

ARTICLE

Putting (us) in common: Production of knowledge and narratives in/from social work

Poner(nos) en común: Producción de conocimientos y narrativas en/desde el trabajo social

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Abstract:

In this article we develop a reflective exercise regarding knowledge production in social work, its entanglements with power, and the way in which it is geo- and corpo-politically situated, highlighting a methodological proposal for knowledge production: Narrative Productions. For this, we propose the need to expand the hegemonic margins, leaving behind the presumption of objectivity that some models of knowledge generation sustained by a neoliberal, colonial and patriarchal ethos. From there, we review power relations, their articulations with the logic of knowledge production in the Social Sciences in general and in so-

Keywords:
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cial work in particular, questioning the academic production and the habitual knowledge practices used by the discipline. We propose to intertwine social work with feminist practices and theories, materialized in the integration of Narrative Productions as a feminist methodological strategy, whose main value is that it allows for generating co-work processes, deconstructing naturalized spaces and integrating affective, collaborative and embodied elements.

Resumen

En este artículo desarrollamos un ejercicio reflexivo respecto de la producción de conocimientos en trabajo social, sus entramados con el poder, y la forma en que está geo y corpo-políticamente situado, destacando en ello una propuesta metodológica para la producción de conocimiento: las Producciones Narrativas. Para ello, planteamos la necesidad de ampliar los márgenes hegemónicos, saliendo de la presunción de objetividad que algunos modelos de generación de conocimiento, sostenidos por un ethos neoliberal, colonial y patriarcal, reafirman. Desde ahí, revisamos las relaciones de poder, sus articulaciones con las lógicas de producción de conocimiento en las Ciencias Sociales en general y en trabajo social en particular, cuestionando la producción académica y las prácticas habituales de conocimiento a las que acude la disciplina. Proponemos entrelazar al trabajo social con las prácticas y teorías feministas, materializadas en la integración de las Producciones Narrativas como una estrategia metodológica feminista, cuyo principal valor es que nos permite tejernos en común, generando procesos de co-labor, deconstruyendo los espacios naturalizados e integrando elementos afectivos, colaborativos y corporeizados.

Palabras Clave:
Feminismos;
producción de conocimientos;
trabajo social;
investigación social;
producciones narrativas



Introduction: Our starting point

In this collaborative and affective exercise in which we trace the reflections that we share here, we assume a commitment with a feminist critical social work, which weaves and knots our acting/feeling/thinking. The critical refers to the possibilities of deconstructing and reconstructing the various theoretical, epistemological, political aspects that converge in the processes of social transformation, welcoming the tensions and constant articulations between research and intervention movements, generating feedback and situated knowledge (Hernández, 2018; Muñoz et al., 2017; Hermida, 2020). In this sense, and to exercise situated thinking (Haraway, 1995), both academically and politically, this article reflects part of our current movements, without totalizing pretensions or uniformity around disciplinary visions.

Rather, we put in common the trajectories we have developed, which intersect affectivity (Enciso-Domínguez and Lara, 2014), upbringing, teaching and multiple relationships we inhabit; from there, we can question ourselves disciplinarily in the methodological exercise for the production of knowledge; based on the idea that the plot is woven by semiotic-material imbrications (Butler, 2005), so that we cannot separate affectivity from knowledge, nor ideas from the body. In summary, we identify our place of enunciation with proposals that transit between feminisms and anti-patriarchal gazes (Cabnal, 2017; Gil, 2011; Haraway, 1995), de and anti-colonial positions (Espinosa, 2016; Hermida and Meschini, 2018; Rivera, 2015), as well as anti-neoliberal (Ioakimidis, 2020; Muñoz-Arce, 2019; Pérez-Orozco, 2017).

These looks that manage, from the articulation of different fronts, to provide possibilities of intersectional reading (Crenshaw, 2002; 2012) in our research and vital exercises, also require methodological anchors that translate these theorizations with procedures that seek some coherence, to be supported by real possibilities of interpellation on how we do what we do (García-Fernández and Montenegro-Martínez, 2014; Haraway, 1995; Harding, 1986). It is precisely this exercise that we attempt in this article, by putting in tension the forms of traditional knowledge production, integrating the power of narrative productions.



In this way, our pretension, which we know to be ambitious, is to put ourselves in common and through these letters to be able to agree (Cabnal, 2018) to think among us, to exchange possibilities of action, to try movements together that can challenge the hegemonic visions, where to put in common does not mean to homologate nor to think only in agreements, but to make dissent exist, that we fit with our contradictions and also with our agreements, to produce knowledge that integrates this marriage.

Weaving to widen the margins

In this sharing exercise we reinforce the idea of widening the margins, because we understand that in the conceptions of traditional science the desire to achieve objective and totalizing visions (Haraway, 1995) leads us to build a positivist view of the world, since, in order to find the desired objectivity, those who investigate must distance themselves “from the object” and try to observe it impartially so as not to stain it with personal subjectivities, a premise that is reaffirmed by classical social work. Thus, “Eurocentric Western modernity (...) generated a coloniality of knowledge (Lander and Castro-Gómez, 2000), a type of technical-scientific, epistemological rationality, which is assumed as the valid model of knowledge production” (Curiel, 2015, p.51).

It is from this colonial, patriarchal, Eurocentric and neoliberal space that we believe it is necessary, both academically and politically, to move the borders and get out of the assumption that

The model of knowledge is a subject capable of objectivity, that is to say, capable of separating his own interests and acquiring, then, this vision of the aspects of the world without putting himself at stake in the vision of these aspects. A separation between the subject and the world, where the subject acts as a kind of mirror, where the laws of the world and the objects are reflected as they are, and not as each perspective appreciates them. (Maffía, 2005, p.628)

In contrast, we believe that, as we have initially stated, in line with feminisms, there is not (or at least it is not the central intention) a quest for

a doctrine of objectivity that promises transcendence, a history that loses track of its mediations where someone can be held responsible for something, nor an unlimited instrumental power (...) We need the power of modern critical theories about how meanings and bodies are created, not to deny meanings and bodies, but to live in meanings and bodies that have a chance in the future. (Haraway, 1995, p.322)

Therefore, and from Haraway's (2005) proposal, which seeks to distance itself from the discussions around the search for a single truth, it is possible to affirm that "the moral is simple: only the partial perspective promises an objective vision" (Haraway, 1995, p.326). Feminist objectivity deals, then, with limited localization and situated knowledge, not with transcendence and the unfolding of the subject and objectifies her. However, she also speaks of a trap for the establishment of the ability to see from the periphery and from the depths. We see this directly linked to the analysis of the privileges we exercise, since there is a serious danger of romanticizing and/or appropriating the vision of the less powerful while having the illusion of looking from their positions. Looking from below is not easily learned; it is even more difficult if we are unaware of the shifting continuum of above and below, and it is also not without its problems, even if "we naturally inhabit the great subterranean terrain of subjugated knowledge" (Haraway, 1995, p.328). Thus, "feminism is not reduced to an epistemological break with modern thought from which it emerges and feeds back. It implies cultural, normative, symbolic and logical-political changes" (Lagarde, 2000, p.5), which necessarily impacts on how we think about methodologies.

In turn, incorporating the idea of continuum between political, ethical, theoretical and epistemological projects of life, always thought from interdependence, requires us to keep updating/creating methodologies that contribute to account for that line of coherence, understanding; it is never a pristine exercise, but rather stained (Rivera, 2018), in which we can account for dissents, contradictions and inconsistencies, which will again promote other inexhaustible recursive exercises.

Rehearsing this possibility is not easy; it requires us to be attentive, in a recursive attitude, present in the relationship and in ourselves. It is an entangled ethical practice (Duboy-Luengo



and Muñoz-Arce, 2022), not in the sense of confusing, but in the sense of being woven with others, putting care at the center of the relationship (Martínez-Flores et al., 2021) and allowing, in that construction, to give life to the ideas that will nurture this research process.

From there, we communicate ideas with the intention of generating more openings and less methodological overdeterminations (Duboy-Luengo and Iturrieta, 2021) that allow the plurality of our voices, existing and making possible the realization of exercises that decenter the usual logics of power so present in the production of knowledge

Power relations in the production of knowledge

One of the needs we visualize in order to develop knowledge production exercises that transgress and subvert traditional hegemonic practices is to think about how power is played in this framework. Although there are many conceptualizations that deepen the notion of power, we want to stay with those developed by Foucault (1981). Thus, we will understand power as an exercise, not as the property of a class that has conquered it. It is, concretely, a strategy. Its effects are attributable to dispositions, tactics or techniques, but not to appropriations. We link this concept to the usual practices of knowledge production in social work, where, both for qualitative research and systematization, the techniques that give life to the methodological processes are guided interviews (structured and semi-structured).

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Although they can have nuances and achieve results of great depth and density, it is possible to observe that they perpetuate the existing tensions in the subject/object dichotomy, because, although it is true they allow the interviewee some flexibility in the story he/she constructs, there is always an intentionality on the part of the person conducting the research. In this way “interviews become narratives of research authors, who “extract” from the interviewees the necessary information to produce a text where “their” positions are clear, and where power relations continue to be reproduced” (Duboy-Luengo, 2020, p.5), generating what Grosfoguel (2016) has called epistemic extractivism.

To decenter these logics, we propose to make room for other ways of conceiving knowledge that can develop distinctions with the dynamics contained in the neoliberal ethos (Harvey, 2007) in which we have been immersed, and that, in turn, discusses the hegemonic model that has endorsed a male supremacy in the



ordering of the world, strengthening a binary construction of gender, reinforcing the development of stereotypes of what is expected for each category (sex-gender system) with a heterosexual patriarchal regime (Pateman, 1995) and also colonial (Rivera, 2018).

In this sense, universities, places that we inhabit both in privilege and precariousness, and that “constitute a central aspect in the configuration and production of knowledge” (Villalobos, 2017, p.162), have not been at the margin of these impacts, serving as reproducers of these logics and, in turn, disputing within them the clientelist relations linked to the idea of privatizations and those of public and community service (Torres, 2011).

Thus, neoliberal management devices have proliferated, ordering academic work, hierarchizing it, promoting a quantitative photograph of scientific productivity and affecting their work (Fardella-Cisternas et al., 2017). With this, and adding that “neoliberal academia integrates diversity and critical thinking as performance indicators and at the same time reproduces a climate of racism and sexism and supports a culture of silence in the face of harassment and abuse of power” (Loick, 2018, p.242), we visualize the risk, in which as the same author indicates, the “critical theories become accomplices of hegemonic institutions” (Loick, 2018, p.242). Therefore, it is important to assume the urgency of “questioning the material conditions of university production, its history and its relationship with communities” (Federici, 2020, p.157), which entails the obligation to modify “our conception of what knowledge is and who can be considered a producer of knowledge” (Federici, 2020, p.157).

Social work and discussions at the edge: the production of knowledge

These discussions have also strained the production of knowledge in social work and have been developed previously on multiple occasions (Heler, 2011; Malacalza, 2019; Sosa, 2018), affecting how academic productions are understood and their impact on how social work training has been transiting, which is evidently contained in the same framework of neoliberal relations and maintains challenges around the disputes of hegemonic thoughts in the discipline (Cifuentes, 2013; Duarte, 2022; Grassi, 1995; Rain and Muñoz-Arce, 2019; Rozas, 2006).

Thus, we are traversing a history of social work's relationship with knowledge that has not been univocal and that has manifested transformations according to the territories inhabited, the histories traversed, the social, economic, political and cultural oppressions of which it has been a part, among other factors. Of course, we do not want to abandon the structural dimension in the analysis

In this sense, there have coexisted statements about social work that define it as an applied science; others, in the search for scientificity, have sought to adhere to an empirical-deductive model in the processes of intervention and research; and others, which have been marked by reflective movements that place the knowledge of action at the center, as has been the case with the reconceptualization movement in Latin America (Mosquera, 2006).

There are bets from authors who adhere to critical lines, both from the Social Sciences and social work, which have developed a long trajectory and which are linked to the emergences of the reconceptualization movement, proposing current readings around the social question and which invite us to "recreate the professional field from the knowledge and understanding of the complexity (...) of the social question, which is expressed in the trajectories of individual and collective subjects with respect to their needs" (Rozas, 2018, p.54).

Now, from feminisms this is also a long-standing line of reflection and action, which has found as many possibilities as there are currents, being able to highlight emergencies such as *afidamento* (Espinosa, 2008) and *sorority* (Lagarde, 2000), raised from some perspectives as counterpoints, but which build other ways of looking at the links to think about life and the production of knowledge. Thus, many feminists, from philosophers and epistemologists (Harding, 1986; Haraway, 1995; Gil, 2011; 2017) to community feminists (Tzul, 2015; Koroly Castro, 2016), to black feminists (Crenshaw, 2002; 2012; Davis, 2019), Marxists (Federici, 2004; 2020), ecofeminists (Pérez-Orozcoy Mason-Deese, 2022), post/des/de/anti-colonial ones (Spivak, 2003; Rivera, 2015; 2018; Espinosa, 2014), among many other identifications, and understanding that on many occasions these categories also function imbricated, have discussed and generated a myriad of proposals to emerge multiple ways of producing knowledge.

With the ample existing development around these themes, which we find when we look separately at social work and feminisms, and which are constituted as extensive trajectories, both analytically and prospectively, we could think that both are already widely permeated by each other. However, although there is less experience in this crossing, there are critical analyses that grant glances to the production of knowledge,



intertwining feminisms and social work (Guzzetti et al., 2019; Hermida, 2017; 2020; Linardelli and Pessolano, 2019; Lorente-Molina and Luxardo, 2018), questioning the heteropatriarchal, colonial and neoliberal constructions (Roldán, 2020; Acuña Pinilla et al., 2019; Campana, 2021; Casá, 2014; Duarte, 2013; 2022; Patiño, 2020), and that not only tension, but invite us to travel other possible paths, and that have been triggers, along with others, in the reflections that propitiated this text.

Weaving situated in a geo- and corpo-politics

Historically, even in the first and second wave feminisms, the knowledge to which we have access is thought from European and North American theories (Cejas, 2011). However, and from non-hegemonic social work, there have been views that discuss this idea and question the exercise of knowledge construction as a continuous flow between theory and practice, in which social and political practices are the roots from which this possibility emerges (Cazzaniga, 2009; Deepak, 2012; Grassi, 1995; Malacalza, 2019; Parola, 2009; Rozas, 1996).

This is, then, another starting point, since “a process of decolonization means recognizing the theories that come out of political practices (...) as a center that questions the knowledge-power relation” (Cejas, 2011, p.181). And that place does not always ascribe to the same physical territory, but to a way of constructing ideas that have experienced similar oppressions and that constitute a logic of thought that could come from a certain effect, such as the south:

The south is not a place, but the effect of relations between power, knowledge and space (...) The south is the result of a racial and sexual system of social classification, a binary epistemology that opposes above and below, mind and body, head and feet, rationality and emotion, theory and practice. The South is a sexualized and racialized myth. In Western epistemology, the South is animal, feminine, infantile, queer, black (...) The South is always represented as lacking sovereignty, lacking knowledge, lacking wealth and, therefore, as intrinsically indebted to the North. At the same time, the south is the place where capitalist extraction takes place: the place where the north captures energy, meaning, jouissance and added value. The south is the skin and the womb. It is oil and coffee. It is meat and gold. (Preciado, 2019, p.276-277)

Producing knowledge from the South has implied a continuous exercise of resisting, both to epistemic hegemony (Rivera, 2015 in Rasgado, 2015) and to the patriarchal norms with which spaces move, also in the face of the colonial logics of knowledge (Lander and Castro-Gómez, 2000) and the neoliberal formulas that have permeated the practices of society and social work (Muñoz-Arce, 2015).

At the same time, a gaze is required that recognizes the elements associated with the corpo-politics of knowledge (Anzaldúa, 1987), which in its enunciation accounts for the bodies and relationships that are established in the process of knowing, evidencing the heteronormative forms in which narratives are established, silencing memories, practices, senses, knowledge and flavors. Thus, a “politicization” is woven that “is encrypted in the body” (Castillo, 2022, p.40), in which its enunciation is made explicit, so that “feminist corpo-politics need to integrate in their practices narratives belonging to other archives -other presents of struggles forgotten by the histories of emancipation- that activate the present itself, altering it, transforming it, liberating it” (p.42). Therefore, recognizing ourselves as bodily-politically situated implies becoming aware of the frontiers, evidencing the hegemonic practices inscribed in our corporealities, the ways in which colonial logic is installed androcentrically, imposing, invisibilizing and plundering other ways of knowing. To enunciate ourselves from a feminist body-politics is also to bet on different ways of positioning ourselves in the relationships that are woven between the production, reproduction and creation of knowledge in social work. It is also a form of resistance that interpellates, “knotting bodies, names and acts” (Castillo, 2022, p.42), embracing the meanings and ways in which knowledge is narrated and linked. From a feminist corpo-politics we allow ourselves to create bridges, to circulate words, to articulate the fabric, the looks and the affections.

Thus, from a geo- and corpo-politics located in the south, in mestizo and variegated, sentient bodies, we try to produce and trace feminist theoretical reflections, in which we can harbor the “hope of our liberation”, since “in its production resides the possibility of naming all our pain” (hooks, 2021, p.118), as long as we allow ourselves to knot a deep connection between theory, practice and feminist movement, in a fabric that is “able to speak directly to the pain people feel and offer healing words, healing strategies, healing theory” (p.118).

From this place of enunciation we recognize feminisms as part of an irruption in social work that “problematizes coloniality and patriarchy from a racialized and situated imprint” (Hermida, 2020, p.96), reaffirming the importance of generating modes of production of disciplinary knowledge that facilitate, geo- and corpo-politically situated, the transgression of the margins that have been delimited, ena-



bling the recognition of a social work that is situated as a practice of daily feminist resistance, framed in a politics of bodies that weaves and destabilizes spaces (Duarte, 2022). In this sense, we propose the need for the relationship between different dimensions of the text, both logocentric and corpo-political, in order to think narratives as a counter-hegemonic exercise for the production of knowledge.

Narrative Productions: Subverting hegemonic logics in knowledge production

Considering our positionality, the territory and the role of power in the production of knowledge, we start from the idea that generating knowledge is a performative activity (Butler, 1998), “reiterative and referential through which discourse produces the effects it names” (Butler, 2005, p.18), so that the generation of knowledge is associated with the power of discourse to make something recognizable or not (Butler, 2009). Thus, identities, knowledge and relationships are produced and reproduced.

In this framework, the notion of Narrative Productions emerges. This concept has important qualities that we want to highlight. On the one hand, it tensions the power relations inherent to research processes and, on the other, the possibility of integrating through them the dimensions of affectivity (Troncoso et al., 2017). Thus, the Narrative Productions are presented as a feminist methodological strategy that points towards “a partial objectivity and a politically responsible positioning”, in which “a new, complex construction is generated, which develops in the game of interpellation-reflection between participating subject and researcher” (Troncoso et al., 2017, p.24).

In the words of Balash and Montenegro (2003), to develop Narrative Productions, it is necessary to manage meetings in which researchers and participants comment on various aspects of what is being studied, considering that those who are a part develop a reconstruction of their experience and a production of meanings together with the researcher. In these sessions, “the text of what was discussed is changed and reformed until a discursive consensus is reached for the construction of a final narrative on the topics discussed” (Rubilar and Galaz, 2019, p.2). After each session the researchers recount the various ideas using their own words, subsequently creating “in-formation” texts. The account is then presented to the participants so that they can intervene in the vision of the phenomenon and, at the same time, questions and clarifications from the researchers can be inserted. Not all of the participant’s words are necessarily included, but rather the way in which she wants her point of view to be integrated.



From the development of this process, a group of diverse narratives of the phenomenon studied emerge. These texts are not presented as transcriptions of these processes, but rather the ideas that emerged in the course of the sessions are organized to achieve the creation of a narrative that has an argumentative logic and is presented as a finished text that accounts for the phenomenon (Balash and Montenegro, 2003).

One of the potentialities of the study of the narrativization of certain social phenomena lies in the possibility of observing the tension between dominant narratives - which can serve to silence or make invisible stories that do not fit or go outside the norm - and counter-hegemonic narratives in which the visibilization and creation of liberating imaginaries and practices are at stake. (Gandarias and García, 2014, p.100)

Another important characteristic is that textualization allows us to rethink the notion of product, typical of Narrative Productions, avoiding its presentation as data or discursive records. Therefore, the analytical level is back and forth with those who co-construct it; it does not become an act separated from the data. This time, the data acquire meaning only from the hand of those who have the strength of their production.

Narrative Productions, as Balash and Montenegro (2003) point out, approach language in a different way than discourse analysis; however, they also conceive knowledge as a social construction, affirming that if language is conceived as an activity, it must be in continuous dialogue with what happens in everyday life, generating an “independent product that transcends the context of elaboration” (Ramirez and Montenegro, 2021, p.6).

Narrative Productions allow “the generation of emancipatory or anti-oppressive practices and generators of critiques to social normativization” (Galaz, 2016, p.1), facilitating a research that acts on the porosity of the academy (Butler, 2020) and that questions the way knowledge is known and produced, oriented towards the construction of skeins of affects (Federici, 2020). Narrative productions enable co-labor processes in which “both parties are legitimized from mutual recognition as particular subjects who share interests and intentionalities of change of the hegemonic political order” (Castañeda, 2019, p.21), enabling the emergence of research “from acting, commitment and affects” (Duarte et al., 2022, p.137).



Adding the reflections of geo- and corpo-politics, we propose to integrate the bodily experience, materialized both in the production of the ideas developed in the Narrative Productions, as well as in the possibility of expansion in the presentation of results. This integration can be done by incorporating registers that exceed the logocentric manifestations and graphing, as they have done from research that integrates art or the sociology of the image (Rivera, 2015), the bodily trajectories as a visible part in the production of ideas.

Final reflections

Up to this point, we have carried out a reflective exercise regarding the production of knowledge in social work, its interweaving with power, and the way in which it is geo- and corpo-politically situated, highlighting a methodological proposal for the production of knowledge: the Narrative Productions. In this, it is vital to recognize that situated research is positioned as a possibility to deconstruct those naturalized spaces, which are intertwined with social opacity, preventing the understanding of the complexities that are unveiled from the contexts in which our discipline develops. The research can be understood as an exercise of deconstruction and against the grain, because from the ruins it is possible to observe the various paths that open up in order to build projects that dialogue with those complexities that the contexts of disciplinary development present; therefore, we place ourselves from a look that opens the possibility of incorporating complexity to the elaborations that emerge.

We recognize here a contribution and a challenge from the discipline of social work. From the construction of situated knowledge, it is possible to approach emerging and contingent social processes, such as institutional and political forms oriented to the provision of care, the production of subjectivities and the public sphere.

Enhancing the intrinsic link between intervention and research, from a critical and feminist point of view, allows for reviewing the historical constructions on the professional and research work of social work and its fields of action, questioning the traditionally assigned role and allowing for drawing new professional and academic perspectives (Muñoz-Arce, 2019; Duarte, 2022). Such perspectives are strengthened by thinking the discipline from the South, from Latin America, by giving centrality and meaning to a resistance that is inscribed in a decolonial key (Hermida and Meschini, 2018). At the same time, we see it as imperative to think ourselves from the corpo-political, picking up feminist provocations, questioning the ways in which knowledge is produced, making reference to the ways in which the multiple oppressions lived, felt, thought and embodied intersect:



Doing this exercise has at least three levels of implications for social work:

First, how we conceive research: reflecting on what is raised here requires developing an epistemic movement in the classical conception in which social work has been related to research, incorporating conceptions that feminist traditions have extensively deepened, such as the notions of partial and situated knowledge, and the integration of geo- and corpo-politics to find the places of enunciation.

Second, how we design the research: this epistemic dislocation and re-centering with feminist assumptions also requires materializations in the design of strategies that transcend textualization, both in the interviews and in the final products, incorporating other ways of immersing ourselves in the experiences of those who participate, exploring poetry, music, art, performance, among others, with the intention of enriching the opportunities for research exchange and expanding the traditional logics for the reconstruction of experiences.

Third, how we teach research: the two previous implications have as a point of arrival (and possibly departure) the repercussions in the formative processes of social work. Epistemic and methodological decentering requires moving these discussions to the classroom and to the Schools of social work, to stop thinking about approaches to the field with the traditional qualitative/quantitative divisions, and rather think about how we can respond to the contingent and contextual needs that are graphed in “the social”. This requires not only developing critical epistemologies and methodologies in training, but also thinking about the continuity between the two. In short, to leave behind the atomized conceptions of what research implies.

Finally, we would like to point out that this does not mean that, by writing these lines, we are proposing that all social work should develop research based on these conceptions. This premise would again have a hegemonic pretension and what we seek to dislocate would be strengthened. On the contrary, with this article we seek to expand the margins to think about the production of knowledge from social work, developing recursive and self-reflective practices on our work as women who move in an academic circuit and who adhere to the positions that we developed before.



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