

Social movements and struggles in Chile: Interpellations from Social Work

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Gloria Cáceres Julio¹

In the 2000s, with the so-called “penguin movement”, Chile began to experience the emergence of important social mobilizations that from different spheres demanded changes, where the action of various social movements (feminist, environmental, student, union, among others) configured a critical process that in 2019 led to the social revolt. This “social explosion”, as it has come to be called, constitutes a milestone of rupture in a certain resignation of society that every so often has been assaulted by the demands of social movements. Millions of people mobilized in the streets and made the public space their own to press for a transformation of the neoliberal system; at the same time, citizens’ councils were formed to think about what kind of country we want to live in. The Agreement for Peace and the New Constitution, of November 15, 2019, appears as a reactive response of the political elite, in terms of containing the conflict, and opens the institutional path to change the Constitution of 1980, which together with consecrating neoliberalism, contains the blood mark of the dictatorship.

193

We receive this text at a time when we seem to find ourselves in a different country in political terms; from the revolt, followed by the citizens’ pronouncement approving the change of the current Constitution (78.31% of the votes according to the Electoral Service of Chile, SERVEL, 2020), and to do it through a Constitutional Convention with 100% of elected members (79.18% according to SERVEL, 2020) we passed to the triumph of the rejection of the proposal for a new Constitution elaborated by a parity Constitutional Convention and with the participation of the native peoples (61.89% of the votes SERVEL, 2022). The analysis of the reasons for this change is still incipient, in order to understand in depth why a process that many of us saw as part of a transforming horizon was truncated.

¹Professor, School of Social Work, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso.
E-mail: gloria.caceres@pucv.cl



The book *Movimientos sociales y luchas en Chile: Interpellations from Social Work*, coordinated by Paula Vidal Molina, views the constituent process with the possible horizon of constitutional change. As its different authors seem to insist, in order to understand the processes in course it is necessary to have a historical look; the explanations of the conjuncture must be sought in and beyond itself. Starting from the premise of historical links between social work and social movements in Latin America, which gained special strength during the Reconceptualization, the task-invitation proposed by the book is to establish “a bridge in the history of the profession, an issue that is very weak in the production of this type in Chile and, therefore, we want to settle, in part, certain theoretical-political weaknesses that exist in the relationship between social work and social movements under Chilean neoliberalism” (Vidal, p. 13), at a time of structural crisis of capitalism, where the basic conflicts of a profoundly unequal society challenge the reflection-action of Social Work.

The book, as a collection of articles, has a kaleidoscopic richness. Both for the diversity of styles and places from where it is spoken (written), including the geographical diversity that, as Vidal states in the introduction, rescues “the voice of the disciplinary-professional collective throughout Chile, materialized by the contributions of colleagues who are inserted in various public universities in the regions of the country” (p. 13); as well as for the different registers of the articles, including the geographical diversity of the articles); as well as for the different registers and levels addressed in it, ranging from the presentation of theoretical perspectives for the study of social movements, as in the article by Paula Vidal and José Cea, *Teorías de los movimientos sociales: distinciones para su estudio desde el Trabajo Social*, to the review of a concrete experience of a formative nature that we appreciate in the article *La educación en derechos humanos como matriz heurística para afrontar dilemas ético-políticos desde el Sur global en tiempos de convulsión social*, by Ximena Soto and Damián Ojeda. Between one and the other of these articles (opening and closing), varied readings are traced that together with the critique of capitalism, address other systems of domination and oppression, also establishing interdisciplinary dialogues.

Their reading provides interesting keys to understanding some elements at the basis of the social revolt of 2019, as Soraya Espinoza and Ramón Vivanco approach in *Analizando potenciales razones para el estallido social*, especially through the articulation, in chronological key, of the previous mobilizations.



On the other hand, it allows us to notice the persistence of actions of resistance and contestation, as we can see in the article by Cory Duarte, *Feminismos en territorios sacrificables: el caso de Atacama y sus implicancias para la propuesta formativa en Trabajo Social*, and in the article by Leticia Arancibia and Pamela Soto, *Movimientos sociales, conflicto y construcción democrática: Resistances and imaginaries from the secondary student movements in the Chilean post-dictatorship*; where, from the feminist action against dispossession and violence, in the case of the former, and in the struggle of the student movement for public education, in the case of the latter, other forms of organization, participation and relations that subvert the political-economic logic of neoliberalism are proposed. Here, the power of social movements is recovered as living social agencies (Guattari, 1989, in Arancibia and Soto, 2022, p.123), recognizing their political potential and the place of conflict as a topos of the political and as an essential element in Social Work for the reading of social reality (Arancibia and Soto, 2022). In this same line, from the decolonial feminist reading developed by Duarte, we notice the thanatopolitical form (Esposito, 2006) of the Chilean post-dictatorship; where the violence of the patriarchal-colonial-capitalist patriarchy is exercised on women's bodies and on the sacrificial zones, converted into sacrificial bodies-territories.

From a decolonial perspective, Pablo Suárez questions the concept of dignity, proposing in his article *Dignidades humanas: el "Willi mapu" de los "trabajos sociales otros" en tiempos de "revuelta"*, a plural with an open and polyphonic aspiration, as a relevant aspect to decolonize Social Work.

Héctor Vargas and Carmen Gloria Jarpa, appealing to the politicization of Social Work in their article *Social work and public policies: between the reproduction and the rupture of capitalist logic. Reflections from Dusselian readings*, propose, from Enrique Dussel's theorizations, categories to read the production of public policies in the relationship citizenship-State-Social Work; they raise the importance of potestas, the people as instituting power, recognizing the relevance of the effective participation of citizenship, through social movements, in the formulation of public policies.

From another place of political action, Luis Vivero and Dina Guarda explore the political action of social workers who are part of collective spaces in *Perspectives and places of social work: struggles and social movements in Chile*; they distinguish the tensions and challenges faced by professionals who develop their practice within the framework of neoliberal policies, and at the same time engage in collective actions together with other actors for their transformation.

This kaleidoscopic form has its crossing point in the inscription of its authors in critical Social Work. In this sense, the historical-critical reading in a Marxian key is also relevant and serves as the foundation of this book. This constitutes, together with its more explicit content, one of its substantive contributions for Social Work in Chile, if we consider that after the 1973 coup, Marxist theory was not only relegated, but also excluded from training; an issue that more than thirty years after the end of the civil-military dictatorship remains, with nuances, as one of its burdens, and that the fall of the “real socialisms” came to cement, in Western societies, as a “stale” and “defeated” theoretical perspective. However, the contributions of Marx himself and, in the case of the text we are commenting on, of Gramscian categories, seem to be pertinent theoretical-political keys to understand our present time, especially if the idea is to transform it.

I understand this book as a praxis, in the sense that Gutiérrez (2022), following Marx, proposes for historiographic practice:

as a constant search between concrete experience and theoretical reflection. Marx referenced it well when he thought of praxis, that is, where theory and practice are one and the same moment in the process of research/creation, and not two separate moments, where one determines the other. (p.96)

196

A praxis that we can situate as counter-hegemonic.

If we understand Social Work “as a historical product and, as such, that acquires meaning and intelligibility in the history of the society of which it is part and expression” (Iamamoto, 2003 p.221), the book coordinated by Paula Vidal, as a whole and as diverse articles, proposes suggestive readings to read ourselves in this time and an approach to understand the present that we are living, questioning us, as Young (2000) would say, from the demands of justice that social movements, their actions and struggles carry. Chile is a country marked by different inequalities and oppressions, where more and more, what is at stake, what is at risk, is life itself; but, social movements carry the denial and the possibility of an emancipatory societal project that puts the life of all and everyone at the center; since, as Vidal and Cea state, they have promoted a “prefigurative or anticipatory politics” that “refers to the creation of forms of social relations and production outside capitalism, in the here and now, making the future society effective in the present, without stopping to wait for a better future” (p. 36). 36). I invite you to read it, discuss it and put it into circulation in training spaces and in professional and research collectives.



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197

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