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## Borders and overflows of the criticism of objectivity in the training of Social Work professionals

### Bordes y desbordes de la crítica a la objetividad en la formación de profesionales del Trabajo Social

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#### Abstract

In this article we will try to put back on the table the epistemological and empirical need of objectivity for any discourse with pretensions of producing knowledge, in social sciences in general and in Social Work in particular. To do so, we will try to identify the edges and overflows of some critical theories that are frequently raised in the faculties of social sciences and, on the other hand, based on the work of Saul Karsz, we will point out the false equivalence between objectivity and neutrality and between objective and indisputable. In reality, what is claimed to be indisputable is any dogma or affirmation -ideological, political, scientific or militant- that is pronounced as the "word of God". Objectivity, on the contrary, is a process of argumentative production, by definition debatable, basically rectifiable and generally collective (or, at least, involving more than one professional). We will try to make explicit how "neutrality is impossible but objectivity is indispensable" (Karsz, 2017).

**Keywords:**

Objectivity;  
critical theories;  
Otherness.

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## Resumen

En este artículo trataremos de volver a poner sobre la mesa la necesidad epistemológica y empírica de la objetividad para cualquier discurso con pretensiones de producir conocimiento, en ciencias sociales en general y en Trabajo Social en particular. Para ello, trataremos de identificar los bordes y desbordes de algunas teorías críticas que se enarbolan con frecuencia en las facultades de ciencias sociales y, por otro lado, basándonos en la obra de Saúl Karsz, señalaremos la falsa equivalencia entre *objetividad* y *neutralidad* y entre *objetivo* e *indiscutible*. En realidad, lo que se pretende indiscutible es cualquier dogma o afirmación -ideológica, política, científica o militante- que se pronuncie como “palabra de Dios”. La objetividad –por el contrario- es un proceso de producción argumentativo, por definición debatible, básicamente rectificable y generalmente colectivo (o, al menos, que implica a más de un profesional). Trataremos de explicitar cómo “*la neutralidad es imposible pero la objetividad es indispensable*” (Karsz, 2017).

**Palabras Clave:**  
objetividad;  
teorías críticas;  
Otriedad

*“Non ridere, non lugere, neque detestari, sed intelligere”*  
Spinoza

## Critical theories

Until the 1960s, in the training of social workers, the identification of the student body with the typical discourses of bourgeois humanism was promoted. The great majority of students came from the upper and middle bourgeoisie, which implied that they arrived at the faculty with an important religious formation that was reconverted, during the course, into philanthropy, i.e., into “love of Man and of the social worker”, in “love of Man and Humanity”, and that could derive as much in the ladies-of-the-bene-ficence-mano-right-wing-philanthropists-and-doctors-hygienists model as in the militant-in-favor-of-social-causes-feminist-pacifist-suffragist model. Thus it was that the Social Work career historically swung between producing sensibilities (subjectivities) that tended to monitor and control the lives of the poor and sensibilities that took sides with them, confronting, in some way, the established powers. Even these two options were not always mutually exclusive.



During the 1960s, the discourse of “social workers as agents of change” spread under the supervision of the technicians of the United Nations and the Alliance for Progress. During the seventies, the reconceptualization and its manifest commitment to the working classes was raised. Today, we challenge students, to a large extent, with so-called critical theories.

Although most of them arrive in the first year with a strong empathy with the most vulnerable sectors of society and a marked tendency to criticize the hegemonic powers, the work to be done every day in the classrooms in relation to forming the social sensitivity of future professionals is no less important. We refer to the effort aimed at breaking with the mandates that saturate common sense in the West and that drag wills towards exacerbated consumerism, the veneration of luxury, the obscenity of wastefulness and the whole series of typically neoliberal values and affections that translate into individualism, meritocracy, aporophobia and a certain political apathy, to which must be added the ever-present patriarchal, racist, heteronormative, transphobic, fat-phobic, segregationist practices, etc.

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In this way, we encourage in the student body “disobedient” and “insubmissive” positions in the face of patriarchal and neocolonial mandates, while promoting commitment to social and identity struggles.

From this advanced position, it is common to try to go one step further: to apply these critical developments to concrete social intervention. However, the ground here begins to become slippery under our feet. The problem that immediately arises is that this task is often approached without precise definitions and with an omni-explanatory spirit, which facilitates frequent overflows that make it difficult, if not impossible, to produce objectivity.

Precising the place that critical theories should have - both in the training of professionals and in concrete intervention practice, oriented towards the production of knowledge and objectivity - requires three prior moves.

- First, to define Social Work and social intervention, which will imply delimiting the place that the problematic of the subject occupies in both definitions, either as an intervening subject (and its concern for professional identity), or as a subject of assistance.
- Second, to mark the borders -and to point out the frequent overflows- of any theory in general and of critical theories in particular.
- Third, to differentiate objectivity from neutrality, given that the confusion of these two terms is largely responsible for the abandonment of the pretensions of objectivity in the social sciences.

## Definition of Social Work

It is very common to read that Social Work deals with “social problems”. Herman C. Kruse, for example, places Social Work as:

*a branch of the Social Sciences that seeks to know the causes and process of social problems and their incidence on individuals, groups and communities, in order to promote them to an action of correction of those effects, eradication of their causes and rehabilitation of the affected beings, having as a final goal the widest social welfare in a framework of authentic and sustained national development (Kruse, 1975, p. 9).*

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Vives de Heredia states:

*Social Service is the set of appropriate scientific techniques, tending to prevent, attenuate and suppress social problems, promoting the harmonious physical, spiritual and socioeconomic development, for the achievement of welfare and the best relations that may occur in a society at a certain time, through interdisciplinary professional activity and the free, active and responsible participation of those concerned, on the basis of Social Justice (Vives Heredia, 1967, p. 167).*

Natalio Kisnerman (1990) defines it as a discipline that is in charge of “knowing the causes-effects of social problems and of achieving that men assume an organized action, both preventive and transforming, that overcomes them” (Kisnerman, 1990, p. 1).



Carballeda, in a recent text -where he argues about the convenience of crossing Social Work and decolonial studies- expresses himself in the following way: “It is possible to enter the study of social problems from different aspects and categories of analysis (...)” (2017, p. 72); a few lines later he refers to decolonial theories:

“This perspective, perhaps, allows to expand the possibilities of conceptualization and the construction of new ways of understanding and explaining social problems” (2017, p. 72); further on, he points out “the importance of an American thinking, in this case of social problems (...)”, then -and this time already with capital letters- he suggests: “To study and analyze Social Problems from a situated perspective that tries to move away from pedagogical colonization (...)” because “(...) in America social problems are inscribed in a different way (...)” (2017, p. 73)<sup>2</sup>. Examples abound in the specific bibliography of the field; what does not abound, however, are definitions, particularly of “social problems”. Instead, one rushes forward to debate whether we should approach them from classical sociologies, from critical sociologies, from new decolonial theories, or from southern epistemologies. In this way we tend to embark on long theoretical journeys, without realizing that, not having defined the terms from the outset, we end up in the midst of exotic and foggy territories, generally suggestive, but far removed from concrete social intervention.

Let us attempt a summary deconstruction of the notion of “social problems”. In principle, it implies that there are, on the one hand, society and, on the other hand, phenomena that disturb it. These phenomena would be poverty, addictions, sexual abuse, homelessness, unemployment, immigration, prostitution, teenage pregnancy, delinquency, violence against people with non-binary sexuality, etc. However, the same phenomena do not qualify as “social problems” if the social class where they occur changes, rather they are usually taken as “private problems”, they may not even qualify as “problems”. For example, teenage pregnancy does not fall under the jurisdiction of social workers if it occurs in middle or upper class homes, nor does uncontrolled substance abuse if it takes place on fashionable beaches or at electronic parties, much less sexual abuse or gender violence if it takes place in private neighborhoods. The immigrant who has a professional degree, the prostitute who charges in dollars and much less the criminal who evades taxes, leaks foreign currency or bankrupts banks or companies, never crosses paths with social workers. The same practices cease to be “social” depending on the person,

<sup>2</sup> Social problems also occupy the center of the definitions of Social Work in the Gran Enciclopedia Larousse (1970); in the Documento de Tandil - Informe final del Segundo Encuentro de Escuelas de Servicio Social de las Universidades Nacionales - realizado en Tandil (Provincia de Buenos Aires) - Argentina del 27 al 30 de Julio de 1978; also in the document of the Escuela de Servicio Social - Universidad Nacional de Entre Ríos - Paraná, Argentina - (1985), and several other texts and authors as stated in Alayón (1987).



group or social class that practices them, and may even cease to be problematic, to become gracefully transformed into class characteristics. On the other hand, it would be naïve to forget that many of the phenomena called “social problems” - which would apply to the popular classes - are often also solutions for the users, just as symptoms are shelters for patients, that is, they do not always or automatically represent failures, vices or abysses, but also serve as attempts at solutions. In reality, the signifiers “society” and “social problems” are empty signifiers of which no definition is given - nor could be given. They are metaphors and synecdoches that are not at all appropriate for professional and disciplinary work. When an author analyzes the relationship between “society” and “social problems”, he or she speaks from a “we” that perceives itself as “society”, an ideal entity without drugs or crime or violence or neurosis or psychosis or abuse or prostitution or sexuality or conflicts or deficiencies or “dysfunctions” or “perversions” or problems in each and every one of the families that really exist. From these heights he or she points out and studies the anomalies that “we must face as a society”, even with the best of intentions, as Simmel does when he thinks of “the relationship of the collectivity with its poor” (2014, p. 77)<sup>3</sup>.

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When these phenomena are verified in the popular classes, they awaken strong alarm in the right-wing sectors, which usually react by demonizing, monitoring or controlling -even locking up- while appealing in their discourse to “lack of values”, “idiosyncrasy”, “genetics”, even invoking the famous diagnosis “they are poor because they want to be”. Reformisms and leftists, for their part, strive for the inclusion of that “Other” within “society”, if not, plainly and simply, they perceive and present it as covered by a mantle of glory.

The discourses on “society” are exclusively enunciated by the bourgeois classes and are articulated around the fiction that these classes have elaborated of themselves. These fictions are imposed as models of life so luminous and evident as to be impossible to find realized anywhere... not even in the social class that raises them. However, everything that distances itself from these models, that is, from how one “should” live, raise children, have sex, have fun, get sick, suffer, endure or not endure anymore, be born or die, immediately falls into “otherness”, an entity that - whether perceived as infected or as nimbed - either way is produced by a classist disposition, even if we immediately join the two terms in the same sentence with a possessive article, in the style of “French society and its poor”, as Serge Paugman (2014) does.

<sup>3</sup> We have made a more detailed analysis of Simmel's position in the text “Social Theoretical Analysis and the Real of Intervention Practices” (Lobos, 2022).



We cannot fail to mention that discourses that include formulations in the style “society has to take care of its poor” have their effectiveness - by no means negligible - in spheres such as parliamentary debates in bourgeois democracies, or the hegemonic media (entirely bourgeois), or common sense (hegemonized by bourgeois ideologies). They even have their place in the foundations of decisions taken by national and international bodies, which must be expressed in terms digestible by (bourgeois) common sense. What we are pointing out is that beyond its legitimate use in other spheres, this rhetoric is neither pertinent nor effective for social intervention.

In the case of Social Work, these empty signifiers serve - like squid ink - to escape from the necessary task of defining and to be able to move on quickly to less arduous and more bubbly topics.

The same synecdoche is carried out when we move from the verifiable fact that social workers intervene in some situations where certain users of social policies are in situations of poverty, to sustaining that “Social Work deals with poverty” in a universal and complete manner. In this way, one can read pages and pages based on the assumption that Social Work has the expertise to reduce poverty, the responsibility to disarticulate it and even the mission to fight its cause, in our times, neoliberalism.

Defining Social Work is an arduous and complex process that requires gray and meticulous work. To achieve it, it is necessary to renounce the use of protean signifiers, in exchange for identifying what Social Work can really do. Defining helps to increase the potency of what is defined, while at the same time sparing it from the painful experience of being required to do what it could not possibly do and of bearing the guilt of not having been able to achieve what was never in its hands.

On the other hand, we will not be able to define Social Work if we do not include in the definition the State, social policies, certain institutions and the system of public-state protections. Nor can we do without pointing out in the definition the close link that Social Work has with capitalism, highlighting, at the same time, its structural incapacity to combat, transform - or even damage - this mode of production.

## **A possible definition**

The French-Argentine philosopher and sociologist Saúl Karsz has devoted the first chapter of the book *Problematizar el Trabajo Social: Definition, Figures, Clinic* (2007) to define Social Work. We will not try to summarize those 72 pages here, rather we refer the reader to that text. However, we will offer arguments and formulations that go in the same direction.

The object of research and intervention of Social Work is the material and ideological conditions of certain relations of social reproduction that are plausible to connect with the social policies in force in each country. Social Work does not deal with “social problems”, but with situations that include some people in poverty, some people in a situation of uncontrolled consumption of substances, some unemployed people, immigrants, those who suffer harassment or violence, in street situations, some neighborhoods, communities and settlements, as long as they apply to the conditioning factors of social policies.

Social Work tries to influence some conditions of social reproduction of certain users (individual or collective) of social policies that suffer certain effects of capitalism, neoliberalism, racism and patriarchal and neocolonial practices, involving the mobilization of agents and material and ideological resources offered by social policies and the tools provided by the theories, discourses and concepts of Social Work. Professional intervention, always both theoretical and situational, seeks to produce - from an ideological standpoint - argued, tendentiously objective knowledge about concrete situations which, together with some material resources (always insufficient), seeks to produce some distance from the real, thus promoting a certain distension, opening or oxygenation of the real of some intervention situations, especially in the register of the ideological conditions of social reproduction, contributing to alleviate some effects of capitalism without attacking its structure or questioning its existence. The possibility that Social Work has of producing a distance within the reality of certain situations of social reproduction can eventually lead to the transformation of the reality of the situation. Social intervention is, then, a mobilization of resources -especially ideological ones- carried out by a main intervener (professional, service, institution, NGO) and where the users (individual or collective) facilitate such intervention or resist or oppose it, to the point of deviating it, at least in part, from its initial objectives, which -on the other hand- is constitutive of the structure of such practices.

### **Concern for “the self”, identity and the subject versus the need for objectivity**

One of the concerns that hovers over the professional collective and that often displaces the question of knowledge production in the field of social intervention is: are social workers obedient to patriarchal, neoliberal and neocolonial mandates or, on the contrary, disobedient and revolutionary?

Faced with this question we have to say that what is at stake is not the “being” of social workers or their identity, but social intervention. As professionals, what is im-





portant are the competencies in the production of records, diagnoses and reports. It is not we, social workers or social scientists, who must be objective, innovative or revolutionary, but our analyses, diagnoses, interviews and interventions that can be so. Let us remember that we speak of objectivity, never of neutrality! And it is precisely in the objectivity/non-neutrality dialectic that the transformative possibility of intervention lies. This thesis is developed in chapter 8 of *Objectivité indispensable, neutralité impossible*, of the book *Affaires sociales, questions intimes* (Karsz, 2017).

The shift from focusing on professionals as subjects to focusing on the reports and diagnoses they produce arises from a view that focuses on practices and not on practitioners. That is to say, we pay attention above all to the doing and its effects, and not to the persons and their purposes. This gaze characterizes the Transdisciplinary Clinic, but also the perspectives of Bourdieu, Castel, Passeron, Canguilhem, Foucault, Lacanian psychoanalysis and all the currents of thought that have been defined as “philosophies of the concept” by Foucault confronted with the “philosophies of the subject” represented by humanisms, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, etc (2012, p. 252). For the “philosophies of the concept” the subjects are a sine qua non condition of the practices, but they are neither unique nor sufficient: what is determinant are the logics that structure the practices. These logics are not subjective. Although subjectivity is a variable to be considered, it does not play a central role. To put it another way: there is no intervention without an intervener, but the latter is not the protagonist of the intervention. What is decisive is not what each individual projects on the situation: what is important is to objectify the logics of the practices, to read them and to dimension them, making an effort to limit as much as possible the phantasmatic of the intervening professional. In other words, it is a matter of locating the practice as a real phenomenon. With Marx and Lacan we understand by real that which exists and functions here and beyond our desires, fears and theories: real is that which resists and never goes too well with the subject. As subjectivities we see what the books we have read and those we have not, the concepts we have and those we lack, the training we have had and those we have avoided, allow us to see. The real does not appear immediately to subjectivity. As Lacan says “The real (...) in the analytic experience, for the subject, is always the clash with something, for example: the silence of the analyst” (2009, p. 37). The real is that with which we always collide. “The real is the impossible” says Lacan; “I do not hesitate to speak of the real (...) Later, over the years, a little formulation emerges, that the impossible is the real” (Lacan, 2008, p. 178)<sup>4</sup>. This implies that the real acts as a limit for any pretension of

<sup>4</sup> Lacan sometimes writes Real (with a capital letter), not always, as in this case. Although the text was established by J-A Miller; it was published during Lacan's lifetime, and probably revised by him. We have preferred to keep the lower case to avoid the metaphysical connotations implied by the use of the capital letter.



complete understanding of the world. But at the same time it must be remarked that it is possible to delineate the real. Althusser says explaining Marx: “the real is independent of its knowledge, but it can only be defined by its knowledge” (Althusser, 2011, p. 205). “The real does not speak, it must be made to speak” (Bourdieu, 1998). However, we can approach it, delineate it, try to have an impact on it if we are able to hold on to the concepts and leave aside prejudices, fears and longings, if we could - as Spinoza recommends - “Non ridere, non lugere, neque detestari, sed intelligere” (2018).

### **Borders and overflows of critique**

Critical theories can illuminate one or another aspect of the real. However, when we pretend that this or that theory explains everything, hyperboles are produced that lead us to think “everything is political”, “everything is psychic”, “everything is colonial oppression” or “everything is patriarchal oppression”. This type of formulation implies at least two things: first, that we would have the key to explain any possible situation, and second, that we would be able to solve, completely and fully, the problems that the situation entails.

If “everything is political” we do not need to listen too much to quickly offer a diagnosis. If “everything is patriarchal oppression”, some feminisms claim to account for all conflict and discomfort and even point the way to liberation. These overflows make the production of objectivity and, therefore, of scientificity improbable. In this way, and in spite of ourselves, we contribute to discredit our professions (Karsz, 2021).

The same criticism that was once directed against “Science” must now be directed against the totalizing use of critical theories. It must be said again, Science (singular and superpowerful), mirror of nature, which would have the monopoly of knowledge and which was dreamed of as the savior of humanity, does not exist and never existed. The sciences, the really existing ones, will neither save the world nor destroy it, neither will Modernity nor technology. The same argument is valid for patriarchal and colonial practices, conceived - from some theories - as the source of all evil. In fact, no theory can explain everything or be the sole cause of a domination or, on the contrary, of a revolution. Such are the edges that must not be lost sight of. Such is also, and consequently, the path that opens up: to resign oneself to incompleteness, to renounce the metaphysical pretension, highly narcissistic, of a subjective point of view that claims to account for the real without shadows or unknowns in order, on the contrary, to persist in an endless research, with progressive improvements, trying to avoid the plague of dogmatism from which no one is definitively exempt.

## The dialectic between objectivity and non-neutrality

The tendential but effective objectivity is the space that opens up when we stop thinking in terms of “all or nothing” and start working in the arid terrain -but not at all infertile- of partial, debatable, conjunctural and rectifiable knowledge. Knowledge that can have effects of certain transformation and, why not, of certain emancipation.

For that we will dwell on the dialectic objectivity - non-neutrality that has been analyzed by Saul Karsz in the book “Affaires sociales, questions intimes” (Karsz, 2017). Objectivity is a process of argumentative construction, by definition debatable, generally collective and basically rectifiable. This construction is realized thanks to, in spite of and against the inevitable taking of sides. In our case, we generally take sides with the vulnerable, segregated or discriminated sectors of society. This position is usually grounded in the critical theories we frequent and in the social sensibility that constitutes us, that is, what we love and hate, both personally and ideologically. In relation to this partiality we produce knowledge about concrete situations, that is, we try to make explicit -with, thanks to and against theories in general and critical theories in particular- the logics that make a situation work (Karsz, 2007).

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In intervention practices we do not intervene as subjects and neither on subjects. We intervene as agents and we do so in situations, within situations constituted by the materiality of practices whose main characteristic is that they are transindividual. As we have already said, the fundamental aspects of the intervention are the reports, interviews and diagnoses, the effects they may induce and the commitments they may promote. We must emphasize that it is not a question of unveiling the keys to the “subject of the assistance” or what the subjectivities of the interveners hide - or treasure - but the situation as real.

## Otherness, the “subject of assistance” and situations of intervention

Let us dwell for a moment on the categories “Other” and “Otherness” that are often used to think about the “subject of assistance”. These concepts, frequently used by humanisms - where social intervention is usually considered as an “encounter with the other” - have nowadays slightly changed and point out - in order to denounce it - the question of the absolute difference that certain persons, groups or peoples would have with respect to the hegemonic models. If the place of “the Same” is occupied by white, heterosexual, bourgeois males, or white, bourgeois, thin women from the northern hemisphere, then the place of “the Other” is reserved for native peoples, people with mental suffering, in



poverty, undocumented immigrants, people with non-Caucasian skin color, with non-hegemonic bodies or with non-binary sexual choices, understood as the disvaluable or pure negativity. The logic of “the Same and the Other” is the logic of all segregation practices.

If we have sufficiently studied gender studies, critical studies of heteronormativity, cisnormativity, transphobia, validism, ageism, fatphobia or decolonial studies, we can be aware of all these forms of violence and we will be able to identify them in the practices. Once we have reached this point - and if we take for granted that our audiences are “the Other” - three paths open up: the first is to invert the negative valuation of “otherness” and turn it into a positive difference in the style of the “Pride of Otherness March”. The second is to constitute it in a specific field of study such as “Anthropology of street children”, or “Sociology of poverty: subjectivity, habits and forms of enjoyment of the poor”. The third is to focus on the affront to Human Rights implied by the category of Otherness as pure negativity.

The inversion of the value of otherness into a positivity that produces pride is a fundamental weapon for identity struggles, but it does not seem to us to be so for the career of Social Work. Although it is often politically relevant to hold a march for trans pride, Mapuche pride, “colifato” pride or “villero” pride, and it is certainly valuable to support these demonstrations as militants or to incorporate them as part of an intervention strategy, it must be emphasized that they do not challenge the specificity of the profession. In fact, it is a problem for the Social Work perspective to take for granted that there is any sector, group or social fact that may be unassimilable or constitute an absolute difference. Insanity, poverty, addictions, street situations, violence, involve suffering, heavy and difficult situations, sometimes impossible to deal with, but they are not the Other of normality (among other reasons because normality does not exist).

Studies on poverty, or on street children, or on street violence may be suggestive research topics for urban anthropologists and possibly interesting for social intervention, but they do not point to the core of Social Work. The specificity of Social Work is not a certain anthropology or psychology of the oppressed. What we can do is to influence in some way the material conditions, but above all the ideological conditions of social reproduction of the users of social policies. Finally, the subject of rights is one of the ways of access to Social Work, but we cannot forget that rights in Western societies are predominantly bourgeois. The struggle for rights is the struggle for the bourgeois inscription of certain individuals and non-bourgeois groups, a struggle that is undoubtedly long term, very necessary to carry on and impossible to win.



## A case

Let us suppose the case of a “violent child” in a school. We do not intervene with this child but in a situation that includes him/her together with a teacher who may or may not be a good teacher, a correct, dismissive or persecutory principal, more or less cruel or frightening classmates, a structured, partial or completely unstructured family, a positive, passable or terrible referent (father, uncle, neighbor, kiosk owner), a probable group of friends from the neighborhood, a social worker, institutions (school, health center, municipality, etc.) and specific social policies. We try to produce knowledge about this complex situation and thus intervene to induce -or give rise to- effects of change or transformation.

The professional will present him/herself in such a situation with his/her certainties under his/her arm: first of all and surely on the value of social inclusion (“we must prevent this student from being kicked out of school”), then on the need to respect the Convention on the Rights of the Child and social policies for children, without forgetting, of course, the certainties provided by his/her readings on adult-centeredness and critical pedagogy. What is being said in the parents’ chat room about the rights of the other children in the school may also be very present in the situation, as well as the pressure from the authorities who want a quick solution, without forgetting the pressure from the teachers’ union that tries to protect the teacher from situations that exceed her duties. In addition, there will surely be present what is heard in the corridors about preserving the good name of the school and that “this kind of child” should be in a specialized institution where they are given “the medical attention they need.”

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Most probably, from the progressive bias of the professional, the supposedly violent child will take sides, thinking of them as a previously violent child to protect them from the punitivist onslaught. However, one cannot fail to hear the bias that supports the obligation to preserve other children from such situations and even the bias that warns of the need to protect female students from the practices of patriarchal domination embodied by these “children without limits who do not respect authority...” despite *the Ritalin*. Each of the above hypotheses could be deployed by appealing to critical theories. It is indeed possible to develop the reasons that serve the so-called best interests of the child, and/or the interests of the victims, and/or of the girls, and/or of the teachers, and/or of the dissidents, and/or of the school as an institution. But this debate risks remaining exclusively in the realm of meaning. That is to say, in the discussion about which right should prevail, who is more vulnerable than whom, and whose best interest is whose.



Social intervention requires, first of all, a work of deconstruction. What meaning do the notions “violent child”, “situations of violence”, “bullying”, “ADHD”, “child without limits”, “setting limits”, “lawlessness”, “vulnerability”, etc. have, in this concrete situation, for these concrete interveners? Each of these terms encompasses a wide range of possible interpretations and it is necessary to identify which of them is playing its game in each case. At the same time, it is necessary to review what is being projected by authorities, teachers and professionals. It will be necessary to listen to the child, the family, the classmates, the referents. All this will help to read which logics are fighting their armed battle here. Without forgetting that logics are the logics of practices, not of people (Althusser, 2015). We will have to see which ideologies knotted to unconscious logics structure the situation and rigidify it (Karsz, 2007).

The bourgeois ideologies are undoubtedly the most frequent; we refer to the universalist discourses on Childhood, Women, Adolescence, the Human Being, the Evolutionary Maturation Process (all with capital letters, of course). Faced with these discourses, we must ask ourselves some inevitable questions: Are these so-called universals equally valid for the popular classes? at what price? In addition, ideologies will probably never be far away, playing their game, neoliberal, hygienist, macho, pachamamamist, ecologist, racist, socialist, fascist, communitarian, feminist, psychologist, victimizing, medical hegemonic, etc.

The challenge is to try to identify the logics at work in the situation with, thanks to and against our feminist, decolonial, anti-psychiatric or psychoanalytic theories; with, thanks to and against our most deeply rooted ideological convictions; with, thanks to and against our institutional or political inscriptions. In this way we will try to reformulate the situation: it is not always the character who appeared at the beginning as a victim who retains, at the end of the analysis, that place; often the problems - after looking at them for a while - reveal themselves to be solutions or shelters and always the private issues reveal themselves to be “social issues” and the social issues, inevitably private issues. Finally, it will be necessary to see what alliances can be woven between the institution, the referents of the neighborhood, the family, the teacher, the classmates and the social policies. Movements and readings that make possible some form of unblocking the situation, without ever forgetting that social intervention does not resolve situations: it seeks viable negotiations. Theories -classical or critical- help us to approach the real, illuminate one or another aspect of the (ideological) struggle that develops there, show us threads that we can take or leave according to the concrete of the situation. In this way we can approach a certain objectivity.



## Conclusions

The necessary commitment, as Social Work professors, to progressive ideologies, together with the consequent taking sides with the oppressed, usually has the collateral effect, generally unnoticed, of overshadowing -or completely displacing-, both in the academy and in professional practice, the concern for objectivity, thus losing an important ally.

Far from favoring scientific positivism or the old slogans of “keeping the right distance” or “not getting affectively involved in the intervention”, the pretensions of objectivity in Social Work (understood in dialectics with non-neutrality) offer us the possibility of producing knowledge that tends to be scientific, distancing us from slogans and bringing us closer to the complexity of reality.

We have insisted that in order to achieve a certain objectivity we cannot understand the subjects who come to social intervention as radically “other” (neither negatively nor positively). They are not a different species from the rest of the citizens, they are not only victims nor do they exist exclusively as subjects of rights. They are people with strategies, interests, alliances, tricks, resentments, cowardice and courage just like any businessman, university professor or social intervention professional... Nor can they be defined at all as “subjects of lack” or assume that they have a monopoly on suffering. In this sense, it seems to us necessary to remember that, at least in Social Work, it is more interesting to define the user subjects by what they can do and not by their deficiencies or needs. It is fundamental in social intervention to keep in mind potencies rather than impotencies.

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We have also pointed out that posing the question in terms of “being” - or of the professional identity of social workers - diverts the gaze, leads us to boast, to be ashamed or indignant; *ridere, lugere et detestari*, as Spinoza would say. To boast for being revolutionaries, to be ashamed for being obedient, to be indignant for being “accomplices of the system”. However, what is at stake is not our identity or “what we are”. What is at stake are the interventions, analyses, reports and diagnoses that professionals may produce, as well as the effects they may cause. What is important is that the report to the judge, the hospital director or the school principal be rigorous and objective and, as objective, forceful, convincing and - why not, but thanks to that - transformative. Symmetrically, as we have already said, it is not “the subject of care” that is central to the profession, even less so as “Otherness”, but the logics and linkages that constitute the situation of intervention in which this person, group or community is involved. It is neither fruitful nor pertinent to think of professionals, users, social sectors or situations of intervention as entities; instead, it is more interesting for Social Work to think of them in terms of processes, or as elements or agents that are part of processes of social reproduction.



We thus relocate objectivity to the center of intervention practices on the condition that it is not confused with neutrality, disinterest or impartiality. Objectivity is not equivalent to disinterested knowledge; on the contrary, it is a practice interested in knowledge, in identifying how the real works in fact and what makes it work. The work that summons us is to progressively unveil the real thanks to and in spite of the different partialities of which we are the bearers. In this way we will be able to produce an objectivity that will illuminate the situation in order to promote, at the same time, certain political or ideological directions for which we are betting.

In conclusion, teaching in our classrooms to produce, to work, to think within the dialectic objectivity/non-neutrality is as necessary as is the study of critical theories. If we avoid focusing on the binary oppositions “the Same” versus “the Other”, “modern Science” versus critical positions, “the study of subjectivities” versus political clientelism/not neutrality and, instead, focus on the dialectic objectivity/non-neutrality we will be able to clearly appreciate how practices are articulated by ideological and unconscious logics. Identifying these logics is the task that can lead us to produce a possible objectivity and, within the framework of existing social policies - and even in spite of them - to intervene in such a way that we can weave alliances, combine forces that enhance the user and the situation in its best profile and give rise to “favorable compositions” as Spinoza (1983) would say; in short, perceive the existing alliances in order to enhance them and thus be able to aspire to a certain effectiveness of the intervention and - why not - to a certain social transformation.

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