

POWER AND AFFECTION IN PUBLIC SOCIAL ASSISTANCE POLICIES: CONTRIBUTIONS OF PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT. The daily practice of social workers is marked by exposure to affections that directly interfere with their activities. This theoretical study aims to discuss these professional practices using an interdisciplinary approach. To this end, this study is divided into three sections. First, an explanation will be provided regarding the power relations present in the daily lives of these professionals. Then, the consequences of these relationships will be analyzed based on the concepts of affection, transference, and resonance, and presented from a social perspective. Finally, the daily practice of social workers will be addressed, considering its potentialities and limitations. As a result, conceptual elements of Social Psychology will be presented in their interface with Philosophy and Psychoanalysis to understand the affective implications of these professionals' work. In the end, the importance of building inventive and collective ways of work in Social Assistance will be emphasized, as well as the relevance of the care of the self as a condition for caring for others.

Keywords: Power relations; affections; professional practice.

PODER E AFETO NA POLÍTICA PÚBLICA DE ASSISTÊNCIA SOCIAL: CONTRIBUIÇÕES DA PSICOLOGIA

RESUMO. O cotidiano do trabalho de assistentes sociais é marcado pela exposição a afetos que interferem diretamente nas atividades realizadas. Este estudo teórico tem como objetivo discutir essas práticas profissionais usando uma abordagem interdisciplinar. Para tanto, o estudo foi dividido em três momentos. Primeiro, será realizada uma explanação sobre as relações de poder presentes no cotidiano desse profissional. Em seguida, os desdobramentos dessas relações serão analisados a partir dos conceitos de afeto, transferência e ressonância e apresentados em uma perspectiva social. Por fim, a prática cotidiana será abordada considerando suas potencialidades e limites. Como resultado, elementos conceituais da Psicologia Social serão apresentados em sua interface com a Filosofia e a Psicanálise para compreender as implicações afetivas da atuação desse profissional. Ao final, será possível ressaltar a importância da construção de modos inventivos e coletivos de trabalho na Assistência Social bem como a relevância do cuidado sobre si como condição para cuidar do outro.

Palavras-chave: Relações de poder; afetos; prática profissional.

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PODER Y AFECTO EN LA POLÍTICA PÚBLICA ASISTENCIAL: APORTES DE LA PSICOLOGÍA

RESUMEN. El trabajo diario de trabajadores sociales es marcado por la exposición a afectos que interfieren directamente en las actividades realizadas. El objetivo de este estudio teórico es analizar estas prácticas profesionales utilizando un enfoque psicosocial. Para ello, el estudio se dividió en tres momentos. En primer lugar, se dará una explicación sobre las relaciones de poder presentes en la vida cotidiana de este profesional. A continuación, se analizará el desarrollo de estas relaciones desde los conceptos de afecto, transferencia y resonancia, que se presentarán desde una perspectiva social. Por último, se abordará la práctica diaria teniendo en cuenta sus potencialidades y límites. Como resultado, elementos conceptuales de Psicología Social se presentarán en su interfaz con Filosofía y Psicoanálisis para entender las implicaciones afectivas del desempeño de este profesional. Al final de la trayectoria, será posible destacar la importancia de construir formas inventivas y colectivas de trabajo del asistente social, así como la relevancia del cuidado de uno mismo como condición para cuidar del otro.

Palabras clave: Relaciones de poder; afectos; práctica profesional.

Introduction

The articulation between the fields of Psychology and Social Work has enabled the development of significant interventions for emerging problems in social exclusion scenarios permanently generated by capitalism. From different yet complementary theoretical and methodological perspectives, both fields work towards an interdisciplinary intervention that provides a more comprehensive and context-specific service to the target population. However, what effects does this practice produce in the lives and health of the professionals who provide this service? With this in mind, the present theoretical study sought to analyze the practice of social workers based on a conceptual dialogue between Contemporary Philosophy (Foucault, 1996, 2014; Deleuze, 2001; 2009), Social Psychology (Saraiva, 2018; Guattari & Rolnik, 1996), and Psychoanalysis (Freud 1912/1969; Laplanche & Pontalis, 1991).

A preliminary analysis revealed that the daily life of social workers is marked by extreme situations that require planned actions in accordance with current state norms and policies (Romagnoli & Fadul, 2018). At the same time, these professionals confront serious cases in which users are exposed to situations of violence, hunger, illness, death, and other adversities that demand immediate actions but not always possible actions (Cordeiro, 2018). Therefore, we question: What effects do these extreme situations have on social workers? How do they welcome and deal with the affections that emerge in daily life? How can Psychology contribute to understanding the affective dimension present in the daily relationships of these professionals?

This study aims to provide insight into the affective dimension present in the daily lives of social workers. Adopting a qualitative perspective as a research strategy aimed at exploring multiple angles of analysis, we will address these professionals' experience from the perspective of power and affective relations expressed by its multiple agents. Thus, the distinctive feature of this theoretical investigation lies in outlining a conceptual contribution between interdisciplinary research and everyday practices to support the debate in question, based on the approach adopted by Penido (2020, p. 393): "It is necessary to denaturalize the imposition that science requires distancing from the object" and, we add, to bridge the gap between areas of knowledge.

Thus, adopting a theoretical-historical perspective, situated and attentive to the highlighted problematic field, this study is divided into three sections that address the complex affective relationship experienced in the field of Social Assistance. Firstly, the power relations present in the daily life of these professionals will be explained, considering that we also affect and are affected in this context (Foucault, 1996; Guattari & Rolnik, 1996). Subsequently, the consequences of these relationships will be analyzed based on what Freud (1912/1969) named transference, which is characterized, re-signified, and situated as a historical process that actualizes various and diverse power relations (Deleuze, 2001). Finally, the affections that emerge in daily practice will be addressed based on the potentialities and limitations that are manifested in the field of intervention as a space that can be expanded (Costa, 2014; Carvalhaes, 2019).

Thus, this research is justified by carrying out an interdisciplinary dialogue to understand the affective dimensions present in the daily practice of social workers, an occupation largely marked by difficulties and challenges that have effects on both the professional and the private spheres.

Social Work and power relations

The relationship established between social workers and users can be approached from various perspectives. We have chosen the Foucauldian perspective on power relations as it allows us to examine what is said and unsaid about these relationships, their unsuspected effects, and subtle coercions. Throughout his work, Foucault (1996, 2014) repeatedly pointed out that power relations are more productive than repressive, adding that power produces reality or even the elements of a transformed reality more suitable for the current social order. Could this also be true in the relationship between social workers and users?

Let us engage in a reflective exercise on this encounter and the set of socio-economic, but also subjective, implications it comes with. Who are these subjects assisted by social workers? These subjects are inscribed in their historical time, and inserted in the capitalist social organization, which hegemonically produces a subjectivity that is also capitalistic (Rolnik & Guattari, 1996). In this context, values familiar to all of us are disseminated: competitiveness, excellence, and the praise of merit and individual effort. These values take shape in what we commonly refer to as 'having a life project'. However, if the user is before a social worker, it is precisely because this life project has not produced satisfactory results according to the capitalist vision of productivity. Thus, it is understandable that, by contrasting to the dominant values, users may see themselves as those who, in common sense, 'have not succeeded in life', as devalued individuals who materialize the 'social problem' itself.

There is also an element that, when confronted with capitalistic subjectivity, marks these subjects: they need and eventually ask for help from others. In this case, the other is the State, represented by the social worker. With this, the user gains one more label: in the individualistic bourgeois societies of the self-made man, acknowledging the need for others, any other, is frowned upon, it is seen as a sign of weakness. Guattari and Rolnik (1996) consider the growth and diversification of vulnerable populations in all parts of the planet. This is the "irreversible development of a considerable amount of the population that, by definition, escapes guaranteed work processes. This is what these currents of thought have called 'non-guaranteed', 'precarious workers', 'black workers', 'student workers'" (p. 187, author's emphasis). This list includes those who are not even part of the labor market and remain unemployed.

So, how do social workers position themselves in relation to this subjective condition of vulnerability? Eventually, these professionals empathize with socially vulnerable subjects who are exposed to adverse living conditions. These conditions limit or even prevent their access to education, healthcare, food, and housing. This situation can generate a series of risks to their existence (Sassen, 2016), and Social Assistance practices seek to rescue subjects from this adverse condition. Driven by the affection present in the relationship, these professionals may not always realize that the bond established is also a power relation. And, as such, a productive relation. However, what is being produced? Basically, a new history of the individual subject is being produced in this context, a transformed reality in relation to the disoriented individual who arrived there. In this context, the exercise of power can be characterized as follows:

[...] it incites, it induces, it diverts, it facilitates or makes more difficult, it amplifies or limits, it makes it more or less likely; at the limit, it obliges or absolutely prevents; but it is always a way of acting on one or more agent subjects, while they act or are susceptible of acting. An action on actions (Foucault, 2014, p. 133).

So every intervention is based on the fact that the users will be different after this encounter. If social workers intervene by producing change or transformation, we must ask: What changes? For what purpose? Regarding power relations, we can answer: a change in the ways of acting, in the concrete actions performed by that subject. After all, power is an action on the actions of others (Foucault, 2014). This definition demonstrates the impossibility of remaining outside power relations. For Foucault, more than difficult, it is, in fact, impossible. Workers in the social field such as social workers, psychologists, and educators can be understood as agents in the production of the human being required by the current social order. If these professionals intervene with users, acting on their actions, this intervention has a political meaning.

Such a categorical description of power relations, which highlights their effectiveness and their range of action, may lead to the idea that power produces its effects through a repressive and constraining operation. Is this Foucault's conception of power? Regarding this point, the question of power reveals its complexity because, even though the exercise of power always involves some degree of violence, its execution can be required and desired by those on whom it falls. In such a way that Foucault considers:

For if power only had the function of repression, if it acted only through censorship, exclusion, impediment, repression, in the manner of a great super-ego, if it was only exercised in a negative way, it would be very fragile. If it is strong, it is because it produces positive effects at the level of desire – as we are beginning to know (Foucault, 1996, p. 148).

Thus, professionals in the field of Psychology and Social Assistance, who are part of the power relations, may also come across the affective and desiring investment of the users they assist. Whether in a relationship between two subjects or in a broader collective process, desire and power can appear intertwined, resulting in the exercise of power and its modification in the actions of the assisted users. In Foucault's words (1996, p. 77), the masses:

[...] want this power, they want this power to be exercised. This relationship between desire, power, and interest is still little known. It took a long time to understand what exploitation was. And desire was, and still is, a great unknown (p. 77).

Thus, we have a complex field composed of power and desire, in which a modality of power, when invested with desire, can gain the conditions to spread through the social fabric and precipitate different institutional transformations (Carvalho, 2018). This is what can be

inferred from Deleuze's observation in a dialogue with Foucault (Foucault, 1996, p. 76) about the compositions that are established between desire and power. "There are investments of desire that shape power and diffuse it". It is precisely the point we intend to reach: a form of power diffused in society because of the affective and desiring investment it involves. Based on this, we seek, in the psychoanalytic concept of transference, the resources to understand and characterize this type of power relation, as will be described in the next section.

Transference and affections in Social Work

The daily work of professionals who interact directly with other human beings is marked by encounters and affections expressed in various ways. Negri and Hardt refer to this type of labor as "affective immaterial" (Negri & Hardt, 2001, p. 313). In their words, affective immaterial labor involves "human contact and interaction" (p. 313). These activities provide

[...] a feeling of comfort, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, or passion. Some categories, such as personal services or proximity services, are often used to identify this type of work, but what really matters is the creation and manipulation of affections (p. 314).

The notion of affection is understood as a continuous variation of the body's potential, which can range from sadness to joy depending on the encounters experienced. In the words of Deleuze (2009, p. 47): "When I am affected by sadness, my power to act diminishes; that is, I am even more separated from this power. When I am affected by joy, it increases; in other words, I am less separated from this power".

However, the affections that emerge in social relationships and, more specifically, in professional relationships, are still little studied in the Humanities and Social Sciences. In addition to the technique required in interventions aimed at individuals, there are subjective and affective dimensions that have been disregarded in the work environment due to the accelerated pace of capitalist production and the focus on results, which tend to make their apprehension and elaboration unfeasible or minimized. Nevertheless, the daily transformations in work increasingly emphasize the importance of personalized relationships between professionals and users, clients, and organizations, treating these relationships as a differentiator.

When studying the psychoanalytic relational context, which can also be characterized as an immaterial labor, Freud had already paid attention to this subjective production when he outlined the concept of transference (1912/1969; 1914/1969). According to Laplanche and Pontalis (1991, p. 514), it can be understood as "the process by which unconscious desires are actualized on certain objects within the framework of a certain type of relationship established between them and, eminently, within the framework of the analytic relationship". Recognized as one of the main technical instruments that favor the establishment of the analytical process in psychoanalysis, the transference relationship "is classically recognized as the terrain in which the problem of a psychoanalytic treatment takes place, since its establishment, its modalities, its interpretation, and its resolution are what characterize it" (p. 514).

In psychoanalytic terms, transference happens in relation to figures invested with authority, specifically parents. However, for the context of this study, we have extended and re-signified the notion of transference, addressing it in the midst of a psychosocial reading that broadens and complexifies the figures of authority and attachment. Thus, we consider that transference alludes to a wider range of social agents who are invested with authority and exercise functions of power and knowledge in the subject's history.

In Freudian terms, transference is the condition of possibility for establishing the analytical process since certain experiences that were remarkable for the patient are relived through it, in the presence and relationship with the analyst. In an analytical situation, the patient has the opportunity to revisit and repeat these experiences in encounters with the analyst, who is willing to absorb these contents and projections, making a series of considerations and interpretations that allow the patient to remember, repeat, and elaborate (Freud, 1914) on the traumatic experience, giving it new meanings. It is noteworthy that, for Freud (1912), the transference experienced in the relationship with the analyst is marked by resistance to treatment. In his words, it can be understood as "the strongest weapon of resistance, and we can conclude that the intensity and persistence of transference are the effect and expression of resistance" (Freud, 1912, p. 139). However, it is precisely the manifestations of transference that "provide the invaluable service of making the patient's erotic and forgotten impulses immediate and manifest" (p. 143).

Since we are expanding the concept of transference beyond the analytical scene and the bourgeois family experience, we must consider that transference goes beyond the psychoanalytic setting and can also be experienced in daily social relationships. Freud himself admits that the characteristics of transference "should not be attributed to psychoanalysis, but to neurosis itself" (1912, p. 136). From this perspective, subjects in their daily relationships, re-edit past significant experiences with those around them, assigning them reference and authority roles. These roles are not necessarily linked to the present moment but refer to difficult and sometimes traumatic experiences that are re-edited in the current relationship.

The practice of social workers is also permeated by transference relationships. Users, through various actions, may deposit unconscious contents onto these professionals, arising from other relationships and which, to a large extent, affect the work relationship. Sometimes unaware of it, these professionals may spontaneously embrace such contents, experiencing conflicts, confrontations, and approaches that do not concern their practice, but subjective contents that, in a projective and defensive manner, are revisited in the professional relationship marked by the exercise of power. The risk of transference involvement is imminent in this field of activity since, as seen in the first part of this article, it brings into play relationships that re-edit affective contents that are difficult to understand and absorb.

In this sense, the concept of resonance, present in Deleuze's work, gains ground in this investigation. In his study "Empiricism and Subjectivity", Deleuze (2001) shows that the subject does not exist as a ready-made, identifiable, or fixed substance. It is constituted in the midst of the data present in each lived experience. The author then describes two qualities present in this open constitution of subjects and encounters: "*resonance* and *vividness*" (p. 149). To characterize them, he compares the subject to a percussion instrument. In a percussion instrument, the act of touching its surface resonates beyond the space that was touched, producing physical and sound effects even outside the instrument. In encounters, the action of a subject, in a given circumstance, also resonates in other subjects, producing various effects and affections. He goes on and questions:

When does it become subject? It becomes subject when 'its vividness is mobilized in such a way that the part characterized by vividness (impression) communicates it to another part (idea)', and also, 'when all the parts taken together resonate in the act of producing something new' (p. 149, author's emphasis).

It is then necessary to analyze how affections, which come from social contexts other than the specific relationship of assisting the user, reverberate and interfere with each other, co-producing actions and subjective effects. It is also important to note that, in the vividness

mentioned by Deleuze, every part encompasses a wide range of positions and affections, which are expressed in various ways and can assume different positions in every new situation experienced, as observed in the previous section addressing power relations. These actions resonate in bodies and practices, emphasizing the multifaceted expression of affections.

The vividness and resonance described here are also present in the various social encounters experienced during social work services. In these encounters, the participating subjects, users and professionals, have the possibility to revisit their affective-transferential history, their confrontations with powers, and build differentiated bonds. The user may or may not enter into transference and resonance relationships with the professional and the service offered at that moment. However, its consequences and its effectiveness will depend on this transfer and resonance. Thus, we find that there are no norms and prescriptions that survive on their own, relying only on their technical and bureaucratic efficiency. Transference and affective resonance become the conditions for subjects to engage desirously with the service in question.

What we want to emphasize is the extent to which social workers are marked by transference psychic contents and resonances that cannot be simply supplanted by the technique and bureaucratic procedures of social policy. These professionals are immersed in affective and desiring networks that can either promote or hinder their work. Distancing oneself from this multifaceted and diversified affective field can turn the intervention into a mere instrument to be applied, measured, and quantitatively recorded. What lies beyond these records? What dimension of the lived experience gains prominence in these meetings between users and social workers? In the next section, we will address the potentialities and limits that everyday practice imposes on professionals.

The daily practice of the social worker: potentialities and limits

Problematizing the affective implications that arise in the daily practice of social workers invites us to enter a complex and constantly changing field of analysis. Thus, we emphasize some effects perceived in the dialogue and interaction with these professionals. However, there are still many unexplored effects that can be mapped by a researcher who is attentive to the explicit and/or silent transformations that unfold in daily work encounters.

Since the transition from the 1970s and 1980s in Latin America, Cordeiro (2018) reports that Social Work has been shaped by new legal frameworks, discourses of denunciation, and practices to confront professional conservatism until then sustained by traditional welfare models that evoke the idea of favor and charity. This process of critical analysis has contributed to consolidating the foundations of an ethical-political project in the profession, primarily inspired by the Marxist tradition, operating through theoretical and methodological concepts that denounce prevailing economic and social relations.

With the professional commitment to the population and the uncompromising defense of human rights as its guiding principles, the ethical-political project of Brazilian Social Work in recent decades is based on the struggle for universalization of access to goods and services and the guarantee of civil, political, and social rights. This project also prioritizes a new relationship with users and the valorization of network (Romagnoli & Fadul, 2018).

Despite these advances, we must consider Social Work as a field of tensions with divergent and convergent encounters, alliances, and conflicts. Analyzing this context from the perspective of power relations (Foucault, 1996) adds mobility and complexity to the daily dynamics of these professionals. This also allows for the recognition of the permanent reversibility of practices adopted in the scope of Social Assistance work. Pluralism in the

profession is therefore evident in the circulation of neoconservative and critical discourses, which coexist in conflict in the work routine, impacting in multiple ways the affective relationships established in the daily professional practice, as well as on the production of users' and social workers' subjectivities.

It is also noteworthy that the social worker profession sometimes carries a diffuse conception in the contemporary social imaginary. There is a certain misunderstanding about their place in the current historical moment, given that their work is a result of different forces. As analyzed by Rodrigues and Guareschi (2019), this professional is required to have a deep knowledge of family institutional transformations and the legal apparatuses established in state rationality, while simultaneously and routinely dealing with ways of life articulated in the (im)possibilities of legal support. Within this apparent structural incongruity, social workers are often circumscribed as the professionals responsible for 'providing solutions' to the demands arising in a scenario of underdeveloped countries. This has an impact on the daily work routine which reverberates, for example, in the demands, placed by the intersectoral network of social policies, that social workers 'solve' cases of illiteracy, criminality, and unemployment, among other complex social demands that arise in Brazil. Could it not be possible to consider that this extensive set of demands, actualized in professional practice, precisely corresponds to a transferential situation? And would it not be possible to identify a series of power relations being formed in this process?

We believe that this movement of assigning social workers the responsibility of 'solving' cases considered to be socially problematic remains generally linked to the individualizing project of modernity. Regarding this mode of societal organization, articulated in the transition from the 18th to the 19th century, Foucault (1996) points out that control over individuals was no longer restricted to the action and power of the Absolutist State over bodies, but rather to locating individuals and the human species in disciplinary strategies. In this perspective, the demands required subjects to 'function' according to the needs of the emerging capitalist political and economic system and its mode of production.

The implications of this rationality in the daily practice of social workers result in the risk of these professionals reproducing the modern political perspective of population control and assuming responsibility to 'adapt', 'save', and 'discipline' the population in relation to social norms. This perspective demands that they assume a police-esque and messianic role in their daily work, which commonly results in normalizing practices, moral judgments, and feelings of frustration, anxiety, impotence, and incapacity, among other expressions of psychological suffering (Saraiva, 2018). These are the dilemmas faced daily by those who perform immaterial labor (Negri & Hardt, 2001), in which historical, political, scientific, and affective contexts are intertwined as they simultaneously take place in relationships.

Another affective implication of this rationality is the risk of professionals reproducing readings based on binary and classificatory representations of race, gender, sex, generation, profession, territory, and social class, among other markers. In this case, we identify a resonance between the social workers' labor practice and prevailing hegemonic positions in society as a whole, which affective immaterial labor could precisely overcome. Thus, social workers materialize practical and discursive procedures built on preconceived images, such as 'man, therefore, violent'; 'woman, therefore, caring mother'; 'adolescent, therefore, reckless'; 'suburban dweller, therefore, suffering'; 'police officer, therefore, violent'. Each of these examples refers to hegemonic discourses that circulate among the population. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1996), binary segmentation results in the production of instituted modes of existence. Segmentations also establish patterns of hierarchy and societal organization that limit the power of critical analysis and movement in life in society.

Thus, we can consider that the presence of a normalizing classificatory power is also evident in this case.

In this context, we emphasize that Social Work professionals deal with risky situations on a daily basis. This risk sometimes materializes in the insecurity of assistance practices, the fear of intervening in families, and the limits of meeting idealized social demands placed on social workers, as they are seen as those responsible for correcting or saving the population they assist. Therefore, we are faced with professionals immersed in territories marked by intense social vulnerability and various expressions of violence, materialized in marginalization, inaccessibility, death, and neglect. The daily proximity of social workers to the emotional scenario described can lead to feelings of melancholy, impotence, and persecution. Referring back to the analysis presented in the previous topic, we can consider that social workers also enter into an affective process of transference, recalling past experiences that serve as a guide and directly interfere with their current practice.

Another relevant affective dimension of this analysis is that, in their daily practice, social workers are in contact with risky situations that have direct effects on their personal lives. The majority of cases handled by these professionals involve extremely vulnerable conditions, which often require social workers to go beyond the working hours stipulated in their employment contract, which can affect their family and/or community relationships (Mansano, 2020). As a body affected by an intensely contradictory and complex social reality, work relationships also resonate transferentially in the lives of many social workers, sometimes making it difficult to sleep, eat, relax, or disconnect from the experiences and concerns encountered during the workday.

There is also the daily relationship between social workers and the excessive bureaucracy, which involves data generation tasks in information systems and the development of prescribed actions at an administrative level (Rinhel-Silva, 2016). These professionals find it difficult to develop an intervention process focused on the emotional demands placed by their users in the management of social benefits, in the tense relationship with the demands of the judiciary, and in the daily demands of filling in data in information systems and reports, among other examples.

Therefore, professional practice is constituted by conflicts between affective immaterial labor and technical-bureaucratic tasks that require constant revision of the objectives of their work to prevent it from becoming disorganized amidst paperwork and merely bureaucratic demands, which leads to anxiety, frustration, and exhaustion. This situation can put professionals in the vicinity of saddening affections consolidated in the experience of resentment, which can be considered "one of the great risks highlighted by affective work (with its consequences in hatred, suffering, adaptability, and vital impoverishment)" (Mansano, 2020, p. 8).

In this way, we agree with the analyses of Carvalhaes (2019), who problematizes the need to avoid interventionist practices based on depoliticized views that insist on placing the relationship between individuals and society in dichotomous parameters. Thus, it is valuable for social workers to have a plurality of subjective and affective compositions as an analytical reference, through which they can implement public policies that have already been achieved, as well as those that may be established in the midst of the knowledge produced in daily social relations. We, therefore, stress the importance of social workers demarcating their work in "localized knowledge" (Barbosa, 2020), which analyzes the plural and contingent process through which life is produced.

Despite the problematized issues resulting in painful affections for professionals, they can also be seen as opportunities for social workers to invent creative, unprecedented, and

critical ways of dealing with the precarious structures of Brazilian society (Romagnoli & Fadul, 2018). The daily relationship with at-risk populations and the pressure of bureaucratic demands, although difficult, also enable the production of innovations and challenges as the professionals are interpellated to navigate between discourses and practices from different areas through which they can articulate plural intervention strategies. These experiences require them to undertake more complex readings of the population's subjective, affective, and social realities, activating their sensitivity to perceive the subtleties that emerge in daily work relationships.

Another effect of these experiences is that most social workers are well aware of the legal apparatus that supports constitutional rights, as well as the various sectors that comprise social policies, culminating in the possibilities of articulating joint actions and referring users to specific services. Thus, these professionals emerge as powerful articulators of network (Romagnoli & Fadul, 2018). Navigating through different discourses, actions, and services, experiences of decentralized interventions carried out in the assisted territories, and daily contact with populations in social vulnerability situations can open strategic paths in the daily lives of social workers, depending on the affective bond experienced there. Among these bonds, the creation of a more resistant, politicized, and sensitive professional body to deal with the set of adversities and inequalities that characterize the Brazilian population is highlighted. In the words of Mansano (2020, p. 8), this involves activating processes of:

[...] creation, support, sustainment, and favoring of what is sometimes avoided and even demonized by work relationships: affections in their living, diverse, and changing dimensions. Workers who, far from mere docility, embrace and exercise their power to affect and be affected in professional encounters are considered, making encounters flow in their unpredictable and imponderable dimension.

This highlights the possibility of professionals dedicated to Social Work subverting the hierarchical rationality of assistance, paving the way for interventions that support dialogue and the construction of inventive and collective ways of work. This is exemplified by actions that establish partnerships that bring users closer to emerging social, artistic, and environmental movements in their communities, according to their needs and desires (Costa, 2014). The daily encounters between social workers and users involve a field of power and a dynamic transference articulated amidst existential pluralities, heterogeneous relationships, and critical movements, enabling the composition of affective and desiring networks of work and life.

The analysis of the affective dimension present in the daily practice of social workers calls for an exploration of a field where multiple affective resonances coexist in dispute. Problematizing this field of power relations, affections, and transference from a psychosocial approach invites us to identify the limits and potentialities of social workers' current role, not to fall into mere impotence, but to experience the profession from other analytical angles.

Final considerations

In this study, the social workers' profession is characterized as affective immaterial labor that faces the challenge of not only providing welcoming assistance to users facing extreme situations but also the responsibility of directing attention and care to oneself. This implies efforts to detect to what extent professional encounters produce subjective and affective effects that have repercussions beyond the time and space limits of work. However, this demand is not always met by these professionals, which can have an affective impact or even harm their health and well-being.

The first contribution brought by the field of Psychology to this study was highlighting the set of power relations widespread in society without necessarily being recognized or analyzed in terms of their political, affective, and social effects. Producing a certain type of individual, endowed with expectations and values that are "appropriate" to the social order, corresponds to the production of a docile and useful body in which a capitalist subjectivity still exists, ultimately inscribing subjects in the calculations of power. Hence the importance of understanding how professions, especially the social work practice, are not neutral but are permeated by complex networks of power that directly interfere in daily encounters, and in their affective consequences.

This debate led to the second contribution, emphasizing the care of the self as a condition for caring for others. This is due to the fact that the social workers' work tools include their own bodies and affective-transferential potential, which enable them to welcome and work with the population they assist. Without this minimally guaranteed attention to the self, the greatest impact falls on the professionals themselves, who are at risk of becoming involved in situations of suffering, demanding solutions and answers that are not necessarily within their reach, since they presuppose direct support from public policies and government agencies. This is due to the fact that, as a professional involved in elaborating, implementing, monitoring, and overseeing public policies, their work depends on a series of instances, procedures, and social agents that can sometimes hinder or delay the immediate resolution of problems. Therefore, it is necessary to understand that professional practice is an extension of the coordinates of institutional macro-powers, whether directly derived from the State or inscribed in the social environment.

The third contribution was the problematization of the wide range of movements, from the most neoconservative to the practices of resistance that are articulated in the professional practice of social workers, and, primarily, the affective implications that are expressed directly in these workers' bodies. This debate, articulated with a psychosocial reading, made it possible to analyze the incessant variations of affective states of professionals and users, which trigger sickening and/or inventive processes of subjectivation.

Finally, what we sought to emphasize throughout this study is the need to recognize the practice of social workers as eminently affective and immaterial, with the body and its powers of connection as the elements that enable daily work. We believe that this recognition is the first step towards consolidating care of the self as an essential condition for assisting others. It is the area's responsibility, in collaboration with other professionals, to create spaces for raising awareness so that this care is recognized as essential for professional practice.

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