



Research and Social Work: contributions to criticism

Pesquisa e Serviço Social: contribuições à crítica

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ABSTRACT – This paper aims at offering contributions to the debate on Social Work research, an imperative process to professionals who deal with the continued and expanded reproduction of social inequality in the mature bourgeois system (broadly characterized as the “social issue”). This is done by considering the several contradictions that currently exist for carrying out totality-oriented research, focused on the wealth of reality itself (in its objective logic). What are the paths to foster the production of genuinely ontological-material studies? What are the main hurdles to that? How the specificities of Social Work research can be located in this controversial context?

Keywords – Social Work. Research. Marx’s Social Theory.

RESUMO – O artigo em questão se propõe a oferecer contribuições ao debate sobre a pesquisa em Serviço Social, processo este imprescindível aos profissionais que lidam cotidianamente com a reprodução continuada e ampliada da desigualdade social na ordem burguesa madura (genericamente caracterizada como “questão social”). Faz isto considerando as inúmeras contradições atualmente existentes para a realização de pesquisas orientadas pelo ponto de vista da totalidade, centradas na riqueza da própria realidade (na sua lógica objetiva). Quais caminhos devem ser trilhados para estimular a elaboração de estudos genuinamente ontológico-materiais? Quais os principais obstáculos para isto? Como situar as particularidades da pesquisa em Serviço Social nesse contraditório contexto?

Palavras-chave – Serviço Social. Pesquisa. Teoria Social de Marx.

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Submitted in: September/2015. Approved in: October/2015.

[...] all science would be superfluous if the form of manifestation and the essence of things immediately coincided [...] (MARX, 1985, v. III/2, p. 271).

This paper aims at reflecting upon and contributing to the debate on Social Work research. It is important to highlight, as a matter of introduction, that Social Work had its creation connected to the monopolist-imperialist order of the capital (NETTO, 1998), under a *Fordian* rationalization standard of the labor force (ANTUNES, 2005), as part of the specialized collective labor that started to compose the social division of labor in the late 19th Century (IAMAMOTO e CARVALHO, 1985). Such characteristics were objectively tensioned by the workers uprising in the second half of the 19th Century, that is, by the densification of the “social issue”¹, as termed by the conservative thought. Such aspects were present at the genesis of Social Work as a profession in a global scale as ontological-universal features, being necessary, nevertheless, to rebuild the mediations that determined their particularities in the different regions of the planet and in its respective countries (and this second point is not a simple detail)².

Regarding the method in Marx’s social theory, a feature necessary for knowledge production oriented by the ontological perspective, Lukács states that (2012, p. 297):

The system criticism that we have in mind, and that we find consciously explained in Marx, rises, on the contrary, from the totality of the being in the investigation of the connections themselves, and tries to seize them in all their intricate and multiple relations, in the maximum degree of approximation possible. Totality is not, in this case, a formal fact of thought, rather, it constitutes the ideal reproduction of the truly existing; the categories are not elements of a hierarchical and systematic architecture, they are, in reality, “ways of being, determinations of existence”, structural elements of relatively total, real, dynamic, complexions whose dynamic inter-relationships give way to increasingly more comprehensive complexions, in both the extensive and the intensive sense. Facing the appropriate knowledge of such complexions, the logic loses its philosophical conduction role [...]

In the first Social Work schools in Brazil (1936-SP and 1937-RJ), professional education/training focused on the technical-operational dimension instead of knowledge production³. Only with the so-called Latin American Reconceptualization Movement (1965-1975 – not exactly – NETTO, 1992 and 1998), in the bourgeois autocracy aimed in the civic-military dictatorship imposed from 1964 onwards in Brazil, the renewal of the Brazilian Social Work developed. Conservatism, then, reinvigorated over other grounds, even though in this renovation the first more consistent questions on the syncretic-doctrinal and scientific framework of the Euro-American traditional Social Work were drafted (NETTO, 1998). The trend termed by José Paulo Netto as “rupture intention” (NETTO, 1998) – in its diversity – has produced the most fruitful observations and criticism to the densification of the concern the professional category had regarding knowledge and research in the process of professional preparation. It is necessary to acknowledge, here, the advancements of the profession with the establishment of the area of study and research with the funding agencies (CNPq and CAPES), and the expansion of graduate programs from the 1970’s on. In this scenario, PUC (SP) pioneered in providing educational training and conferring degrees to a considerable number of masters and PhDs to work at several universities in the country.

In the following decades (1980/1990), there was a significant effort of the category to strengthen the scientific and professional basis, particularly in relation to the process of critical construction of the profession and the professional practice, both guided by the socio-historical contribution of the analysis of the real, spread out by the 1982 curriculum. From this moment onwards, the professional category of Social Workers, through its main representatives (CRESS, ABESS/ABEPSS) clearly assumed a different perspective in tune with the defense of workers’ rights⁴.

It was a moment of undeniable advances for Social Work, expressed in scientific productions and in undergraduate and graduate programs. It reaffirmed the critical legacy from part of the reconceptualization-renewal movement, deepened by the national context of collective struggle of social

movements for the process of political redemocratization of the country. This fertile scenario enabled the creation of a critical professional design, which was called “professional ethical-political project”, as a strategic social direction⁵. It is in this rich context that the research gains a clear importance in the academic and professional education of social workers, fostering the reconstruction of reality inspired by the perspective of totality, redefining the role of technical-tools and producing answers that go beyond the daily immediacy impregnated in the professional work⁶. Therefore, the qualification of the social worker is essential, considering the theoretical background, the intellectual discipline, the academic and scientific rigor, and the professional practice based on the guiding principles of the profession, as established in the Code of Ethics of Social Work, written in 1993. In this sense, the intellectual improvement of the social worker is key.

[...] qualified academic education founded on critical and solid theoretical-methodological conceptions capable of enabling a concrete analysis of social reality – which should open space to the concern regarding the permanent (self) education and stimulate a constant investigative concern (NETTO, 1999, p. 16).

However, it is important to highlight the fragmentation of the Social Sciences as an expression of a bourgeois science, as modern knowledge is organized into specializations that justify conservative positions and procedures. Added to this, the growth of the natural sciences and the generalization of its methods, whose research leverage the industrial and technological development and the ramifications of capital development. This is deepened in the current socio-historical context marked by neoliberal barbarism, its productive reorganization and continuing precariousness, with perverse impacts on social life in general, particularly in the world of work⁷, presenting profound obstacles to the realization of human emancipation (MARX, 2009).

In order to contribute to increasing levels of social emancipation, it is the role of social workers to decipher this complex and adverse scenario guided by the category of totality (LUKÁCS, 2010, 2012 and 2013). For that, it is vital that those professionals count on a dense and critical theoretical framework, which is critical to foster the interpretation of social reality, of existing social complexes, and to provide support to professional work. Thus, they must have a good appropriation of the various currents of thought present in Humanities and Social Sciences, among which the three major modern theoretical frameworks stand out (as an absolute minimum standard): Positivism, Phenomenology, and Marx's Social Theory (considering its several traditions and current developments). The study and the research are essential to all of them.

Neoliberalism and higher education restructuring

The Brazilian higher education restructuring is unthinkable without the neoliberal prescription implemented worldwide in the 1970s, even though it was more clearly felt in Latin America starting in the second half of the 1980s. Neoliberalism is an ideology advocating for ideas and actions sustained in intense (ultra) privatization, destatization, reduction of rights and public spending on social security and social policies. It adopts this prescription as an alternative to resume capital accumulation and to deal with structural crisis, having as a reference the macroeconomic formulas linked to the ideas of Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman. Surely, it is located in a particular phase of monopolies capitalism, which is inspired by the *Toyotist* accumulation pattern and on privilege to the financial fraction of the world bourgeoisie (HARVEY, 2011; CHESNAIS, 1996; IAMAMOTO, 2007). The Latin-American case is unthinkable without its overly late and dependent mark, typical of nations that have done, with specificities, their bourgeois revolutions already in the 20th Century (FERNANDES, 1987; 2009).

Regarding the training/education of social workers, it is appropriate to emphasize the serious problems faced in the area of higher education in the past decades. The deep decadence of research and

knowledge production reported by Lukács (In NETTO – org - 1981, p. 109-131), as well as the deterioration of public universities in Brazil, both in the precariousness of human force at work (outsourced, lack of civil service examinations, hiring trainees and substitute professors etc.) and in the decrease of higher education quality. Overestimation and expansion of private education of doubtful quality is seen, along with the aggravating factor of distance education and the deterioration of public education, demonstrating the commitment with a certain type of “knowledge” which is essentially descriptive, production-oriented and hegemonically committed with market interests⁸.

In the current scenario, we experience higher education reorganization with the subordination of education towards the market, as merchandise that is subject to the interests of the capital, generating mutations in the work relations at the Brazilian public universities. This becomes evident, among other ways, from the current deterioration of those institutions of public education for the benefit of the valorization of private institutions of higher education, under the market premise that fosters capital accumulation through a sped-up professional training/ education⁹.

Thus, the *operational university* is constituted (CHAUI, 1999), structured through regulations and standards that are completely foreign to knowledge and the intellectual education, pulverized in micro organizations, keeping its faculty busy and subjecting its students to demands that are unrelated to intellectual work. The heteronomy of such university is evident: “*the insane increase in class-hours, the decrease in the time for masters and doctorate programs, the evaluation by the amount of publications, colloquiums, and conferences, the multiplication of boards and reports, etc.*” (CHAUI, 1999, p. 221); thus, according to the author, it is committed to itself, a university that operates, but does not act. . It is a fact, therefore, that this operational profile reinforces its “permanent public demoralization and internal degradation”. (*ibid.*). On what would teaching and research consist at this operational, productive, and flexible university? According to Marilena Chauí, it would be, under such bases, a space committed to

[...] the fast transmission of knowledge registered in easy to read manuals for the students [...] teaching is thought as a fast qualification for holders of college degrees who need to quickly enter a labor market of which they will be expelled within a few years because they become, in a short time, obsolete and disposable young people; or as a drive belt between researchers and training for new researchers. Transmission and taming. The essential mark of teaching has then disappeared: the provision of education (CHAUI, 1999, p. 221).

The economic, social and political fragmentation, imposed by the current phase of capitalism, according to the author, represent “a postmodern self-named ideology”, intending “to mark a rupture with the classical and illustrated ideas that made up modernity” (*ibid.*). For this ideology:

[...] reason, truth, and history are totalitarian myths; space and time are an ephemeral and volatile succession of fast images [...] subjectivity is not reflection, but the narcissistic intimacy, and objectivity is not the knowledge of what is external and different from the subject, rather, it consists on a set of strategies built on language games that represent thought games, that is, as invention and abandonment of “paradigms”, without knowledge ever touching reality itself. (*ibidem*).

Therefore, research at this type of university cannot be committed to knowledge, but with the appropriation of tools to intervene and control certain socially placed object, as intervention-control. For this reason, without any commitment to the ontological science that extracts information from reality and rebuilds it as mirroring of the real and goes back to real life itself as social practice (LUKÁCS, 2012). It is, therefore, a purely operational university.

This university does not provide educational training and does not create thought, it deprives the language of sense, density and mystery, it destroys curiosity and admiration that lead to the unfolding of the new, nullifying all pretensions of

historical transformation as a conscious action of human beings in materially determined conditions (CHAUI, 1999, p.222).

Studies presented by Braz and Rodrigues (2013, p. 270) on the impact of ongoing Counter-Reformation in the particular field of professional education in Social Work, clearly point to a fairly difficult scenario. By analyzing the higher education Census of the Ministry of Education (MEC) from 1995 to 2010, the authors have concluded that there was an increase from 72 (1995) to 333 educational institutions (2010), and the weight of the private sector in this growth is significant: in the same period, it had a leap from 41 to 270 educational institutions of Social Work. That, in percentage, represented a robust growth of private schools, considering the total number of schools: of around 57% in 1995 to 81% in 2010. The situation is even more concerning when we consider the Higher Education data by MEC (2010) in the modality distance education for teaching Social Work: 143,198 enrolled in distance education, and only 22% of enrollments (31,099) were in regular classes. Such a context, objectively provided, not only speeds up and deteriorates teaching and research, but also hurts the professional ethical-political project of Social Work in one of its fundamental pillars: *professional education/training*¹⁰.

Even though the ongoing process of resistance involving representative bodies in the area of Social Work (the set Cfess, Cress, Abeppss, Enesso) cannot be disregarded, this tough picture has thickened the difficulties in this particular field, while it imposes to society an operational university seen as more “efficient” and “socially engaged”. This process, far from being apprehended separately, composes a social totality particularized in education and centered on a doomed triad: *privatization, precariousness, and reduction to operationalization* of Brazilian universities, adopting differentiated strategies to objectify such principles in the so-called “centers of excellence” and in the “peripheral educational centers”. The onset and the stimulus to distance education complete this process of marketization of education as a means to mass produce education and college degrees.

Social Work Research and its Specificities: times of resistance

To start, it is important to emphasize that doing research / science means to be willing to learn some “social complex” from deep investigations (LUKÁCS, 2012) and realize such intention as a conscious act (teleology-purpose-causality). Thus, it is about mentally rebuilding a dynamic that is not in the head of who carried out the study (no matter how brilliant this person might be). It does not mean, absolutely, devaluate the critical reasoning exercise, but to focus its strength in the logics of the being.

The starting point of any science is the very reality (the real starting point) that fosters, questions, imposes needs related to the material reproduction of the (social) being. The ontological-materialistic reason is accomplished from this insuppressible, ineliminable basis, even if immediately it does not surface as the real starting point. On the other hand, without the exercise of objective reason that deconstructs the immediate toughness of the real, research and knowledge production are not accomplished, and the social forces of the relative subjects are not put into movement. We are faced with another relation between reason and reality, as objective reason, committed to the “logic of the thing” (MARX, 2005a, p. 39), geared towards genuinely human problems, surely intentional ones, but based on determinations of the being, of his/her existence (where the categories of research analysis effectively are). Gnosiology, which concerns production of knowledge, shall not be taken as ontology (the determinations of the being), even though both are essential for any scientific investigation. The priority is always ontological by the simple fact that *the existence of the being is prior to the thought about the being*. In addition, the ontological dimension works as a “predominant moment”, just like the “Marxian political economy” (LUKÁCS, 2012; 2013) which, in absolute, explains the reason as a simple mechanical mirroring of reality itself or attributes to economy a role of “shaping” the other dimensions of social life. The *desanthropomorphizing* process (of the search of the thing as it is, and not as research wants it to be), typical of the “mirroring” promoted by science, does not eliminate the role of reason or underestimate it;

it just does not attribute to it a logic which is of reality, it does not see the beginning of the scientific process in it. Regarding this base, it is possible to talk about social praxis and understand the centrality of his (useful-concrete) work as first praxis, maintaining the specificities of science as a particular means or mirroring reality¹¹. About the method in the social theory, Marx highlights in an excerpt of “A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy”¹²:

The concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, that is, the unity of the diverse. For this reason, the concrete appears in the process of thinking, as a process of concentration, as a result, not as a starting point, and thus the starting point for intuition and representation. In the first path, the full representation volatilizes itself in the abstract determination. In the second, the abstract determinations lead to the reproduction of the concrete through thought. ‘This is how Hegel fell into the illusion of conceiving the real as the product of thought concentrated in itself, deepened in itself, which seizes itself as a mobile thought from itself’; whereas the method that consists on rising from the abstract to the concrete is not but the means thought proceeds to take ownership of the concrete and to reproduce it spiritually as a concrete thing [...]” (MARX, 1989, p. 410).

Obviously, the operational university and the “knowledge production” fostered by it do not work on such basis. Here the scientific inquiry and its methodologies are subject to the bourgeoisie conception of science, leveraging development of knowledge according to the capital's logic. Thus, knowledge is geared towards productivist interests, focused solely on the immediate face of real, absolutely biased (even though it claims itself as neutral), making the relationship between knowledge and the “world of men” limited. It means that knowledge is fragmented, centered on a formal and superficial (if anything, systemic) dialogue between the different knowledge areas, completely derailing any explicative perspective on the real and its movement objectively provided.

The bourgeoisie conception of science has submitted the Social Sciences to pure fragmentation. As explained by Lara (2007, p. 74), it does not overcome mere “stingy specialization” (as method) and reproduces, in Lukács terms, a clear ideological decadence. In this same perspective, Lukács himself stresses (2010, p. 100 and 113):

[...] an ontology of the social being should, therefore, if it does not wish to misrepresent the ontological nexus, try to apprehend exactly its specific features in its original properly-being-this way. And for the social being, it is profoundly and decisively characteristic that all dynamic processes of the complexes of human praxis, only within the being constituted and possible, are, regarding its genesis, founded in the respective way of society development, in its economy, and that are guided by it until their specific characteristics; in its own dynamics both in formal terms and in terms of content [...]. One of the main reasons for the vulgarization of Marxism, which has collaborated so much for it to lose its influence as a universal theory of development of humanity, was exactly the mechanist conception of all ideology as a simple ‘naturally necessary product’ of the respective economic relationships.

As pointed out before, the undeniable fragmentation of modern science based on the productivist logics imposes challenges to the human and social sciences as for giving effective answers to genuinely human problems. Its specific way of producing knowledge is not only questioned and subordinated in the relation to other “areas of knowledge”¹³, but it is paralyzed by purely descriptive “educational” stimuli, which are ahistorical and disengaged with the objective reason, often inspired by procedures of natural sciences and its variations. Here purely comparative studies are created, based on quantitative and qualitative data supported in the immediate mirroring of the real¹⁴. This justifies the skepticism of the bourgeoisie science in relation to a certain type of production in Human and Social Sciences (particularly the ones with a profile of clearly a critical-ontological-material), as well as the stimulus given, at the edge,

for subsidiary and descriptive studies produced by this area of knowledge (seen as of less importance and priority).

In this scenario, it is possible to notice that knowledge is fragmented by the material conditions of research institutions, among them the university, responsible for systematizing knowledge within the social division of labor. Therefore, the modern fragmented knowledge favors the conservative ideological justifications, legitimating relations under the bourgeoisie logic. Added to this, the growth of the natural sciences and the generalization of its methods, whose research leverage the industrial and technological development and the ramifications of capital development. In the social sciences however, studies “without critical positioning” (treated as “ideological”), “systemic”, frequently fragmented, descriptive, without a critical political economy, encyclopedic and politically behaved. An important category that constitutes the dynamics of the real is absolutely abandoned in the process thus named as “knowledge production”. *The category of totality*. Without a genuinely human science guided by the materialistic ontology of the social being, connected to the Social Theory of Marx in its totality (criticism to the value-labor theory, a dialectic method, and the perspective of the revolution), the study of the “logic of the thing” is completely unfeasible.

It is worth mentioning that Social Work was constituted in Brazil linked to the emergence of the so-called modern society, i.e., capitalist, in its monopoly-oriented stage, which opens and legitimizes scientific (or “scholarly”) knowledge, allowing for specific conditions for training professionals with authority to seize and explain the social complex (even though it is still necessary to recognize anti-modern traits present in the genesis of the profession – SILVA, J. F. S., 2015). It is in this context that Social Work is socially legitimized to intervene in the “expressions of the social issue” (IAMAMOTO, 2007), its refractions, linked to the conflict between capital and labor, resulting from the “expressions of the educational process and development of the working-class middle class and its entrance in the political scenario of society, demanding its acknowledgement as class from the business community and the State” (KAMEYAMA, 1998, p.33).

In the specific case of Brazil, the configuration of the “social issue” within the capitalist economy “happened from the 1930s onwards, reflecting the advancement of the social division of labor, bounding, therefore, to the emergence of paid work” (KAMEYAMA, 1998, p. 34). In this context, in the decade of 1930, that is, in the Vargas era, the first schools of Social Work were created in São Paulo (1936) and Rio de Janeiro (1937), while professional training, given its interventionist character, privileged, above all, the technical-operative aspect rather than knowledge production. As we highlighted before, Social Work research started effectively in the beginning of the decade of 1970, when the first graduate programs in the areas of Human and Social Sciences and Social Work were created.

However, attributing relevance to the investigative action does not mean, under any hypothesis, to disregard the importance of the interventional dimension present in professional work. With this understanding, Social Work inserted research as a subject in the first minimum curriculum determined by Law no. 1,889, June 13, 1953, being reaffirmed in the second curriculum in 1962. In the third curriculum, in 1970, research is not among the mandatory courses, for “being implicit in the integrating spirit between research-teaching in the Higher Education Reformation” (SETUBAL, 2007, p.68). Knowledge production was broadened in Social Work with the expressive increase of bibliographic production, nurtured by the master's and doctorate thesis and dissertations¹⁵. However, in the 1980s Social Work gained the acknowledgement of the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), as a research area, encompassing the following areas of inquiry: “Fundamentals of Applied Social Work”, “Social Work of Labor”, “Social Work of Education”, “Social Work of Minor”, “Social Work of Health”, and “Social Work of Housing”.

Research in Social Work has developed in the relation with the theoretical perspectives that have guided the professions for the past decades. The renovation of the Brazilian Social Work experienced inside the process of Latin-America reconceptualization allowed an approximation with inquiry trends guided by Positivism, by Phenomenology, and by Marxism (even though these are not the only references). That said,

surely, the different perspectives inserted in the interior of those theoretical-methodological orientations and the type of appropriation that Social Work has been building on the aforementioned trends. It was, however, the densification of the debate with the Marxist tradition, and later with Marx himself, that has guided debates in the field of social emancipation, even if it is necessary to acknowledge the different readings and the existing appropriations. Analyzing those trends in the scope of research in Social Work inside or outside the Marxian-Marxist field is of extreme importance to qualify the debate in the profession and shed light on the issues that are ontologically put in the scope of professional work and beyond it. In this perspective, according to Paulo Netto (1989. p. 101):

(...) Without Marx, and the Marxist tradition, Social Work tends to impoverish itself [...]. Without considering the practices of social workers, the Marxist tradition may let behind significant elements of social life [...]. Even with a strict, intense, and extensive interlocution with the Marxist tradition, it will not constitute a Marxist Social Work (...).

This way, it concerns a perspective committed to the reconstruction of the movement of the real as “a planned concrete” (MARX, 1989), full of multiple determinations and specific social complexes (LUKÁCS, 1978) which interact and define (not in a deterministic way) the insertion of social workers in a certain historicity and from a certain socio-historical legacy. Social Work is inserted in this context as a historical specificity and the professional work of the social worker is that it is done in certain conditions objectively provided and subjectively leveraged by possible professional subjects. Research, therefore, guided by an ontological reason (in the terms used here), is a component of utmost importance in professional educational training. Since the scientific ontological-material process is essentially desanthropomorphizing, that is, committed to the reconstruction of reality, its rationality, Lukács (1978, p. 88) clarifies that:

(...) The authentic science extracts from reality itself the structural conditions and its historical transformations, and if it formulates laws, those embrace the process universality, but in a way that this set of laws may return – even if frequently through several mediations – to the singular facts of life. It is precisely this dialectics concretely accomplished by the universal, particular and singular (...).

Alternatively, in the words of Marx (2002):

The inquiry has to seize the matter, in its singularities, analyze its different means of development and assert the intimate connection between them. Only after completing this work, it is possible to describe, appropriately, the real movement. If this can be done, life in the investigated reality will be mirrored on the ideal plan. (MARX, 2002, p. 21).

In the core of the category, there is a fruitful debate on the need to reset education and work in Social Work. The empiric-oriented view of profession has been slowly surpassed, but on its place, there have risen heterogeneous alternatives that seek the “theory that is necessary to practice” (that reissues the empiricism on other basis). The syncretism (an objective trait of the profession present since its creation) and the eclecticism continue current, even though the first is insuppressible in the conditions offered by the capital society. It is important to acknowledge, also, the several objective limits that have affected the labor relations and the own subjectivity of the Social Worker as a worker. This reality, enriched by the complex context experienced in the field of professional education and the universities (as highlighted specifically in the previous point), has hit severely the critical legacy built and accumulated throughout the past highlighted by the profession. Surely research and knowledge production have been severely affected. Although this does not invalidate or mischaracterizes the professional project under way (on the contrary), undeniably it imposes objective needs to the ones who recognize it as an important reference within the profession. Appreciating this fact is a condition without which you cannot resist and reverse this reality.

In this sense, acknowledging the significant advances of the Brazilian Social work in recent decades and its current limits, it is necessary to emphasize some important points to fostering an ontological and faithful research to the tradition responsible for the critical deepening of the profession. This emphasis should be put in two ways: on the one hand on the recognition that neo-conservative trends have always existed and continue invigorating within the profession, either within the scope of research or of professional work (it's important not to underestimate this fact); on the other hand, it is necessary to reaffirm and deepen the existing social direction in the ethical-political project of the Brazilian Social Work, having Marx and part of his tradition as irreplaceable references (though not the only ones). For that, research in the area of Social Work shall consider:

- a) the criticism of current postmodern trends that insist on re-editing forms of “neutrality” and of forged procedures through abstract knowledge theories that tend to violent the movement of the real by imposing to it “the thing of logic” instead of capturing the “logic of the thing” and nurture professional and social praxis. The abstract science is here reinforced, absolutely averted to reality (anti-ontological), committed to the theoretical speculation, whose main goal is to collect and reorganize a heterogeneous and eclectic array of theories and knowledge and introduce them to the profession as alternatives to the “closed”, “outdated” and “old” theoretical frameworks built by modernity. The radical criticism to those trends, also present in the Brazilian, Latin American and global Social Work, is an essential enterprise. To underestimate this scenario, also in the field of research, will be fatal to fostering studies committed to genuinely human problems, More than that, it will create “intellectuals” “who do not behave intellectually” (as conscious post-modern utilitarian), politically and practically appropriate, committed to the detailed description, “scholarly”, disguised of research and science (SILVA, J. F. S., 2015);
- b) fostering inquiry orientations clearly based on the perspective of those who “live from the sale of labor force” (which does not mean, absolutely, to not carry out investigations that reveal the internal dynamics of the dominant class and its fractions). This procedure should be committed to the centrality of concrete, useful, creative, and humanizing work (this one as a central ontological category) and adverse to (radically critic) to the history form assumed in the society of capital: the abstract work, foreign-alienated. In this context, one aspect is relevant: the result of these studies needs to be socialized with social workers (in its various insertions in the social division of labor – inside and outside Brazil) with other workers, with defense entities thereof, social movements, trade unions and other committed segments, in theory, to the defense of those who sell their labor force (in its diversity);
- c) the concern of valuing, in the scope of education, and professional work, the point of view of the social totality, which denies any type of professional endogeneity and theoretical-practical fragmentation, but committed to explaining the specificity of Social Work in the current process of broadened production and reproduction of the capital. In this, certainly, the necessary mediations with the profession and its objective limits, as well as the articulation of Social Work with the political economy and the determinations imposed by the capital and by the society that allow for its accumulation: capitalism. From those parameters the so-called “transversal themes” should be studied – inside and outside of the walls of the university – and to enrich professional education and work (by the way,

“transversal themes” are not less important and not mechanically determined by the infrastructure linked to the production and reproduction of the social being);

- d) the need that research explain the specificities of Brazil and Latin America, the ways in which the ongoing order worldwide is objectified in the conditions of this region of the globe and its respective countries. For that, it is impossible to disregard the character of ongoing capitalism that is not only monopoly-oriented, imperialist, and financial, but also its colonial side, which is dependent and delayed. In that, the specificities of the ongoing resistances in the Latin-American continent, its differences, qualities and its surely imposing limitations to socio-liberal and neo-developmental traits (CASTELO, 2015; GONÇALVES, 2015; SAMPAIO, JR, 2015)¹⁶.
- e) it is necessary, moreover, to deal with another old-new topic: The simultaneous denial of the current ways through which the militant activity and the fatalism reissue themselves (IAMAMOTO, 1994). Surely, a profession is not and will never be, for example, a political party. However, the professions cannot be depoliticized or have their relation with the political economy simply discarded “by decree” (as if it were possible). Therefore, it is a process that should *unify without identifying*, professions, parties, social movements, among others, as well as reveal the strategies to be used by professionals – militants in different spaces and conditions that sometimes demand more from the professional than from the militant (or vice versa). In other words, to know one’s standpoint and place of action does not mean to abdicate the professional or the militant (separating them completely) but rather to make it clear that the militant-professional needs to consider their concrete space of action, their objective limits, and possible potentialities.

Concluding remarks

Attributing to Social Work the character of “interventionist profession” that should provide “practical-professional” answers to social contradictions compromises this action when demanding prescriptions that guide the professional work without considering the socio-historical process in which it occurs, reinforcing and reissuing a certain type of empiricism in the profession. Considering Social Work as certain specialization of the collective work in the social and technical division of work (IAMAMOTO & CARVALHO, 1985; 2007) supposes, necessary, to locate this profession beyond the simple professional “intervention”, “action”, “practice”, “doing” or “exercise” (terminologies that are broadly and commonly used as synonyms). The critical and totality perspective demands the social worker to have theoretical-methodological and political competence to grasp the intrinsic connections of the real, enabling him/her to choose safer paths in order to formulate concrete proposals in their professional work inspired by the professional ethical-political project and bound to the socio-historical limits objectively provided. This reinforces the relevance of research in the sense of providing, through investigation, rich subsidies that allow that Social Work professional to deep apprehension - surely never an exact one - of the social reality in its totality¹⁷ articulating theory and practice in the field of social praxis. For that, a dense theoretical foundation that supports the analysis of social reality is fundamental and, therefore, subsidize professional work in relation to the professional ethical-political project as a general reference-orientation (and it does not have real conditions of being more than that).

Thus, the classical reference that offers the best conditions for a coherent orientation with the professional project of the category, according to our opinion, is Marx’s social theory. At that level, the possibilities and conditions for unveiling the social relations that are beyond inherent immediacy in

everyday life are higher, which for Marx and part of his tradition means to mentally decode the essence of the materially ongoing process. This brings us to the apprehension of the dynamics of the real (in which the study subjects are inserted), considering the relations of production and social reproduction expanded under the voracious logic of the capital that reproduces itself worldwide in all spheres of social life (including in the subjectivity the social being). That means to register the profession in a tense terrain of multiple interests and disputes in constant struggles. Here are the class, the individual, and his social subjectivity composing a sole complex-diverse process, inexplicable through its “isolated portions”, safely inserted in a given society: capitalism in its mature phase (the society that allows the broadened production and reproduction of capital). Therefore, studies and research committed to the “truth of detail” (“its own”), with fragmentation of the real; with the purely subjective logic (in the wake of Kant and of his tradition); with the “external description of real” that reissues old formulas settled in heterogeneous notions of equilibrium (more static or dynamic-systemic) cannot serve research that is genuinely committed to human problems in their collectivity and diversity. They will produce, at the limit, a biased science, that is, a human production for few human beings: the “strongest and more apt ones”.

Regarding the training of social workers, it is worth mentioning, as said before, the severe problems demonstrated in the scope of higher education for the past decades, the deep decadence of research and knowledge production made evident by Lukács (1981, p. 109-131), the deterioration of the public universities in Brazil, and the precariousness of the human force that works at the universities, in addition to the decrease in quality in higher education. Therefore, the overvaluation and the expansion of private education of doubtful quality, the deepening of distance education, and the deterioration of public and free education are highlighted, demonstrating the current disengagement and disregard for knowledge production in the parameters stressed here. *In this sense, the defense of the state, free, quality public education, broad and unrestrictive, shall continue to build up the priority agenda of the profession.* Therefore, it is important that the professional category, through its organizational bodies, continue to participate with proposals at the official bodies responsible for education in Brazil (MEC, Capes, CNPq and the several state bodies), as a spokesmen for the collective demands (from the ones “from the lower circles”), fostering the debate, inflating the administrative and managerial bodies with collective demands. The permanent struggle is fundamental, at the same time, insisting and unrepentant at all instances of social life whose collective influence of the professional and group-individual category of social workers is present, through *broad democratization of all its instances: from the simplest commission to the most decisive spaces.* In addition, this exercise, obviously, should be collectively experienced, as a political component of the professional training and work. As highlighted by Silva, J.F.S. (2013b, p. 264-265):

Training and knowledge production in Social Work should enrich the critical appropriation of social workers beyond immediate demands; in other words, it is necessary to fight the utilitarianism-pragmatism in the use of “knowledge” before practical demands (and vice versa), valuing the kind of production that will enrich critical accumulation, critical debate, fixed on the explanation of the mechanisms of production and reproduction of bourgeois sociability and, in it, of Social Work specificities. This contribution can be provided either through studies that more directly address to practical demands, such as through the involvement of knowledge of the real that are not necessarily related to the demands immediately presented to social workers. This aspect cannot be considered or seem as another topic that should or should not be taken into account; on the contrary, it is key to reassert, in the current conditions, what we collectively intend and understand when we defend the so-called Professional Ethical-Political Project. Without it, the instrumental reason will triumph over the ontological reason (SILVA, 2013b, p. 1) and the future will keep to us an exclusive function of operators of that is instituted in the social area or the role of terminal managers (even though reality offers the real conditions for a different action). In this case, there will be a progressive downtime of the ontological critical reason, intellectually disqualifying the

historical subjects able to rebuild the dynamics of the real and to drive the implicit possibilities in reality.

Fortunately, despite the difficulties clearly presented (with specificities in Brazil), not everything is lost and history is not over (on the contrary of what was prematurely announced by Mr. Fukuyama). Hard times are seen ahead, but this announcement is not and will not be the only one throughout history and victories may also come, not as godsend blessings, but in the fight materialized on the action of doing. This is part of the social demand and the sign that the old struggle of classes continues to be current. Unfortunately for the ones who are reactionary and conservative (more or less reformist), it is not possible to eliminate the “scourge of class struggle” for the simple fact that it exists objectively in reality, as objective-material production, although many “scientific minds” say otherwise on behalf of science and the “rigorous and impartial research”. As Marx used to say, “The history of all societies until now has been the history of the classes struggle” (MARX, 2012, p. 185). This is an ontological-real assertion!

In order to be possible for Social Work to contribute with growing levels of social emancipation, it is fundamental that the social worker knows and articulates the mediations that permeate the profession, safely based on a theoretical framework that aids the professional to decipher reality in its totality. There is no question about it: research of high quality is essential. Those actions should leverage the construction of non-endogenous, realist, historically founded alternatives, committed to growing levels of social emancipation and based on the collective construction able to deepen the ongoing professional project considering the current historical tensions. For that, it is fundamental to consider the daily life as a reflexive category for professional work, thus allowing an analysis of reality oriented by the category of totality. It is essential to rescue the sense of class belonging that the capital, through its several domination strategies, has been trying to mask and derail (MÉSZÁROS, 2002). Moreover, a clear fact that is by no means new: without strong progressist anticapitalistic participation in collective protests and resistance, that beyond the national territory, demands will not be fulfilled and the bourgeoisie management of universities and funding agencies will promote setbacks with the “silent support” of those distinguished researchers concerned in maintaining “their funding”, “their scholarships”, “their “resources”, “their positions”, “their curriculum on Lattes platform”, their own demands. Surely and fortunately, this is not the only alternative.

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¹ The “Social issue” explained by the “General Law of Capitalist Accumulation” (MARX, 1984, p. 187-259). About the conservative thought, see Escorsim (2011). For a debate on the contemporary expressions of Conservatism in the Brazilian Social Service, we recommend Silva J. F. S., 2015.

² Surely, the materialization of such universal traits was not identical in the different countries where Social Work became a profession. As a mediation-rich social complex, Brazilian Social Work had its genesis under the specific conditions of the bourgeoisie Brazilian Revolution (FERNANDES, 1987 e 2009), a revolution driven by the urban-industrial project of the government of Getúlio Vargas and of the 1930s. The genesis of the Brazilian Social Work, clearly linked with the Franco-Belgian Catholic tradition, cannot be paired and identified, for example, with the genesis of the Argentinian Social Work (of a more philanthropic-religious profile, with controversies). This fact, however, does not contradict, by any means, the most universal-general observations pointed out by Iamamoto-Carvalho and Netto.

³ It is worth mentioning that the Brazilian schools were not the first ones in Latin America. Chile was the pioneer, founding its two first schools: 1925 (under the leadership of the physician Alejandro Del Río) and 1929 (Escola Elvira Matte de Cruchaga). Even though in Argentina the first education/training center was created in 1930 (at the Social Argentinian Museum), in 1924 at the School of Medical Sciences of Buenos Aires, the program of social hygiene visitors was created.

⁴ In the occasion of the 3rd CBAS, in 1979, in São Paulo, professionals who attended the meeting deposed the opening panel of the event formed by official authorities of the civic-military dictatorship. They were replaced by representatives of worker's movements. For this reason, the event became known as “Congresso da Virada” (Turn around Congress). In this sense, we understand that this political moment densified the discussions on the professional ethical-political project of the category which substantially advanced in the 1980s, consolidated in the 1990s and continues to be in the process of construction (respected the several limits objectively provided). This whole process has been tensioned by the current neoliberal Project and by the growing conservatism present in the core of Social Work (BRAZ, 2013; SILVA, J. F. S., 2015).

⁵ According to Paulo Netto (1999), the professional ethical-political project encompasses the Code of Ethics of 1993, which guides the professional exercise; Law no. 8662/1993, which regulates the profession; and the Curriculum Guidelines of 1996, which guide the curriculums of Social Work programs in Brazil. See: http://www.fnepas.org.br/pdf/servico_social_saude/texto2-1.pdf

⁶ Iamamoto, 2007.

⁷ Antunes, 2005.

⁸ About REUNI, it is important to highlight that it is about an expansion of the public university that operates from the deterioration of the undergraduate teaching work and from the loss of quality of the public higher education in Brazil (SILVA, M.I.; SILVA, J.F.S. – 2011 and BRAZ; RODRIGUES, 2013, p. 255-281).

⁹ See Silva, M. I. (2010b), Braz and Rodrigues (2013, p. 255-281) and Leher (2013; 2012), and Leher and Silva (2014). Leher stresses a brutal treatment given to the resources of public universities in favor of private education with several profiles. Moreover, he correctly insists that the public universities (federal and state ones) could perform the target of expansion of university places with better quality (towards a growing “demercantilization”), with resources invested in the private sector through, for example, student funding.

¹⁰ The authors present additional alarming data in the chapter “Teaching in Social Work in the neoliberal era (1990-2010): progress, setbacks and enormous challenges,” particularly in the item called “regressive aspects of university counter-reformation in professional education”.

¹¹ It is not necessary here to provide a deeper approach to this topic (sufficient for the goals of this article). It is only necessary to register that whereas the mirroring promoted by science is desanthropomorphizing (as previously stated), in art, the process is anthropomorphizing, that is, the artist tends to incorporate its own subjectivity to the object of art. In both, however, the starting point is always reality itself.

¹² This is a segment frequently quoted, but rarely understood and explained.

¹³ For that, it is enough to verify the investments effectively done in several areas (scholarships, funding announcements in general). Another example, which is very current, is the exclusion of humanities from the “Science without Borders Program”, by the Federal Government.

¹⁴ Which, obviously, does not eliminate the importance of qualitative and quantitative data in studies of more analytical depth.

¹⁵ In 1977, teaching units and the ABESS (Brazilian Association of Social Work Education – today, Brazilian Association of Education and Research in Social Work - ABEPSS) started the debate around the reformulation of the third minimum curriculum, reconsidering the research as an important tool for a solid scientific training/education of professionals (social workers who were professors, or not) which was reflected in the fourth curriculum approved in 1982. In 1996, the Curriculum Guidelines reasserted the course on Research as one of the basic principles in professional training.

¹⁶ The Brazilian experience with Lula and Dilma and the Chilean proposal with Bachelet are clearly placed in the socio-liberal field (with modest reforms and changes). The Bolivarian experiences involving Venezuela (Chaves-Maduro), Ecuador (Rafael Correa) and Bolivia (Evo Morales) have their differences; surely, they are neo-developmental and much more daring and anti-imperialist. The Argentinian experience, unthinkable without peronism and neo-peronism (kirchnerism among them) also has a nationalistic, neo-developmental anti-imperialistic profile of its own.

¹⁷ Which, logically, does not mean everything.