ARTICLE

Social work and Institutions: Social control, transformation and escape routes in critical times

Trabajo Social e Instituciones: Control social, transformación y vías de escape

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How to cite

Abstract

Since the sixties, social work has had a complex relationship with "the institutional", especially with public state institutions. Critical perspectives have consolidated a view in which the denunciation, the rupture, if not the generation of alternative instances, was the "critical way" of positioning itself. We discuss the relationship between social work and institutions by putting in tension several of the assumptions traditionally considered critical in the social work tradition. I will start by discussing the definition of institution from various levels and tensioning traditional readings, or traditionally critical perspectives, from the approach

proposed by Gianinna Muñoz Arce to critically analyse social work interventions (Muñoz-Arce, 2018). Far from proposing a conservative turn on institutions, it seems important to us to enhance the value of criticism to make a contribution to "the institutional" from a place that makes it possible for us to inhabit it. We are not interested in proposing an analysis "from outside and from above" but from "inside", to create a space where we can build, where we can find a place to be and to make room for others to enter.

Resumen

Desde los años sesenta que el trabajo social ha tenido una relación compleja con lo institucional, especialmente con lo público estatal. Las perspectivas críticas han consolidado una mirada en donde la denuncia, la ruptura, cuando no la generación de instancias alternativas fue el "modo crítico" de posicionarse. Nos proponemos discutir la relación trabajo social e instituciones poniendo en tensión varios de los presupuestos considerados tradicionalmente críticos en la tradición disciplinar. Para esto partiremos de discutir la definición de institución desde varios niveles y tensionar lecturas tradicionales, o tradicionalmente críticas, a partir de la matriz propuesta por Gianinna Muñoz Arce para el análisis de intervenciones desde orientaciones críticas (Muñoz-Arce, 2018). Lejos de proponer una vuelta conservadora sobre las instituciones, nos parece importante potenciar el valor de la crítica para hacer un aporte a lo institucional desde un lugar que nos haga posible habitarlo. No nos interesa proponer un análisis desde "afuera y desde arriba" sino desde "adentro", que nos haga posible un espacio donde construir, donde encontremos lugar para estar y para dar lugar a otras y otros a ingresar.

Introduction

In times of crisis such as the current one, the complexity of the relationship between social work and institutions is once again highlighted. In the pandemic situation, which in several Latin American countries coincided with economic and political crises, the place of the State, the place of large public systems and social institutions is revealed in its complexity. In this article we address the relationship between social work and

institutions by discussing some assumptions of our discipline in order to think about this relationship. We are interested in reviewing and contributing to the discussion of our place and our stake in the institutions in which we intervene professionally, since we understand that an important political position is defined there, which must be hierarchized in the debates.

In the first section we will begin by discussing the definition of institution from traditional and also traditionally critical readings. We will focus on identifying some characteristics of the definition of the relationship between Social Work and Institutions.

In the second part of the paper we will analyze from the common characteristics of the interventions considered critical (Muñoz Arce, 2018) what elements need to be updated in our positions to effectively build, from criticism, a contribution for the relationship between social work and institutions. We will conclude by synthesizing our position on the bet on criticism at this stage to consolidate interventions that contribute to the construction of social institutions that guarantee rights.

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Institutions and social work

The definition of institution has been a central object of concern of the Social Sciences. Institutions thought of as systems of rules, as restrictions, as anticipations of action, as reproductive machines of inequality and oppression, as natural organizers, as scenarios, as builders of citizenship have occupied social scientists in different ways (Durkheim, 1987; Merklen, 2013; Loureau, 2007). Institutions are ways of regulating common life (Dussel, 2012), and one's own life as well.

And this implies talking about power relations. Without power there is no possibility of modifying life. Without the ways in which this power structures life, 'institutionalizing life', there is no possibility of transforming and it can only be denounced (Dussel, 2012). In this sense, sustaining, modifying and extending life is a concern related to power, it is a concern related to institutions.

From a philosophical perspective, Enrique Dussel defines institutions as "conditioning conditioned conditions" (Dussel, 2012, p.73), necessary as a space for the construction of popular options; although, he warns of the possibility of fetishization in their exercise insofar as forgetting the delegated nature of power and the idea that power comes from institutions or people and the consequent consolidation of institutions as only oppression.

(…) However, by their nature and in the first moments of their creation, institutions generally respond to some popular demands. Very soon, although it may be centuries, institutions give evidence of fatigue, of an entropic process, of wear and tear and, on the other hand, of the inevitable fetishization that bureaucracy produces by usufructuating the institution (the potestas) for the survival of the self-referent bureaucracy (…) In this case, alienation as mere objectification becomes negation of the delegated exercise of power, that is, in fetishized exercise of such power.

(Dussel, 2012, p.43)

For social work, the institutions, which are singularized in organizations or establishments, also represent a sphere of intervention or a place from which to intervene. Hence the relevance and special complexity of the institutional dimension of social work practice.

This complexity of social work can be read within what Francois Dubet called work on others (Dubet, 2006). The author argues that a set of disciplines were created within the framework of modernity to operate on the socialization and subjectivation of populations and that the form of work they acquired can be presented as an "institutional program". This institutional program implied that the work on others was proposed as a mediation between universal values and singular practices; it was carried out by means of workers who were recruited on the basis of the idea of vocation and, finally, the exercise of the institutional program, while socializing individuals also subjectivized them, building individuals with greater degrees of freedom and autonomy.

In recent decades the institutional program is, according to the author, in decline because, like all the institutions of modernity, it would have limited its ability to regulate common life in the context of new forms of individuation (Merklen, 2013; Dubet, 2006).

The ideas put forward by Dubet rescue institutions as complex, contradictory but at the same time necessary spheres to think about social practices of recognition of rights or generating greater degrees of equality.

Social work as a discipline has a history associated with other disciplines, such as paralegal or paramedical. Achieving professional status implied and still implies a defense of the specificity of the discipline. However, and perhaps this is a first issue to be addressed in this development, it is often thought, and this has correlates in the forms of teaching, planning, etc. as an institution in itself (Dubet, 2006), and therefore, it thinks of its practice as a space with high levels of autonomy in relation to the institution/organization where it is generally developed.

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Reviewing the canonical texts of the discipline, this issue emerges clearly. To cite an example, in the text "The Practice of the Social Worker", compiled by CELATS in the 1980s, social work appears as a mediator between users and institutions. Graphed with the idea of a triangle in which social work occupies almost the same size as the other two angles (users and institution), it is placed in an equidistant position. This idea of mediation is complicated for several reasons, but the most complex of them is that it identifies the social worker outside the institution. The critical forms of the discipline, in the reconceptualizing stage and immediately after, have led to thinking of the link between professional practice and institutions in a way that is not only distant, but also superior (Arias, 2020).

Having said the above and defined the institutions, it is worth asking about the construction of a critical option to analyze and intervene in them. Or to put it another way: since the denial, rupture or escape from the institutional does not represent, for the writer, a critical position, but often an evasion of the possibility of intervention, what would be the positions or critical stances towards the institutional or the institutions from social work, and does this criticism have specificity from the disciplinary?

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Criticism and positioning vis-à-vis social work institutions

The definition of critique is a matter of dispute and we do not intend to settle this discussion here. We simply want to briefly present what we are referring to when we talk about criticism and the ways in which it has been deployed in some relevant moments in the history of social work.

The idea of critique as erudition or as analytical capacity has been replaced by perspectives that identify it with the negation or unveiling of naturalized situations. In particular, the "perspectives of suspicion", identified with Marxism and psychoanalysis (Lobos, 2020), constructed a view of the institutional that since the 1970s has placed the institutional on the axis of the traditional, of the oppressive. Recognizing that there was nothing natural in the functioning of institutions entailed the denunciation of the situations of injustice and oppression that their practices generated.

In the case of Social Work, it was undoubtedly the reconceptualization movement that expressed the commitment to critical positioning with greater power, and in some of its developments, proposed the exit from the institutions as a liberating form of intervention

close to the popular (Alberdi, 2013). The options for the territorial, considering it contrary to the institutional, partly reflect these positions.

The institutional analysis approach has significantly influenced social work. One of its founders, René Loureau, placed in the idea of "unveiling" part of the task of analyzing institutions (Loureau, 2007). Influenced by psychoanalysis in his work, and together with other intellectuals, such as Felix Guattarí (1994), he constructed the idea of institutional intervention tied to the idea of unveiling or denaturalization and identified foundational categories for the field, such as the concepts of analyzer, implication, transversality, polysegmentarity, etc. The approach, typical of the 1970s —which considered the instituted as oppressive, as social control, and the instituting as liberating if not revolutionary, as transformer of the conditions of reproduction of the prevailing social order (Loureau, 2007) —has also been part of the disciplinary common sense, and has also given a positive character to the idea of social change.

To summarize, although there is no single type of critical thinking, the idea of criticism is polysemic; in the disciplinary history of Social Work there is a prevailing idea of critical thinking linked to the idea of institutional unveiling, which places the intervention in a reflective place on the institutional, as well as distant. This idea of criticism has had deployments that have substantivized and dehistoricized this thought, turning it into a problem as an isolated position unrelated to institutional practices. The Mendoza-born philosopher Nicolás Lobo will call this the "hydroponic cultivation of criticism" (Lobo, 2020), referring to a type of self-validated intellectual exercise that is alien to the developments of intervention practices.

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How does this critical position relate to the discussion on the State? It should be said that in the Argentine experience there has been a relevant expansion of state social policy and a concordant expansion of the public institutions that carry it out. The presence of social workers in the State is a constant. Since the State is the main employer and there is currently a presence of social workers in the most diverse areas of the State (the presence of social workers employed in NGOs and social movements is very low), the discussion of the institutional aspect in Argentine social work is mainly a discussion within the framework of the public State.

Experience has shown that neoliberal social policies dispense with traditional state institutions. Intervention processes through projects, or transferred to social organizations for management, are usually much cheaper and easier to manage than

sustaining institutions considered as part of the "ballast" of statism. Likewise, this neoliberal redesign of institutions implied both privatizations, transfer of functions to organizations within the framework of fiscal adjustment policies and the precariousness of the working conditions of public workers in general and social workers in particular (Merklen, 2013).

This has placed state workers in the position of strong defenders of the school or hospital, as well as questioners of them. Professional collectives have spoken out against neoliberal advances and many colleagues have been part of social and trade union organizations that defended school, health or social security institutions from the adjustments to which they were subjected. This has complex effects insofar as it seems possible to defend against an attack, but is not transformed into a reconstructive action later on or a bet on the increase of institutional capacity.

These characteristics make it urgent to position oneself in the face of the institutional, also because of its political and trade union implications. What is the place of criticism in this complex position?

Criticism and professional intervention

Gianinna Muñoz-Arce (2018), in a suggestive text called Critical Epistemologies and Social Intervention, wonders what it implies to assume a critical perspective in the processes of social intervention. The colleague goes through different theoretical schools that disputed the idea of critique and proposes some key elements relating to the field of intervention:

a) Intervention as a contradictory movement.
b) The dialectic between subject and object
c) Historicity
d) Contradiction between individual and structure
e) The theory-practice dialectic
f) Telos of transformation

We will take up these elements in order to link them to our question about the place of critique in the framework of the intervention-institutions relationship, or rather, in the framework of the institutional dimension of social intervention.

a) Intervention as a contradictory movement

The control-emancipation relationship may be one of the issues where our students tend to position themselves more quickly. Not only students, but also practicing colleagues often position themselves not wanting to be "an instrument of social control", and by definition on the axis of emancipation. As an example, we can highlight that in 2015, on the occasion of the sanctioning of the National Law of Social Work in Argentina, a group of colleagues present at the event chanted the slogan: "I do not want to be a manager, nor a social controller".

The problem with those who hold this position is that they place themselves on the opposite axis to social control and lose sight of a fundamental element, which is that intervention, in the event that it aims to transform an order of things, needs to consolidate another order of things. It may go against one form of social control, but it necessarily builds another, if it succeeds in effectively modifying the order.

In the framework of the institutional dimension of intervention, this option against social control appears even more complex, since the institutional function is to sustain and form within the framework of a culture; institutions necessarily regulate and control.

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Dubet (2006) states that the paradox of the institutional program rests on this double function, at the same time as it subdues it liberates; in terms of the language we have been using, the institutions in the same movement control and emancipate. This paradoxical idea is very clearly visualized in the framework, above all, of institutions dedicated to children and young people. Their participation in routines, workshops, the establishment of links, etc. seems to be the best strategy for them to become emancipated persons, "masters of themselves". The regulation carried out by these institutions often has the function of building an emancipated subjectivity. In the case of the institutions in which we practice as social workers, in many cases they have explicit objectives of subjectivity transformation. Without transformation of that subjectivity there is no institution. It emancipates them insofar as it "subjects" them to the social.

These positions that claim to be opposed to the idea of control ultimately tend to lose sight of the negativity of their position. They do not recognize that this form of regulation, however emancipatory it may seem, is a form of imposition and thus loses the conflictive character of intervention per se, regardless of the place in which a person wants to position themselves. And they confuse an analytical issue (discriminating

emancipatory or controlling elements) with a singular position. It is an analytical resource to think of the social control - emancipation tension, but there is no intervention that only constructs one of the poles of this tension. No intervention is only regulatory or only emancipatory.

Other classical positions in the discipline put forward the idea of the crack, or the interstices, as the possibility of finding the place where this control breaks down in order to be able to carry out emancipatory interventions. This place, which can be seen as a strategy or as an ingenious trap, is usually a naive place insofar as, together with the pretension of control, it abandons the pretension of "institution". In other words, it thinks of its intervention as deinstitutionalized, using the institution as a starting point or as a platform, but without transforming it.

b) The dialectic between subject and object

On this point, the Chilean colleague we have been following proposes the recognition of power relations within the intervention processes or, better said, of the intervention within the framework of power relations, as a requirement for critical positioning: the observation of the place constructed by the intervention itself, identifying how much of an objectified intervention it is. We fully agree, but it seems to us that this self-observation must take place within an institutional framework of analysis. To tend to think of social work as an institution in itself and not in the framework of an institutional whole runs the risk of denying how much of the intervention is objectified.

Gregorio Kaminsky (1990) proposes the concept of transversality to think about the relations between horizontality and verticality, between instituted practices and instituting practices. He presents the idea of object or subject groups as analytical resources (there are no empirically entirely object or subject groups). Object groups have a very low capacity to institute; they are, in Kaminsky's terms, spoken by the institution, while subject groups have the capacity to institute, the capacity to speak. For this author, working on the optimization of the coefficient of institutional transversality is a challenge related to democracy in institutions, since it allows us to move away from the excesses of the instituted (here he places the problem of the bureaucratization of practices) and from the excesses of the instituting, which he describes as self-managing, but unproductive, strategies.

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This self-observation is an important element of institutional practices; it implies the constant revision of the objectified and the instituted. It is a tension to be assumed, assuming that one's own task is not always on the plane of the instituting.

In this sense, it seems relevant to us that it is not just any exercise of self-observation, but an exercise of reflection on the institution, among other things, that builds other institutional forms. It is also interesting as an exercise in self-observation to analyze how conflicts are processed according to the actors or actresses involved: how much of the conflict is related to the capacity of the users, how much of this tension is linked to the internal power demands of the professional or political groups that run the institution?

We can see in recent research (Arias and Di Leo, 2020; Arias and Sierra, 2018) that those who are in better conditions to produce opening practices for the incorporation of people from the popular sectors are usually those who have the capacity to review their institutional dimension, permanently tensing routines, norms, putting as an objective the encounter, the opening towards the "other" who generally is the one who has greater difficulties to participate in the institutional proposal. The exercise of institutional reflexivity (Giocoponello and Gonzalez, 2019) as the possibility of reviewing the mechanisms that make it possible to adapt/transform to the demands or needs of the population, is evidenced as a requirement in institutions that guarantee rights.

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Taking our reflection to social work, it is not about social work or social workers in isolation, but about the institution as such, the institution as a whole and social workers as an institutional group or as part of these groups, that this self-observation is powerful. Isolated self-observation only reinforces a false illusion of autonomy and limits the powers of criticism.

c) Historicity

This requirement of critique is central in order to understand some of the problems of "dehistoricized" critical positions.

The tradition of critical positions, with special mention here for the reconceptualization in the field of social work, has contributed to a reading of the institutional which, as we have already pointed out, is centered on the idea of suspicion, of unveiling.

The 1960s and 1970s were times of denunciation of the strong oppression of traditional modern institutions. In an intertwined manner, the relationship between institutional

functioning and the reinforcement of the conditions of oppression inherent to capitalism was read as a need to subvert an order. Demonstrating how the family, the school, the hospital and the factory and their articulation produced an unjust order implied a call to break with that order.

In that historical moment that allows to denaturalize the role of institutions, to put in discussion, but above all to break the forms of regulation of these institutions, it was presented as revolutionary and undoubtedly it was. An example of this are the "rigid family forms in times where divorce was denied, parental authority was not shared, job stability was also seen as an unelected sentence, the hospital required a certificate of poverty to be treated and schools were seen as iatrogenic mechanisms and limiting the possibilities of expression and student participation.

This, which Mariana Cantarelli (2005) called "the era of the great bonding" was also the guarantor of a form of integration that had, to appeal to the metaphor, the problem of a lack of oxygen in the bond, a type of social bond that constrained alternative forms of personal unfolding and replicated a form of classist, colonialist and patriarchal control. Rising up against these forms opened up unprecedented possibilities of action in social terms, and were identified, at that historical moment, with a future of overcoming these forms of domination.

In this scheme, the contributions coming from the French current of institutional analysis (Loureau, 2007; Guattari, 1994) that we presented at the beginning of the article had great influence on Argentine social work. I say "in this scheme" and not "at this time", since it was more clearly in the 1980s that these currents influenced the curricula by the hand of teachers who returned from exile with these formations.

To this was added the influence of Argentine institutionalists such as Pichon-Rivièreo Mario Blejer, or later Fernando Ulloa, who contributed much to the construction of elements for the reading of the institutional and its process of analysis, bringing into play the place of hierarchies, groups, unconscious dynamics, etc.

The neoliberal transformations of the 1980s and 1990s brought about changes in institutional functioning. The search for redirecting the power of the state and its institutional dimensions, the defunding, the privatization of growing public spaces, together with the devaluation of the public state and the predominance of consumer logics (Lewkowizc, 2004) generated other scenarios for thinking about the regulatory capacity of these institutions.

The weakness of these institutions in common life, an issue that appeared as a libertarian quest in the previous scheme, was presented in the neoliberal scene as a problem of lack of protection for large majorities (Dubet, 2006).

The weakening of the regulatory capacity of institutions and the political need to defend public institutions, however, do not seem to have transformed some critical positions. This has led to situations in which the same collectives that participate in the defense of public institutions, such as schools and hospitals so that they are not defunded, participate in the denunciation of their social function without proposals for their reorganization.

At some point, dehistoricized critical readings have unintentionally contributed to favor neoliberal deployments that needed to weaken institutions for their societal project, considering their deployment with effects only associated to the oppressive or repressive. On the other hand, the search to unveil the hidden institutional functions, such as the construction of an order or the denaturalization of the social function, seems to be a fairly accomplished social process. Nobody (or almost nobody) thinks of the school as a temple anymore, or does not doubt the authority of the social workers, being an important task to build conditions of possibility for the intervention of a dilemma that was previously given by the institutional belonging itself.

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This does not mean that institutions are not builders of inequalities, but what the historical stage requires is no longer simply their unveiling, a public social fact, but requires other forms of institutional reconstruction that have in the consolidation of new forms of protection one of their great challenges.

d) *Contradiction between individual and structure*

The contradiction between the individual and the structure has been, as Muñoz-Arce rightly points out, a key not only to interpretation, but also to action. Identifying the determinants or conditioning factors of the structure in the problematic situations of intervention made it possible to present this situation as an element of work. At some point, moving from individual approaches to collective actions was a reconceptualizing key that built an idea of progress in group and community approaches, as opposed to the old social case approaches that will remain on the adaptive axis. As an example of this, the power of thinking about conscientization, organization and mobilization became, during the reconceptualization, the ways of overcoming the approaches

considered adaptive and non-transformative. Here, we have very rich elements of the critical tradition in Social Work.

This tendency to privilege the collective over the individual was seen as a fundamental element of political options aimed at justice and equality.

However, the current forms of combining the struggles for equality and justice have given hierarchy to the forms of recognition of differences over standardized or normalized ways of thinking about social collectives. The struggle of women, the discussion on abortion and the control of one's own body, the possibilities of recognition of sexual diversities, the recognition of needs, but also of the productivities of other stages of the life cycle, have placed new problems and new struggles that, without abandoning the collective dimension, present in the individual experience (Martuccelli, 2017) a new way of constructing experience and of thinking about intervention.

While writing this article we find ourselves in Buenos Aires in a moment of preventive isolation, where a collective call is made to perform individual actions and, as if this were an example thought for the article, we are being asked to stay in our homes; it even appears as one of the problems of the Argentine distributive injustice that the people who suffer the most from urban poverty cannot isolate themselves.

The possibility of individuation also appears today as a horizon of struggle, to lose this dimension is to lose part of the dispute for social justice today.

Stubborn positions that only identify forms of individuation as evidence of neoliberal individualism will miss out on understanding much of what is happening today, which in some cases is interesting and with liberating potential, even if it is often developed at the scale of individuals (Martuccelli, 2017). And this does not mean that the collective has lost anything of what it could have meant as a bet of intervention, but that the new forms of the collective are only liberating when they incorporate other struggles that strongly include the individual or personal (not necessarily individualism) as a value. The example of the current pandemic may be illustrative of what we have been suggesting and poses interesting challenges for thinking about the relationship between the individual and the collective.

At the institutional level, the incorporation of the recognition of the demands that imply particularizing the intervention is presented in different ways in the public sphere. While the middle and upper sectors have access to benefits in the private sector, which

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are increasingly individualized with the possibility of choice (from the hours and places of attention to the professional and the forms of service or attention), the public system appears as a more rigid system in which choice does not appear to be possible.

This is a complex element, since private providers appear, based on the need to attract clients, to be more permeable to identifying these demands for individual choice; the problem is that they do so from a market need and not from a search for protection or the fulfillment of rights.

On the other hand, in public health care providers there are more rigid schemes of choice from their design, which in many cases leads to the expulsion of those who can afford to pay for these services. Undoubtedly, the main problem has to do with the over-demand for services and budgetary shortages, but there is also a logic that continues to think of the public and the collective with little possibility of personal choice, especially if it is for low-income sectors.

In addition to this, the profound impairments brought by people who have been violated are increasingly serious and require individualized approaches. In highly complex situations, they require thinking "to all" but "one by one" (Zerbino, 2008). In our research with popular sectors (Arias, 2018; Arias and Sierra, 2018) the need to discuss expectations about what "subjects should be or should demand" was a key to the possibility of adequacy of the institutional proposal to the populations.

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It involves a complex tension for institutions to adapt to these increasingly individualized demands, a tension difficult to process especially if one starts from a dehistoricized conception of the individual - structure contradiction.

To be able to read the epochal keys of the individual-structure contradiction and to intervene in them is today a central element for the critique to be a support and possible in social intervention and not only a declamation, at some point conservative.

e) The theory-practice dialectic: can there be state thinking?

As Gianinna Muñoz-Arce (2018) rightly points out, identifying the relationship between knowledge and power is central as an element of criticism and also of the relationship of silencing knowledge of different actors in the field of intervention.

In our institutional practices it is necessary to ask ourselves: how do we link ourselves with the knowledge that the institution itself generates? How can we place them in the framework of this tension between the instituted and the instituting, and value them in the framework of the general discrediting of what institutions produce?

One of the contributions to the critique of decolonial thought has been to recover the idea of situated thought, the discussion that thought responds to a place of enunciation. If we accept this requirement of critique and think about intervention from the spaces in which we work/intervene, we raise again the question: can there be state thinking? Does critical thinking include the possibility of generating a way of thinking from there, from the place of state workers?

How does this knowledge relate to the knowledge of users, to territorial practices, to the academic field?

In Argentina there is a frequent call from positions critical of neoliberalism identified with the popular national tradition for the idea of "recovering the State". With this image it is proposed to "recover" the regulatory capacity of the State in the face of the privatizing and limiting advance of the State's capacity to regulate. We agree with Abad and Cantarelli (2013) that this is only possible if we can "inhabit" the State. And for this we must think, and we have already said that we think from a place, so we return to the question: Can there be state thinking, what silenced knowledge should this thinking hierarchize? In this exercise, will those of us who find ourselves working as state actors have something to say, to propose, or will we only be able to mark the limits of this thinking? If thinking is an exercise of actors, and of situated actors, do we think from Social Work outside the institutions which we are in? In the Argentine case, in which labor insertion is massively state-led, do we think from the State?

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Something of the state exists and is evident when it is occupied by the so-called CEOs (acronym for Chief Executive Officer), as in the recent Argentine experience, or when it is occupied for clientelistic purposes, but it is more difficult to think about its substantive specificity without thinking about what it is not.

We understand that it is possible (and complex) to build from the critical traditions of state thinking. If we could not, we could not recover the State as a sphere. Then, to continue proclaiming the need for state intervention on social problems would sound like a slogan.

The problem of the theory-practice dialectic is complex and interesting.

f) Telos of transformation

The imperatives of transformation are part of the definition of intervention for social work; interrupting a trajectory from action to generate an effect is undoubtedly a transformation; effects are always generated when intervening, but it is not about transformation in general, but a transformation tending towards values such as those of emancipation. To know in order to transform, to seek social transformation, to emancipate from different forms of domination become needs that are projected onto the others of the intervention and become a measure of the validity of the intervention: what was transformed?

The value of transformation in the professional common senses corresponds to an optimistic idea towards the future, in which transforming means abandoning a previous state to go towards an evolved one in the developmentalist version and a revolutionized or liberated one in the critical versions. It coincides with an idea taken to the institutional level in which the idea of the instituted remains on the axis of the negative, of the oppressive, and the instituting remains on the plane of the positive, of the liberating. If in the first part of the 1970s this could represent a shared imaginary, today, perhaps because of the experience of the end of the 1970s onwards, we think that the future is not necessarily better and that not all transformation or instituting contributes to increased justice or freedom or protection. Neoliberalism was and is an instituent with great transformative capacity.

Likewise, the quests for transformation are in good health in the ideologies of the better part of our students and colleagues. And if this sounds quite logical, why intervene if reality cannot be transformed?

In a previous article (Arias, 2018), we posited that the idea of subject to emancipate that had/has greater pregnance in Argentine social work is heir to the contribution of Paulo Freire and his version of intervention as liberating from forms of oppression. Working with the subject so that he/she recognizes his/her ties, and therefore commits to his/her transformation by means of political action, appears as the prevailing ideology. This often translates into intervention proposals in which the aim is to generate a subject with the capacity to make demands, a subject aware of his or her rights.

The enormous efforts that different colleagues make to achieve these transformations often do not lead to possibilities of deploying their strategy due to a set of structural restrictions that determine trajectories that are not governed by the presence or absence of awareness. What do we mean by this? That people do not change their reality not because they cannot, but because of an important set of conditioning factors; not because they do not know how to or because of a lack of awareness.

In this perspective of transformation, which focuses on changes in subjects in terms of the politicization of their actions, other institutional issues that imply guarantees of social rights are often obliterated. Perhaps as an example, in the interviews we conducted with institutional referents, when we asked them to identify rights-building practices in their actions, they reported practices in which the subjects recognized themselves as subjects of rights, in which educational tasks aimed at generating a type of awareness of rights were carried out, but the institutional practices that effectively made rights possible did not appear. The teaching of classes or the delivery of food (which is an institutional obligation for the access to rights) did not appear, but the work for the subjects to demand the right to education, assistance, etc., did appear.

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This search for transformation sometimes becomes a complex issue when it is addressed to users who come to an institution and do not want, do not demand, and even resist "being transformed". This is often the case when the recipients of assistance actions demand a resource and are forced to participate in training or capacity-building programs because of their situation of need and not because they are seeking to reflect on or change their way of thinking about some issue.

Updating the critique implies reviewing the imperatives of transformation and reviewing this search at the level of proposals or institutional responses according to the response to rights, especially according to the demands of the subjects who are excluded from access to these practices, placing in the institutional proposal a centre.
Taken to the state level, placing coverage, quality, treatment, cultural adequacy and accessibility on the transformation agenda is of major importance to the certain possibility of exercising rights. Emancipation, becoming a subject, is a complex process that requires institutional support. Working on it today requires a major critical contribution; we speculate that it is greater than transferring the responsibility of the demand to the users.

Conclusions

We are living in a stage in which our critical accumulation has made us distrustful of institutions and at the same time demanding of them. We know of their reproductive nature, we know their complex history, we read in their practices forms of domination and, nevertheless, we need them and demand more and more from them.

Far from proposing a conservative turn on them, it seems important to us to enhance the value of criticism in order to make a contribution to the institutional, but from a place that makes it possible for us to inhabit it. We are interested in proposing a committed analysis from the inside, which overcomes the place of alienation.

Using the contributions of the matrix proposed by Muñoz-Arce, we made a critique of our critical tradition in order to contribute to its updating, focusing on a set of elements specific to this stage of institutional issues.

Making one of the first efforts to synthesize a position, we understand that a critical exercise for social work in its institutional dimension cannot be carried out from a false place of autonomy. Criticism must be carried out from the full awareness that it is from within the institutions that social work has certain possibilities of transforming common life. This implies assuming the contradictory process of building regulations and not only denouncing them.

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The requirement of historicity of the critique must allow us to read at the stage that the weakness of current institutions, both in their material and symbolic dimensions, implies another floor, another reality than the one assumed in other stages of the critique. Today, contributing to the dismantling of institutions by thinking about how to get out of them feeds forces contrary to the search for rights guarantees.

Consolidating institutions then, contributing to their defense at a time when neoliberal transformations take away their power and where institutional identities are liquefied in the figures of consumers, requires betting on other forms of work that can recognize forms of demands and identities where the singularization of trajectories becomes imperative, both because of the pressing problems of rights violations as well as the struggles that different collectives have carried out for the recognition of individual rights. Therefore, the importance of individualized approaches where the subjects have the possibility of choice, not from a consumer logic, but from a logic of rights must also be a commitment to institutional transformation.

If we agree that any emancipation process requires institutional support and that today these supports are weakened, we believe that betting on their consolidation requires placing the institutional as a main object of transformation, even before the transformation searches of the subjects. Let us generate good support and let the subjects enjoy the autonomy to undertake their searches.

Continuing with this proposal to validate the idea of criticism from within, we think that it is necessary to propose the question, or the bet, to state thinking (Abad and Cantarelli, 2013). This is a requirement if we identify the importance of the state as a way of guaranteeing rights. What is the knowledge that we as state workers have to build? How does it dialogue with the forms of thinking generated by social and trade union organizations? To bet on building a State without thinking is impossible, to think that this thinking can be generated from outside is for us undesirable. We believe that here too criticism has a contribution to make.

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