Social work (intervention modality and space)	9

Source: Universidad de Chile. Institutional Repository. Library. Theses and AFE of the Master’s Programme in Social Work. FACSOC. Consultation between May and July 2024. Own elaboration.

The so-called ‘thematic blocks’ in Table 9 express a broad set of foundations underpinning the Masters in Social Work Theses and AFE. Similarly, they are understood to express a broad range of social work interventions and research. As mentioned above, the keywords reveal the proximity to a general objective of the programme; with the references to the foundations described in the previous table, it is possible to indicate that the Master’s degree is, in fact, building the paths to realise its general objective:

To train graduates in the field of Social Work, who understand and deepen the disciplinary discussion, with the ability to carry out basic research and applied intervention, based on the social problems existing in contemporary society (Universidad de Chile, Reglamento Magíster Trabajo Social, 2017).



However, the part of the objective “understand and deepen the disciplinary discussion”, as far as the field of social work is concerned, still seems to us timid or fragile. In this direction, specific objectives 2 and 4 of the same Regulation indicate the need for the programme to broaden studies in the area of social work:

2. To contribute to the understanding of some debates, controversies and critical approaches of contemporary social work, which enable a complex theoretical-methodological approach to social issues.

4. Develop competences for professional practice, being able to generate a more dense understanding of public policies and social intervention (Universidad de Chile, 2017).

In the analysis of the Theses and AFE, either in the key words or in the conceptual foundations, social work is the object of study or its analysis in approximately 25% of the final works; however, the presence of social work in the theoretical-conceptual references was rather reduced.

On the other hand, the theoretical references or analytical perspectives of the works include: Niklas Luhmann’s Systems theory; the perspective of complex thinking; Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of social fields and phenomenology.

Likewise, there is a predominance of works on subjects related to social policies, as this has been the historical and privileged working space (labour/employment market and intervention space) of social workers. In the Theses and AFE reviewed, the social programmes of social assistance, childhood and adolescence, women, family and gender, as well as programmes related to functional diversity, people with disabilities and accessibility problems are the most studied. In this broad set of topics that encompasses social policies, the main references that support the development of the topics are the texts and legislations of the public policies themselves. There were few works in the field of social policies that based their research on the literature related to the set of themes (Table 9) referred to as: state, neo-liberalism, neo-liberalism, public policies, social policy and social policy: State, neoliberalism, labour and conjuncture.

On the other hand, a significant amount of research deals with the judicial and prison system, with a special focus on social reinsertion. The emphasis on this topic in the Theses and SFAs as a whole allows for an interrogation/reflection on the extent of the criminalisation of poverty in Chile and Latin America. This reflection is determined by

the fact that the issue of poverty and social inequality was the subject of a theoretical-conceptual study in almost 20% of the works. This would appear to be not enough, considering that social inequality and poverty, both in Chile and in other Latin American countries, are transversal to all the themes of the Theses and AFE, especially those revealed in the systematisation of Tables 3, 4 and 9.

Quickly, when considering the study of titles, keywords, summaries and oscillating reading, it is possible to point out that there is a cross-cutting demand for several of the social policy services and social service foundation themes.

Despite the efforts of the Social Service visible in the academic production studied, carried out with the aim of understanding and explaining the nature of national and Latin American problems in relation to the contradictions between the State, society and the market in relation to capitalism, it is perceived that the professional work and the responses to these social contradictions continue to be the challenges, in the sense of unveiling the invisible content. There is indeed, in the Theses and AFE, a broad identification of social needs, as well as of the fragile and insufficient social protection aimed at countless social segments, but these reflections seem to question little the particularities studied in their relation to the determinations of the unequal structure, of the concentration of wealth, and which, on the contrary, end up appropriating the demonisation of the state public service, disseminated in these decades of neo-liberalism (Boron, 2000).

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The Theses and AFE point out that the link between Social Service and socio-political processes are inseparable, that the context is what determines our professional practices, despite the relative autonomy (Pagaza, 2024) and, in this sense, the economic, ethical-political, social and cultural relevance of the postgraduate programme is evident, since it trains human resources and produces knowledge to respond to the expressions of the social question. This requires that the planning and self-evaluation process of the Postgraduate Programmes – area of concentration, lines and projects of research and the insertion of graduates in the labour market – be well articulated with the needs of society, which means, articulated with the local, regional and national reality (Carvalho et al., 2020).

This profession has been constantly accused by other professionals of having a marked empiricist character; with regard to this, the production of knowledge in postgraduate studies produces subsidies to eliminate the relative pragmatism of social service

and promotes a theory that strengthens the development of knowledge based on its practice and the reality of social work. In this way, social research is an inherent task of the social service profession, in terms of professional work and, in this case, for the generation of knowledge and its strengthening in the academic-scientific debate (Aro, 2023). As Pagaza (2024) states, it is not necessary to return to the centre itself, nor to subalternity: it is necessary to dare, and the postgraduate course is fertile ground for discussion and debate, to work in an interdisciplinary way, to expand the discursive and interdisciplinary relations, always with a critical and historical look to read the context and its determinations.

In this direction of Latin American social service in the 21st century, it is necessary to overcome a purely instrumentalist or technical view of knowledge, rejecting the reductionism inherent in the linearity and fragmentation of knowledge. The task then is to build and strengthen postgraduate programmes that are democratic and socially committed to a public university, to promote human rights and to contribute to the promotion of the quality of education, science and culture.

Final considerations

Remembering that the general objective of this research was to identify and analyse the thematic, methodological and theoretical structure of the Theses and Equivalent Formative Activities (AFE), which constitute the final work of the students of the Master's programme in Social Work at the University of Chile, the preceding text presented here has a rather descriptive character and is only a partial analysis of the six years of existence of the Master's programme.

As a legacy of the fractures that the Department of Social Service of the University of Chile experienced with the dictatorship, it was possible to observe, from the development of this text, the effort of the academic body of social workers and their students in the recovery of the university status of the career of Social Work, as well as the overcoming of the fragilities that the authoritarian and regressive history caused in theoretical training and research, which deepened an old dichotomy between theory and practice in the area. That is to say, such an effort is witnessed in the analysis of the Theses and AFE elaborated within the scope of the Master in Social Work, since the final works are a reflection and expression of the actions to strengthen the academic and scientific status of Social Work within the scope of the public university.

Considering the purposes of the Master's Programme in Social Work, presented in the Self-evaluation Report (University of Chile Self-evaluation Report, 2020, p. 4):

The Master's Degree in Social Work at the University of Chile is a training programme that aims to contribute to the disciplinary consolidation of Social Work in the country, from a perspective that emphasises academic excellence, the design and implementation of innovative interventions, and a commitment to the social, economic, political and cultural challenges that the country demands in the contemporary context.

The study developed up to this point allows us to affirm that the Master's degree in Social Work has been fulfilling its educational purposes with academic excellence. Although it also highlights, in particular, the aim of "contributing to the disciplinary consolidation of social work in the country", as this aspect still seems fragile in the field of final course work. However, the systematisation carried out reveals an extensive set of themes, of contemporary context, which are situated in the day to day of social intervention, such as the social, economic, political and cultural challenges that go beyond social policies and the actions of social workers, and therefore become the subject of research.

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In evaluating what the Department and the Master's Degree in Social Work of the University of Chile have as an assumption: that Social Work has the public responsibility to confront inequality and the lack of access to the services of social programmes and rights, this mission is fulfilled with the development of the Thesis and AFE. In the same way, it is considered that a qualified expansion of the scientific production in the area of Social Work is taking place, as well as its academic recognition as an area of knowledge by the scientific community and by the organisms that promote research.

It is well known that the Chilean and Latin American social service faces technical, operational and political challenges, due to the reality of social inequality and poverty produced by the capitalist and exploitative relations to which we have been historically subjected. In this context, social policies are, in general: underfinanced, punctual, focused and face resistance to achieve the social rule of law; with a principle of universality, free of charge and state management. These challenges are not separate from the theoretical and methodological perspectives that underpin postgraduate social work training and research.

In order to preserve the democratic and pluralistic nature of the academic and scientific development that underpins the Master's in Social Work, some terms, references and approaches that are repeated automatically and without reflection are left as an indication of the most appropriate characterisation of its pedagogical proposal and its regulations: complex social phenomena, complex theoretical-methodological approach to social issues, critical perspective, basic research and applied intervention, social problems, social innovation, effectiveness. These are the perspectives that manifest controversies and contrasts in the dialogue between authors and conceptual traditions from long ago, and which add to the theoretical, political and methodological accumulation of Latin American social service.

It is important to emphasise that the survey of titles, summaries, key words and oscillating reading among the texts, in order to identify the methodological and theoretical-conceptual references of the Master's Theses and AFE, is only an apparent fact of the reality of the course, which, as such, needs to be shown in its historical-concrete determinations in order to seek a qualitative deepening of the curricular contents of the programme, of the scientific productions (students and teachers), of the activities of the Master's activities, of the activities of the R+D and I Nuclei, and of the policy of promotion of teaching and student research, such as study grants, for example.

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With this delimited study, an invitation is made to expand research on postgraduate programmes in social service in Chile and Latin America, taking into consideration the gathering of subsidies for the analysis of their challenges, limitations and potential in the world of scientific knowledge production and intervention in social reality.

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Author biography

Tania Regina Kruger is a full professor in the Department of Social Work at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC). She holds a degree in Social Work from the Federal University of Santa Catarina (1990), a master's degree in Education and Culture from the State University of Santa Catarina (1998) and a PhD in Social Work from the Federal University of Pernambuco (2005). Her postdoctoral studies were carried out at the Centre for Social Studies – CES – University of Coimbra (2018). She has experience as an editor of the *Katálysis and Temporalis* Journal. Her lines of research are in Social Service, with emphasis on social policy, professional practice, health policy, participation, social control, planning, social policy management and public-private relations. She is a member of the Centre for Studies in Social Service and Popular Organisation (NESSOP).

Email electrónico: tania.kruger@ufsc.br

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7122-6088>



Book Review**Social Work and Common Sense: A Critical Examination.**

**Paul Michael Garrett, Routledge London and New York, 2024, pp.296,
ISBN: 978-1-032-45647-8, USD \$39.16.**

Taly Reininger¹

Paul Michael Garrett is widely regarded as one of the most prominent critical social work theorists in the English-speaking social work world. A professor at the University of Galway and a member of the Royal Irish Academy, Garrett has written many books that challenge the ideological basis of social work practice, with a particular focus on the relations of state, neoliberalism, and professional discourse. In addition to his other books, “Social Work and Social Theory: Making Connections” (2013), “Welfare Words: Critical Social Work and Social Policy” (2017), and “Dissenting Social Work: Critical Theory, Resistance and Pandemic” (2021), Garrett has been making a deliberate and sustained effort to (re)introduce critical theory into social work education and debates, and to assert the political nature of the discipline.

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His recent book, “Social Work and Common Sense” (2024), is a further development of this line of work, providing a sustained critique of the ideas and beliefs that are often taken for granted in social work, both in regards to its education as well as practice. Drawing on Antonio Gramsci’s notion of ‘common sense’, Garrett applies this lens to a variety of concepts and theoretical positions that have dominated social work over the years, including attachment theory, creativity, human rights, and what he terms colonial common sense.

The book is extremely timely due to its publication at a time during which, on an international scale, authoritarianism is on a preoccupying rise, far-right discourses are being normalised, and neoliberal austerity measures are being rapidly enforced – all of which have significant implications for social work as both a profession and as a discipline. Garrett’s contribution is particularly relevant because it looks not only at the external political realities but also at how these contribute to the crystallisation of internalised ‘truths’ and beliefs that define social work. In his introduction, Garrett argues for the need to interrogate the whys, specifically, “Why did a *particular* view establish itself as the dominant one at a *particular* moment in time within *particular* places in the world and within *particular* fields of expertise.” (p.12). As he convincingly argues,

¹Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, University of Chile.
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6398-5204>



situating the debates within particular political, economic, social, and historical moments is necessary in order to question dominant “common sense” problem definitions that shape social work practices, making it impossible to visualise alternative responses.

In this regard, the book positions itself in the broader critical social work tradition by questioning structural inequality, power dynamics, and the ways in which knowledge is produced and legitimised, particularly through the use of “common sense.” Garrett expands the discussion about how dominant narratives establish what counts as legitimate knowledge and acceptable social work practices. The book thus resonates powerfully during a time when many critical positions are under attack from multiple fronts.

The book is structured into ten chapters, each dedicated to a specific topic or area of discourse. In the first two chapters, Garrett introduces and theorises common sense, referencing the works of Hannah Arendt and Pierre Bourdieu while arguing that Antonio Gramsci’s conceptualisation offers the most politically and analytically helpful framework for understanding how dominant ideas become naturalised and shape social work practice. Chapters three to seven provide interesting analyses on the use of common sense on a diverse range of topics relevant to social work, including unmarried mothers, attachment theory, creativity, anti-anger ideology, and human rights.

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In chapter eight, “Colonial common sense and ‘decolonizing’ social work” and chapter nine, “Latin American challenges to the common sense of the Global North” Garrett deviates from previous chapters by “moving beyond critical European social theory” (p. 170), however stating his limitations due to the language barrier (Garrett only reads and writes in English) and his fear of “careless appropriation” (p.171) that might reproduce colonial practices. Garrett situates himself as a scholar living in the Republic of Ireland, a country that has a complicated history of colonialism, and this positionality appears to function, at least partially, as a way of legitimising his engagement with colonial and decolonial debates. At the same time, he recognises the inherent tensions between binary categorisations of colonised and colonisers, adding a further layer of complexity to his position. The objective of this chapter is to examine how “colonial common sense” and Eurocentrism continue to shape what is considered legitimate social work knowledge, thus advocating for the need to challenge dominant epistemologies while creating spaces for situated, decolonial ways of knowing in academia. This critique becomes the groundwork for chapter nine, in which Garrett introduces decolonial theorists from Latin America, arguing that the ideas he presents can challenge colonial common sense and expand the horizons of critical social work.

In chapter nine, Garrett presents the works of a wide range of Latin American theorists, including Paulo Freire, Anibal Quijano, Ramon Grosfoguel, Maria Lugones, Enrique

Dussel, Santiago Castro-Gomez, Ofelia Schutte, Walter Mignolo, and Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui. The concepts he introduces are not only numerous but also complex, such as “coloniality of power”, “epistemological reconstitution”, and “epistemic disobedience”. Garrett not only presents these concepts in great detail but also delves into the internal critiques and theoretical tensions among authors. For example, Garrett provides an extensive analysis of Quijano’s concept of ‘coloniality of power’ followed by an even more extended discussion of Grosfoguel’s and Lugones’s critiques, particularly their argument that Quijano fails to account for gender and intersectionality. A similar, although more concise, treatment is given to Enrique Dussel’s theoretical contributions and their critique from Santiago Gomez-Castro and Ofelia Schutte. Finally, Walter Mignolo’s contributions regarding decolonial delinking and epistemic disobedience are countered with Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui’s critique of Mignolo’s and others’ positionality being based in universities in North America.

While admiring and respecting Garrett’s commitment to theoretical depth and detail, his focus on internal disagreements at times obscures the broader insights these ideas offer for the discussion on social work ‘common sense’. The chapter introduces too many complex debates, especially considering that its intended audience includes students and readers encountering Latin American thought for the first time. This depth and detail may overwhelm and limit the potential to expand the horizons of critical social work in the English-speaking world.

Understanding the complexity of translating and fitting such a large amount of knowledge into one chapter, the book’s most important contribution lies in its ability to unmask the basic presuppositions of social work through a thoroughly critical perspective. Garrett does a great job of using Gramsci to reveal the ideological aspects of professional knowledge, and several of the chapters have a good historical context. The inclusion of pedagogical tools, such as the “reflective Talk” boxes, also makes this a valuable and engaging resource for teaching.

In conclusion, Paul Michael Garrett’s “Social Work and Common Sense: A Critical Examination” (2024) is a continuation of his critical academic project, offering important theoretical insights and critiques of social work and social work education. In his latest contribution, he draws on Antonio Gramsci’s concept of “common sense,” exposing how seemingly neutral concepts ranging from attachment theory to human rights, are embedded within historically contingent, politically charged frameworks. The book’s publication is especially timely in a global context marked by rising authoritarianism, the normalisation of far-right discourse, and the deepening of neoliberal austerity, all of which have serious consequences for Social Work.

Garrett's intervention stands out not only for its critique of these external forces but also for its analysis of how they shape the internalised "truths" that underpin professional knowledge. As he compellingly argues, examining why certain views have gained dominance in particular times, and places is essential to challenging the problem definitions that limit our capacity to imagine alternative futures for Social Work. By including a chapter questioning colonial common sense and a second introducing important Latin American theorists, he invites readers to turn towards other latitudes and authors in order to imagine such alternatives. This book is both a theoretical contribution and a political provocation for social work in the English-speaking world – one that demands the discipline confront its complicity in reproducing common sense and invites a more profound commitment to epistemic and practical transformation.

Taly Reininger
Profesora Asociada
Departamento de Trabajo Social
Universidad de Chile
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6398-5204>



Interview with Teresa Quiroz. 2 May 2011. Research Social Work in Dictatorship Chile

Interviewer, Teresa López¹

Style editing, Gabriela Rubilar²

TL: Who is Teresa Quiroz? Please tell me a little about your childhood and family.

TQ: I spent my childhood in Valparaíso. My father was a civil servant at Banco de Chile in Valparaíso. We lived in Playa Ancha for six or seven years. My mother liked living in Valparaíso and Viña del Mar very much, but my father was transferred to the Bank in Santiago, and as that was a promotion in the Bank, we came to Santiago. We moved to Ñuñoa, my parents, my grandmother Julia and the two sisters, Cristina and me. Later, Arturo, Ana María and Carmen Gloria were born in Santiago.

We were living quite tightly because the only income for the family was the father's salary, but the mother contributed by making us the needed clothes.

In addition, her mother was a Red Cross and served a long time as a volunteer at the Red Cross in Ñuñoa in a mother-child care programme. Poverty was very heartbreaking at that time. The mother would give them the address, and many ladies would visit our home. So, we began to relate to poverty, and I think that influenced my social sensitivity.

A few years later, his father was promoted to the bank, and his income was released. When we arrived in Santiago, our father started looking for a school for us and decided to put us in Villa María. This meant a lot of expense, but father thought it was important for us to have a good education and enter a profession and to learn English, typing and shorthand, which they taught at the school, because that would open up better job opportunities in the future. Dad was quite modern for the time and thought it was good for women to work. On the other hand, the nuns were progressive; we had a fun life because the school was linked with other schools, the French Nuns and St George's, among others. I soon started participating in the YCS (Youth of Catholic Students), where we did social work and socialised with young people from other schools. The high schools were also involved in the YCS. Little by little, we became more aware of the young people of the YCW (Young Catholic Workers). We worked directly with a group of domestic workers, whom we supported and taught various subjects. The latter was an institution run by Father Bernardino Piñera, who guided us at the school.

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¹Teresa López Vásquez was an outstanding scholar of Chilean and Latin American Social Work

²Gabriela Rubilar Donoso, Chile. Mail: grubilar@uchile.cl

ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4635-9380>, Chile. Mail: grubilar@uchile.cl



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At that time, the school did not have valid exams, and a classmate of mine, Pilar Rodríguez, found out that at the Liceo N°7 de Niñas, it was possible to study three years in one, taking valid exams before the Ministry of Education. We enrolled, and the same year that we finished the 6th year of humanities³, we took the exams and passed the first cycle of humanities (1st, 2nd and 3rd year). The problem arose when we had to take the exams for the second cycle (4th, 5th and 6th year) because the dates coincided with the end-of-year exams of the college. Then, we discovered a special exam date in April for young people doing their military service. We tried to enrol with them, and they accepted us, so we finished secondary school with valid exams. Therefore, we could think about entering university, but to do so, we had to take the baccalaureate.

We registered for the baccalaureate, and at that time, we had to draw lots for a foreign language, between English and French; we drew lots and my friend, with a lot of luck, got English, but I got French, and I had very little time to prepare. I only studied for a couple of days and learnt by heart a text called “Les Petites Choses”, but I was lucky that in my class there was a very understanding and kind teacher, she noticed that I was very nervous, she asked me why, and I told her that I knew tiny French because I had studied in an English school, she listened to me and reassured me. I took the test and passed it, as I did all the subjects in the baccalaureate, although with a low score, and the same thing happened to my friend.

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My father was very angry when he found out that I wanted to study Social Service, but I had made up my mind because I had some knowledge of the social reality. I had ‘worked with children and workers’ in the YCS and in some direct school activities; also, with my mother, I had seen poverty and knew how hard it was.

I applied to several universities, and they called me from the “Alejandro del Río” School. I also applied to the Catholic University, the Chile University, and, I think, the Valparaíso University. I applied to the Catholic University, although my father, who disagreed that I should study social service, decided not to pay for my university studies and even less for the Catholic University because he was not Catholic. Still, my sister, who was already working, offered to finance me, which was not very difficult because, at that time, the Catholic University only charged tuition fees.

Then, I started my studies when Rebeca and Adriana Izquierdo were the school’s directors. They were doing a very good job; advised by Belgian professionals, they were oriented towards education and working with children and companies.

TL: What year did you enter the [Catholic] university? How many years did you

³Senior year of secondary education at the time [footnotes are the interviewer’s].



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last, what were the requirements for graduation, and in what year did you graduate?

TQ: I entered university in 1957 and graduated in 1961, after the 1960 earthquake. The degree lasted five years, and to graduate, it was necessary to pass all the courses, the internship, and the thesis. My thesis was based on the '60 earthquake and its title, "The '60 Earthquake: An Experience of Working with Children at Risk".

Immediately after the earthquake, together with Sonia Oyarzún, we worked with children at risk who were arriving in Santiago because their families had housing problems and the factories where the workers were working had collapsed. The children were placed in institutions following the social policies established by President Jorge Alessandri. We worked with institutions located in Los Andes and San Felipe.

We received the children in Santiago, who arrived from different parts of the country, and then we had to go and drop them off at the institutions. It wasn't easy to separate ourselves from the children because, in a short time, we established effective relationships with them. We worked near Santiago because we were both pregnant, but the rest of our colleagues worked in different places in southern Chile, the area most affected by the earthquake.

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After I graduated, I went to work at Viña Concha y Toro with the unions, where I had also done an internship. The winery's manager was Agustín Huneeus, who had very good relations with the unions and was very supportive of my work. I worked only a few hours a week because I was already married and had a child; in fact, 'I had three in a row'. Respecting the pre- and post-natal leave, I had access to pre-natal: 6 months, post-natal: 9 months, and one year if breastfeeding. These guidelines were issued by the Social Security Service, the Private Employees' Fund (in my case), and the Public Employees' Fund for State workers.

TL: What was your assessment of the formation you received then, and what is it now, in retrospect?

TQ: Regarding the training received at the university, I remember the contents of some subjects that were of great interest and useful for our professional performance. Among them:

- Social legislation, Álvaro Covarrubias
- Sociology, Andrés Domínguez
- Human Rights, Ramón Luco.

Regarding the internships, we had teachers who guided and supported us. Alicia Forttes was an example of this.



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As for the teaching of the history of Social Service and the study of the three intervention methods⁴, these were taught by the directors of the School of Social Service and professors such as Clara Calvo who studied in the USA.

However, there were important theoretical gaps because the teaching was centred on the contexts of the countries of the North, whose reality was quite different from ours and that of the rest of Latin America. There were tensions with the management because we felt that there was backwardness in training and a lot of rigidity on the part of the management, which we raised and the management did not like.

At one point, the Izquierdo [sisters] went to my house to talk to my mum and told her that I was very rebellious, and my mum agreed with them and said to them that I was also rebellious at home (smiles). During that period, a strong student organisation was created at the School of Social Service. One of our demands was to modernise the syllabuses, link up with the university's social science schools and the country's schools of social service, and organise a common curriculum that would allow us to have a more solid and shared way of thinking with the other schools. This was how a formal organisation was formed that would allow us to participate in the school with a vote.

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Initially, it was up to me to be the organisation's president and to liaise with the other presidents of the university schools. This experience was rich in solidarity and important for strengthening common bonds. Later, it was Virginia Rodríguez's turn to be the president of the students of the school, who also shared the positions mentioned above. The student movement of the students of the university was strengthened, and in August 1968, they took over the university.⁵

This is highlighted by the canvas placed on the front of the Casa Central, which is the phrase that remains in our minds to this day: "Chilenos, el Mercurio Miente" (Chileans, the Mercury Lies). It is worth noting that the School of Social Service students participated extensively in this takeover and the student movement.

The struggle was for a university with a consistent academic programme that responded to the country's needs, greater autonomy from the Church, and a democratic system of university government.

TL: What did you work on when you graduated from university?

TQ: At Viña Concha y Toro, as a social worker. At that time, the unions could include in their demands that the organisation could hire a social worker and a lawyer.

⁴[Refers to case, group and community methods].

⁵This marked the beginning of the University Reform process in Chile.



At that time, family visits were made, and support was sought for student children through small scholarships; the family was involved in health issues, and agreements were made with the San Borja Hospital, which was opposite the industry. We had the opportunity to build two small villages on Gran Avenida with the help of an architect and according to the needs of the workers. The budget for this work was financed by the Management, reducing the taxes that the industry had to pay each year⁶. In total, 46 families were benefited.

One day, while I was in the office of the Concha y Toro winery, I received a call from the Catholic University's School of Social Service inviting me to collaborate with the school in teaching and teaching practice. The management team at the time comprised Nidia Aylwin, Alicia Forttes, and Mónica Jiménez, who had replaced the Izquierdo sisters. A group of professionals, all graduates of the Catholic University, were called to collaborate, and we stayed at the school. We restructured the curriculum, emphasising theoretical training but also methodological aspects.

At that time, we were very critical of traditional social work, which, in our opinion, did not contribute to social change; we were also critical of the methodological application that was done in Social Service and in that area we published a book on "Basic Method in Social Intervention", that was the name of the publication which the university financed.

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In 1967, we took over the School and restructured it⁷. That was a period of study and networking with schools in other Latin American countries, such as Brazil, Colombia, Argentina, Bolivia, and others, which were developing processes similar to ours. We incorporated Marxist theory but had a mechanical understanding based on Marta Harnecker's manuals. We were supported by professors who worked at the university, among others, Franz Hinkelammert, professor of philosophy and economist, who taught the course on historical materialism; Diego Palma, sociologist, the course on social research; Jorge Gissi, psychologist, who taught social psychology; Oscar Guillermo Garretón, in economics; Jacques Chonchol, director of CEREN⁸ taught courses on Agrarian Reform. We also had Paulo Freire and a professor who had been Brazil's Minister of Education as teachers.

⁶At that time, by law, companies had to contribute to improving and/or providing housing for their workers and deduct an annual percentage of their taxes for this purpose.

⁷In 1967, Nidia Aylwin, headmistress until 1969, took over as headmistress of the school. Between 1969 and 1971, Virginia Rodríguez took over as headmistress, and in 1972-1973, the interviewee took over as headmistress. It is very likely that this expression 'we' refers to the three of them.

⁸ Centre for the Study of National Reality



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We restructured the internships, which were supervised by the teacher from the school, who went with the students to the internship centres. We created three areas of professional practice that functioned in the School, with 10 departments with a certain degree of independence: the Rural Area, with teachers and students linked to the Agrarian Reform; the Population Area, which worked preferably with camps; and the Industrial Area, which worked with the industrial cordons. I worked in that area, the industrial area.

The practice became the central pedagogical instance, since the theory and the intervention methodology were delivered on the basis of the practices; we created the workshops, which were run by the same teachers who supervised the students' practices. This methodological form was later taken up by other Schools of Social Work as well. The number of professionals hired directly by and for the School increased significantly; we social workers were teachers of the social work courses, internships and workshops.

The staff of social worker teachers was composed of:

Nidia Aylwin	Mónica Jiménez
Alicia Forttes	Carmen Salineros
Mercedes Cagten	Carmen Ramirez
Ana Maria Mediolli	Wanda Lao
Lucy Gómez	Gloria Vio
Adriana Falcón	Ninfa Pérez
Ana María de la Jara	Teresa Quiroz
Veronica Gonzalez	Daniela Sánchez

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Most were full-time teachers, but there were also some hourly teachers.

The process of withdrawal from the School of the Directors Rebeca and Adriana Izquierdo and the hiring of new teachers was led by Nidia Aylwin, who was well accepted by the students and teachers and, at the same time, was recognised by the Izquierdo sisters. In 1969, Virginia Rodríguez took over the direction of the school. She consolidated the teaching team with professionals from various social sciences, strengthening the work of the Areas, teacher training and the other tasks mentioned above, which served to consolidate the epistemological, theoretical and methodological approaches at the service of the practices.

Because Virginia was invited to work with the government⁹ on a popular participation programme that she found appealing, she left the school... After some deliberation by teachers and students, I was asked to apply for the Director of the School position, when Fernando Castillo Velasco was the Rector of the university. At that time, we had

⁹The Popular Unity government, which had just taken office at the time.



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150 students, and there was a democratic system for voting within the university. This system consisted of each student having the right to one vote, as did the professors, each with one vote. The result was that 100% of the teachers' votes went to me, and at the same time, every student voted for me, leaving 100% of the votes for me in both cases. The administrators who counted the votes pointed out that this situation had never happened before.

In this way, we were able to have a very well-established teaching team with a good academic level. We further developed the workshops based on the theory-practice relationship. At that time, we also created the *Revista de Trabajo Social de la Escuela*¹⁰, in which the professors of the School wrote and received contributions from other professionals. The analyses of the workshops, as well as analyses of the national situation, theoretical issues and specific social problems, were the main topics covered by the Journal. We managed to publish 10 issues until the military coup of 1973. At that time, the Editorial ECRO¹¹ was created in Argentina and was dedicated only to publishing documents, articles, and books on social work. Many regional meetings were held in Chile and Latin America because ALAETS (Latin American Association of Schools of Social Work) had been created. I remember that as a time of great creativity, significant social and political commitment, and tensions.

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In Chile, many professionals linked to work in private companies had more conservative positions. They were members of the College of Social Assistants (they) who disagreed with our proposal, which created some tensions. ...One of the issues that was achieved was that I had a great struggle to get the Rector to change our location. The school was in Vicuña Mackenna, next to a very busy motel, and it was also full of mice. Finally, they accepted, and we moved to the East Campus, together with the other Schools of Social Sciences and Education. We settled in with teaching offices, classroom space, canteens, and gardens.

When I was a teacher at the school, the academic vice-rector of the Universidad Católica de Valparaíso asked me to advise the school at that university on the construction of a new curriculum. This was because the students had been on strike for six months demanding changes, and both the students and the directors were aware of the changes we had made in Santiago and the experience we

¹⁰The Journal of Social Work of the School of Social Work of the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (PUC) has been published without interruption from the first issue to the present day. All published issues can be found at in the archives of the School of Social Work and in the Central Library of the PUC. Previously there had been a Social Work Journal in Chile, that of the School of Social Work 'Dr. Alejandro del Río', the first publication specialised in social work created in the country. However, at the time of the creation of the *Revista de la Escuela de la Católica*, the publication of the *Revista de la Escuela 'Alejandro del Río'* had already ceased.

¹¹[Editorial ECRO opened the first bookshop specialising in Social Work, on 1 September 1967, in its premises at Lavalle 2327, in the city of Buenos Aires. Note published by Norberto Alayón, on 26 September 2016 at <https://www.facebook.com/@norbertoAlayon/>]



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had gained. The school accepted the request, and I worked simultaneously in Santiago and Valparaíso for two years. We built and began to apply the new curriculum.

For this task, the Catholic University of Valparaíso appointed a commission made up of professors Eloisa Pizarro, Mirta Crocco, Edith Jofré, Vicente de Paula Faleiro (Brazilian) and Juan Mojica (Colombian), with whom I worked as a team to rethink the school and build the new curriculum that was applied until the 1973 coup d'état.

TL: What happened to you after the coup?

TQ: In September 1973, the coup d'état took place in Chile. I was still the headmistress of the school. We stayed at the school for a month. During that time, we held meetings and assemblies with the students to analyse the school's situation in the new reality of the country, and we also held workshops to control the practices that the students were carrying out. This was a period of intense and also very painful work and analysis. Sometimes, parents of our students would come to ask about their children, and when they had not gone home or returned to the university and had not communicated with us, it was because they had been taken prisoner.

The military government dismissed Rector Fernando Castillo Velasco¹² and appointed Admiral Swett.

In those days, a teacher from the school gave the new Rector a list with the names and political affiliations of all the teachers at the school; she told us that she had done so, and when we rebuked her for this action, she told us that she was very honest and that she could not lie or cover up for us. We begged her to leave the directors of the school on the list but to remove two teachers from the list, one because she was very ill, on medical leave at the time, and the other because she was pregnant, was contracted by the hour at the school and had an important position in a government agency. The response from the person who told us was that 'the list was already in the hands of the new Rector and even if it wasn't, she had to be honest, so she couldn't keep quiet about what she knew'.

In those days, a professor who had held an important position in the previous Rector's office and who was still at the university called me into his office and told me that the situation at the school was very difficult because Rector Swett and his advisors knew what was being done at the school, who the professors were, and were especially upset about the work that had been done in the camps and the industrial areas. He recommended that we leave the school to avoid major problems and that we should not return to the university. If we could, we should leave the country. When I asked him what to do, he informed me that

¹²The government did the same with the rectors of the other universities in the country. In all of them, it appointed rectors as government delegates. The universities absolutely lost their autonomy.

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he knew that the Argentinean embassy was receiving people seeking political asylum.

I informed professors and students of this situation, but it was not easy to convince some of them. They thought our school was small, without much weight in the university, and of a certain academic level. They thought both situations would combine and nothing would happen to the school and us. We talked a lot about it and finally decided to leave the school that night and not return the following day. So we did.

That same night, they arrested teacher Adriana Falcón, beat her, broke her head and tortured her a lot, but then 'released' her. She left for a small town in the North of the United States, near the Canadian border, where she stayed and became mayor of the city. She still lives in the USA but comes to Chile from time to time. They had also arrested Virginia Rodríguez and were looking for Oscar Guillermo Garretón, her husband. They had arrested the Director of the School of Social Work at the Chile de Antofagasta, who had a position in ALAETS.

We lived at that time in Gran Avenida, in front of Ciudad del Niño, and that day, the children were at home with the 'nana'. We thought it was not convenient to stay in the house. I called my sister on a public phone, and she realised we were 'complicated' although I didn't tell her anything. She offered to pick up the children and take them to her house. And that's what she did, which reassured us even though we had nowhere to go at the time. My sister found us temporary accommodation in a nuns' house, and we could stay there for a few days, but then we had to leave 'because it became known that we were there'. After that, we wandered around different places with little support from the family, and during that time, they raided our house and took our books and other things (our passports and some money). Some time later, we received an invitation, obtained by my sister, who lived in Canada, to give a lecture at a Canadian university¹³. We managed to get a passport, and in October or early November, we left Chile with the support of the Canadian Embassy; we made a stopover in Peru and stayed a few days in the house of a Peruvian social worker. The Peruvian comrades were very supportive, and we began to calm down a bit. They communicated with Costa Rica, the country that received us.

Finally, we arrived in Costa Rica and were hired by the university. Although it took a few months to process our salaries, with the help of our Costa Rican colleagues and a Colombian colleague who helped us financially, we managed to survive, albeit with difficulties. There were days when even food was scarce; it was a hard period but with hope. During that period, many Chileans arrived in Costa Rica, and some

¹³This was a mechanism widely used in the first months of the dictatorship to facilitate the departure abroad of people who were at risk in Chile.



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of them were in very bad shape, physically and psychologically, because they had been tortured. We listened to their stories of torture and suffering, and we did our best to help them. Among them came the director of the Social Work course at the University of Chile in Antofagasta, surnamed Osorio.

In Costa Rica, we worked for a couple of years teaching at the university; I worked, among other things, in community practice with medical students so that they would understand the social reality in which they were inserted. This turned out to be complex because, in the community, you have to make commitments, and this was very difficult for the students. Together with a group of professors, we also created a degree in Social Planning at a new university, the National University. I taught for two years and then went to work at a research centre on agricultural issues, where I worked for almost nine years.

Diego¹⁴ then went to Honduras to help organise and work on the ALAETS¹⁵ Masters in Social Work. He spent two years in that country as Director of the Master's programme, which counted among its professors Vicente de Paula Faleiro, Paulo Netto and Franz Hinkelammert. The Master's was very well evaluated.

Diego's work in Honduras forced us to live some years apart, although we were very close and saw each other regularly.

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TL: How long have you been in Costa Rica, and how was your life in that country?

TQ: We were in Costa Rica for 11 years. The Costa Ricans were very supportive; they treated us very well and opened up many interesting job opportunities for us. It was a reasonable period in Costa Rica, both in terms of family, study and work. While working at the Research Centre, I had the opportunity to study for and pass a Master's degree in Sociology at CLACSO¹⁶. My thesis was on "The Image of Women in Television Series". My guiding professor was Franz Hinkelammert, who had been a professor at the School of Social Work at la Católica, in Chile, and like us, lived and worked in Costa Rica and was a professor of the Masters in Rural Sociology, which CLACSO had created.

¹⁴[Diego Palma, husband of Teresa Quiroz].

¹⁵ Latin American Association of Schools of Social Work

¹⁶ Latin American Social Science Council.



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Teresita (his daughter) decided to leave to study in Nicaragua, which initially complicated things for us because the Sandinista Front was in the midst of a war of liberation against Somoza, but in that same period, Somoza ‘fell’, and that reassured us. Around the same time, Leila Lima¹⁷ invited us to work at CELATS. Although we were doing very well in Costa Rica, for some years, we wanted to be closer to Chile. It was difficult to leave Costa Rica, but even so, we went to Peru happy and very excited and started working at CELATS¹⁸ in 1985.

(After a little more than two hours, by mutual agreement between the researcher and the interviewee, the interview was suspended and agreed to continue on Tuesday, 11 May, at 3.30 p.m. at the College of Social Workers. Before closing the interview, the researcher asks TQ two questions with which the following interview will begin).

Publication note:

Teresa López and Teresa Quiroz conducted this interview in two meetings on 2 and 11 May 2001. The interview is part of the Teresa López Vásquez Fund, which was formed from a donation made by her family to Gabriela Rubilar, Principal Investigator of the ANID/Coniye/FONDECYT 1230605 Project, and subsequently ceded to the Department of Social Work of the University of Chile, using a donation signed on 28 January 2025. We thank both institutions for providing access to this unpublished material.

The published text is a verbatim interview transcript, including the footnotes by Teresa López after the interviewee revised the transcript.

Some minor edits have been made for publication in the Journal, which have been identified using [square brackets].

The second part of the interview will be published in the next issue of the journal *Propuesta Críticas en Trabajo Social*.

¹⁷A well-known social worker who was Director of CELATS for several years.

¹⁸ Centro Latino Americano de Trabajo Social, a body under the auspices of ALAETS

