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**POST-MODERN
OFFENSIVE,
SYNCRETISM AND
KNOWLEDGE
PRODUCTION IN SOCIAL
SERVICE**

Deise Moreira Cavalcante

Master in Social Work (UFPB)

João Pessoa – Paraíba

<http://lattes.cnpq.br/0986419037554157>

Bernadete de Lourdes Figueiredo de Almeida

PhD in Social Work (PUC/SP). Teacher in
Social Work (UFPB)

João Pessoa – Paraíba

<http://lattes.cnpq.br/0411097768343762>

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Abstract: The present work presents as its object of study the postmodern offensive characterized by syncretism and its absorptions in the production of knowledge in Brazilian Social Work. In methodological terms, this investigative process is typified as a bibliographic research and uses the main works that deal with the theme. The study analyzes the origin of modern thought with the Enlightenment, as well as the emergence of the postmodern movement and its influences on Social Work. In view of what has been studied, it can be seen that through the crisis of capitalism, the postmodern offensive enters Social Work, retaking previously abandoned practices and in the production of knowledge, this adherence will be characterized by the path of theoretical eclecticism.

Keywords: Modernity, Postmodernity, Syncretism, Social Work.

INTRODUCTION

Introducing the debate about Postmodernity demands to initially raise the contextualization of the Modernity Project and the respective categories historically constructed in Western civility, established by bourgeois society, but currently in tension in the face of the crisis of late-bourgeois capitalism and its societal inflections, as the postmodern offensive, and how it affects Brazilian Social Work today.

The Modernity Project emerged at the end of the 18th century, historically demarcated by three events that took place in Europe and whose effects spread throughout the world: the Protestant Reformation, the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. While a civilizing project of the bourgeoisie became a watershed between absolutism, the Old Regime, and freedom and human rights. "The civilizing project of modernity has as its main ingredients the concepts of

universality, individuality and autonomy". (ROUANET, 1993, p.9).

This societal project has its greatest expression in the Enlightenment, under the inspiration of Rationality. The social thought forged in Rationality expresses revolutionary theoretical constructions, arising from both bourgeois liberalism and proletarian socialism. But, upon assuming power, the bourgeoisie abandons its revolutionary project, becoming a conservative class. "Bourgeois conservative thought packs positivist social theories that build a project of society based on the maintenance of capitalist society. On the other hand, the theories arising from the political project of the proletariat reaffirm the revolutionary nature and Marxism claims to be the greatest expression of criticism of capitalism". (ALMEIDA, 2011, p. 9)

Postmodernity emerges as a movement that fights what was established in the Modernity Project by disregarding the existing correlations between the economic, ideological, political, social and cultural spheres. In the postmodern understanding, the subject belonging to the working class feels estrangement from collective causes, it is as if there was a false sense of inclusion of all causes, but in fact what happens is a fragmentation of the collective by individual causes.

The dialectical rationality, arising from the Modernity Project, which permeates the construct of Brazilian Social Service in recent decades, is impacted and pierced by the transformations caused by the crisis of capitalism, especially with the postmodern onslaught that provokes new forms of perception of conservatism - the neoconservatism - expressed through the syncretic way, although existing in Social Work since its protoforms, impose new externalities that are also materialized through the production of knowledge.

POST MODERN OFFENSIVE AND SOCIAL SERVICE

The Modernity Project has as its greatest expression the Enlightenment that appears in the 18th century with the collapse of the absolutist regime – Ancien Régime – and promotes several modifications and changes in the world. Absolutism emerged with the end of the feudal era, represented by the absolutist monarchies from the 16th to the 18th century that defended the theory of absolute power given to the king over his people. With the spread of Enlightenment principles and the French Revolution, the values that supported the period known as the “Ancien Régime” collapsed, demolishing the absolutist political system.

The Modernity Project emerges as a critique of traditionalism, absolutism and obscurantism and places science and reason at the center of life in society, seeking to break with the lifestyle based on religious belief. The Enlightenment or “age of enlightenment” under the liberalist influence defended legal equality, the right to private property, free trade, the defense of the idea that through reason one could reach knowledge.

In the Modern Project, historical time is not dissociated from present life, because this is determined by the materiality of time and space. Man recognizes himself as a historical subject and becomes aware of himself, of his aptitude for the creation and destruction of the world, which expanded his possibilities of development.

This new project is consolidated with two important revolutions: the English Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution. These revolutions carried out by the bourgeoisie transformed the economy, politics and culture, forming a new society that is anchored in rationality.

In the middle of the 19th century, political emancipation under the bourgeois regime

was made possible in the main central countries of Europe, but human emancipation did not materialize. Certainly, the bourgeois regime brought emancipation to men in the relationships of personal dependencies, however, political freedom always came up against an absolute limit placed by the bourgeois regime itself “[...] in it, legal equality (everyone is equal before the law)) can never translate into economic and social equality – and without it, human emancipation is impossible” (NETTO; BRAZ, 2008).

The promise of the “reign of freedom” proposed in the Bourgeois Revolution has not been realized. It is important to remember that it provided a freer social order than the feudal system, but that it exposed its limits that are insuperable to effect an emancipated society, limits related to the fact that the bourgeois revolution results in a new class domination over the other, the dominance of the bourgeois class over the workers, which put into contradiction the emancipatory defenses, initially defended by the revolutionary bourgeoisie (NETTO; BRAZ, 2008).

It is at this moment that the bourgeoisie abnegates its initial proposals and transforms itself into a class whose central interest is the conservation of the regime created by it and establishes its dominion. In this way, the ruling class becomes a conservative class, seeking to neutralize legacies left by the Enlightenment movement. The proletariat class experiences a moment of political ascension and the incompatibility of the classes becomes something perceptible, which will culminate in crisis and revolutions unleashed in the year 1848.

At the beginning of the 20th century (1910-1920), capitalism expands worldwide and consolidates itself in different world scenarios. The Modernity Project is established by separating itself from the field of ideas and materializing in the real world,

its concreteness will take place through the two great stages that cross the post-war period: the consolidation of the Fordist model of production (where there is an alliance with Keynesianism for the pursuit of a Welfare State) and the experience of Real Soviet Socialism. The 1970s will trigger the crisis of late bourgeois capitalism, with serious societal inflections such as the crisis of the Welfare State, of labor conquests, of the Fordist and Taylorist model of production, resulting in a systemic crisis of capital of great proportions. that extends to the present day; and Real Socialism, in turn, also experiences collapse with its fall, materialized with the fall of the Wall in Berlin in 1989.

The crisis of real socialism left some fractures related to Marxism. Netto (1995) points out that there were some mistakes made in the Soviet Union with Real Socialism, because Marxism did not actually materialize, but a “dictatorship of the proletariat against itself”. The mistakes made are taken to disqualify the work of Marx today, and according to Netto, Marxism (from the work of Marx) never existed, what happened was the inauguration of a very diverse theoretical-intellectual and political tradition of interpretations. distant from the original source, arising from Marxist revisionist readings.

There is no established crisis of Marxian social theory at that moment, but a crisis of “Marxisms”, works and theories that start from Marx’s original work, however, are composed of additions, reductions, revisions and interpretations. Therefore, a complex and differentiated cultural block is created in which competing strands are structured and moved.

In his writings, Marx predicted structural tendencies of the current mode of production that also serve as practical proof of the validity of his theories until the present day, such

as: the concentration and centralization of capital, the periodic crises of capitalism, the anarchic character of capitalist production, the growing problems with the rates of profit, the continued reproduction of poverty and the growing absolute poverty. Although the mistakes of Real Socialism are used, especially by postmodernists to disqualify the discourse of Marxism, such trends validate modern ideals in contemporary times.

After the collapse of Real Socialism, a series of theorists began to instigate the Modernity Project and allege its exhaustion and bankruptcy. During this period, a critique of the Modernity Project was built and the movement named Post-modernity was consolidated.

Harvey (2013) also states that the crisis of overaccumulation of capital generated in the late 1960s and 1970s temporal and spatial solutions that created a time-space compression and strong aesthetic, architectural and urban movements that broke with modernism.

This compression marks the contemporary daily life, in which everything seems to be faster, more volatile, liquid, and, therefore, technological advances reinforce and favor this conception. Guerra (2011) points out that the movement of financialization of capital contributed to the logic of fragmentation, of the transitory, as if human existence were limited to the permanent present and, with that, the acceptance of the naturalization of immediacy, of lightening, of the instantaneous, of ephemerality.

The Postmodernity movement did not arise with the crisis of overaccumulation of capital, this discussion has its beginnings in the beginning of the 20th century when the criticism of the Modernity Project was formulated based on the irrationalism that was operationalized with regressive, restorative and fascist tendencies.

Some Marxist authors, such as Evangelista (2006) link the Postmodern Movement with the neoliberal offensive from a structural perspective, since it seeks to recover categories inherent to contemporary capitalism, such as alienation,¹ reification² and fetishism³ of the merchandise. Man humanizes the commodity and the commodity reifies man.

Postmodernity is based on relativism, subjectivity, plurality and diversity, the loss of collective meaning, superficiality, the satanization of totality and universal categories, presenteeism, symbolism, post-industrial society, in theoretical and methodological eclecticism and in the repudiation of Marxism.

There is no longer a collective and revolutionary subject in postmodern dictates, everything is based on individualism and the denial of the socio-historical perspective. It is declared that it is the end of the story. There is a crisis of utopias, capitalism has won and there is no other possibility of sociability other than in the capitalist order. Postmodern thinkers question modern ideologies, as well as their theoretical, political and historical paradigms. Dialectical reason is questioned and relativism together with irrationalism is strengthened.

The incitement to anti-modern thinking is consolidated in different areas of knowledge, including Social Work. The Brazilian Social Service emerged in the 1930s under the conservative theoretical aegis and its assumptions linked to the Social Doctrine of the Church. Catholic conservatism presents itself as an anti-modern proposal, which defended a political and social project contrary to liberalism and socialism (SIMIONATTO, 2010).

1. Alienation as the historical and social process that is marked by inhuman social factors created by capitalist society in favor of its own growth.

2. The objectification of human life, everything becomes a commodity, including the worker.

3. The fantasy of the commodity in offering more utility, the result of the relationship between man in his productive process (SOUSA, 2004).

Simionatto (2010) points out that Social Work in its process of development and professionalization is linked to two great matrices of contemporary rationalism: the “Formal-Abstract” rationalism of an empiricist and pragmatic character, which seeks the control, domination and adjustment of individuals social to the established order, with a positivist basis and has its interventions in the immediate, in the manipulation, valuing the practical-immediate activity in a technical and instrumental way, not the apprehension of the contradictory dynamics; and the “critical-dialectical” rationalism that is expressed in Marx’s social theory, which comprises professional practice in a perspective of totality, with a historical-ontological character, postponing the particular to the universal and including the objective and subjective determinations of social processes.

The Social Work Renewal Process allowed the professional body to expand its dialogue with other areas of knowledge, which brought it closer to the critical-dialectical theory, given with the “intention of rupture”. The purpose of the “breaking intention” was the search for a substantive end with traditionalism, through the theoretical-methodological and practical-professional dimensions. It is emphasized that this perspective had an opposite character in the face of bourgeois autocracy, which is its differential in correlation with other perspectives. (NETTO, 2011)

It is in the academic sphere that Social Work achieves an approximation with Marxism and with social movements, giving the meaning of its struggles the process of redemocratization of Brazilian society, in which it made it possible for Social Work to accompany this moment of extreme

historical relevance, raising then the banner of the struggle for social rights becomes.

In this context, Social Work professionals adopt Marxism as a theoretical matrix and also conceive that they are inserted in class society, recognizing themselves as a working class. From then on, social workers began to defend the interests of the working social class and took a progressive stance in the profession.

The advances in the production of knowledge in the category contributed to the redefinition of the societal project that favors the idea of Modernity focused on human emancipation. It is through critical professional projects that they come to understand, absorb and pay attention to the values, objectives and theoretical and methodological bases of the profession, in addition to being aware of how professional practice must be guided. Professional projects are linked to class projects, considered as societal projects, projects that present a teleological perspective of the society to be built, having proposals for society, and may have a transformative or conservative bias.

The Ethical-Political Project of Social Work is linked to a project that transforms society with the professional category's refusal and criticism of the conservatism present in the profession, becoming an instrument of political struggle in the search for professional theoretical hegemony based on Marxist social theory. (NETTO, 1996).

The neoliberal offensive threatens this professional project, since after the societal transformations that took place after the establishment of the new capitalist mode of production, questions arise about the sufficiency of dialectical reason, together with the strengthening of instrumental reason and conservative thinking that are rearticulated with the postmodern trends in the context of late capitalism.

The struggle of the professional category is fragmented with the various individual causes with the advent of Postmodernity, struggles that are located within the working class, such as racism, xenophobia, diversity and gender etc., however, the struggle as a professional and working class sometimes moves. The collective struggle weakens and the individualized bias is consolidated as flags of individual struggles.

Bento (2014, p. 54) asserts that in Postmodernity, subjects are illusively included, given that all individual causes gain space in this movement, "[...] an individual struggle that takes away the capacity of the subject to recognize itself as a collective subject, inscribed in a logic that permeates the question of class, its teleological capacity to create and act" and that disfigures "the role of the State and of work as the founding matrix of the capitalist mode of production".

In the training process, these postmodern influences find fertile ground with the neoliberal proposals for higher education, in addition to the streamlining of courses, one can see in Social Work training an emptying of the theoretical debate, of the historical classics, in which it is preferable to use the theorists who deviate from the centrality of the capital and work relationship to explain the problems of reality, since in the Postmodern conception, Max is incapable and his theory is insufficient to clarify current issues, making it necessary to complement his writings or reinvent them. (SANTOS, 2007).

The resistance of the critical-dialectical strand in Social Work provides the return of traces of professional conservatism, such as technicality, messianism, immediacy, endogenousness, the denial of class society and the non-recognition of the working class by the professional body.

The recurrence of syncretism highlighted by Netto (1992), which returns to the academy

and follows the postmodern movement, expresses the eclectic adoption of new theories to support the production of knowledge in the profession. This postmodern neoconservative offensive “[...] has strong academic influences [...] a reasonable number of authors and texts that, somehow incorporating the postmodern logic, revive traces of professional conservatism” (SANTOS, 2007), p. 110).

In this way, the formation process finds several repercussions posed by the postmodern offensive, as conservative thinking strengthens as it finds a scenario that favors it. Thus, Social Service continues to be a field of disputes for various professional projects within it.

An addendum to this debate is what Cantalice (2012) points out in his studies on the subject: it is that it is not possible to generalize everything that is conservative and define it as postmodern, since classical conservatism differs from neoconservatism arising from with Postmodernity.

Thus, it is necessary that in training the centrality and strengthening of the critical direction adopted in the Ethical-Political Project of Social Work is recovered. The professional project has its material bases packed in Modernity and in dialectical reason; and it is essential that the defense of this project takes place on a daily basis, whether in the academy or in the socio-occupational

spaces occupied by social workers and not only the defense, but the collective struggle for its effectiveness and the denunciation of (neo) conservative professional practices.

SYNCRETISM IN SOCIAL SERVICE AND THE PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE

The invasions of Post-Modern Thought occur, above all through the production of knowledge in Social Work, as noted above. Netto (1996) in his work: “*Capitalismo Monopolista e Serviço Social*” describes how syncretism and eclecticism are linked to the historical process of Brazilian Social Work and how they are characterized in the contemporary scene.

This book refers to the author’s studies on bourgeois sociability in monopoly capitalism, with syncretism being a constituent factor for the maintenance of this sociability. Netto (1996) exposes the syncretic structure of Social Work divided into three determinants: the original problematic universe⁴ which presents itself as an axis of demands, the horizon of professional practice⁵ and the specific modality of intervention⁶, such structure defended by the author expresses the guiding thread of the development of the profession and a constitutive principle of Social Work.

According to Netto (1996), in the history of Social Work there is not only the syncretism

4. The problematic universe is characterized by the “social issue” with its multiple expressions that present themselves as demands for professional intervention. According to the author, professionals, in the absence of solutions from class society to meet the demands, only start to carry out referrals and screenings, not seeking concrete resolutions for the causes of the problems. The refractions of the “social question” become the object of a controlling practical action, the actions developed in a fragmented and fractional way, interventions not analyzed in their entirety, as resulting from a class society and the contradictory relationship between capital and labor.

5. It is the horizon of professional practice that guides professional intervention, in other words, daily life. The author points out that Social Work has historically played its role in favor of the ruling class and it is perceived in this daily dynamics with several demands on which it must collaborate with the harmonization of society and with the strengthening of the very system that is inserted.

6. It represents the undifferentiated practice, that is, the specification of the work provided by the professional has become an unknown for the professional body, due to the breadth of demands and daily life. The various demands and the lack of definition about the professional’s attributions resulted as a specific lack of knowledge of the intervention in the professional exercise and the adherence of the social worker’s multifunctionality. There is an apparent versatility in the operational form of the Social Service intervention, that such versatility becomes an expression of this syncretism of practice.

of practice, given this non-specificity or undifferentiation of the operationalization of professional practice in its protoforms, but also ideological syncretism and scientific syncretism that are significantly influenced by syncretism. of practice.

When analyzing the professional origin, it appears that Social Work has its roots ingrained in conservatism, including its initial theoretical foundations are linked to the Catholic Church. Santos (2007) points out that, having these syncretic bases in its protoforms, Social Work, when developing, eclectically incorporates new theories to support not only its professional practice, but also its way of producing knowledge.

It is important to highlight that there is a differentiation of the terms eclecticism and syncretism, since syncretism is characterized by the adoption of philosophical currents that constitute the fusion of different opinions, without immediately having selection criteria; eclecticism are the philosophical guidelines that decide between the different currents, the most adaptable and applicable in their contexts, even if they are disconnected from each other. The existence of similarity between them is notorious, as if eclecticism were a concrete expression of syncretism, but it is emphasized that they are different aspects.

Throughout its historical process, Social Work acquires knowledge based on the Social Sciences, this is a characteristic of the category that will contribute to the existence of the scientific syncretism present in the profession. The currents of thought that favor the proposed fragmentation of social reality and maintain the interests of the ruling class become very convenient. As a result, eclecticism finds gaps to infiltrate the professional field, which will reflect on the theoretical-methodological dimension (ROCHA, 2005).

Eclecticism in Social Work absorbs different nuances throughout the socio-

historical construction of the profession, from its emergence to the present “[...] this eclecticism changes as “new” social demands and theories capable of directing confronting them” (ROCHA, 2005, p. 114).

With the Reconceptualization Movement that took place in Latin American territory, there is an approximation of the Brazilian Social Work with the Social Sciences. The approximation of the category with the Marxist tradition provoked questions in the professional body about North American and European influences, which were rooted in conservatism. Professional renewal was the basis within academic environments for criticism of traditionalism, which was already considered obsolete at that time. Although, at first, Social Work has approached a biased Marxism, without the original source of Marx, in a second moment, the professional body adopts it as the theoretical matrix of the profession.

The 1980s/1990s are characterized by the coming of age of Social Work in the field of knowledge production, since it is in this decade that the area is linked to research and becomes a mature profession. It is at this moment that the Postgraduate Programs in Social Work are consolidated, such as the master's and doctorate courses. As well, the dominance of currents grounded in the Marxist tradition becomes perceptible.

Direct contact with works of classical philosophy, especially the works of Marx and Engels, were fundamental for the consolidation of the profession as an area of knowledge, in addition to the approximation with Marxist authors such as Gramsci, Lukács, etc.

The debate about syncretism in Social Work is strengthened with the institution of the Historical, Theoretical and Methodological Foundations of Social Work, accompanied by the concreteness of professional maturity and the break with

conservatism, carried out in the context of the “breaking intention”. The adoption of critical social theory by the category, as well as the other advances made with the renewal movement, made it possible to “[...] Brazilian history.” (SOARES, 2018, p.11).

Postmodern Thought condemns Marxism, claiming that it has become ineffective for non-comprehensive discussions of reality, issues such as gender, culture, minorities. In the search for new paths, the category resorts to authors considered postmodern who believe and defend a more humanized capitalism and not in the overcoming of the system itself.

The Postmodern Movement resumes the syncretic and consequently eclectic tendency in Social Work, placing the subject at the center, subjectivity, valuing the fragmented, the discourse, the sign, and, therefore, reinforcing and reviving professional conservatism and favoring ideology dominant.

It is worth noting that the Social Work Code of Ethics establishes the guarantee of pluralism through respect for existing democratic professional trends, but this does not mean the adoption of eclecticism in the professional category. Souza (2014, p. 533) points out that the democratic debate of pluralism is essential, characterized as “open, frank and critical dialogue”, however, it is necessary for the category to maintain the hegemony of critical-dialectical thinking and not go beyond the fine line that exists between pluralism and eclecticism.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Social Work has advanced a lot during its intellectual maturity, the consolidation of the theoretical-methodological, ethical-political and technical-operative dimensions defended by the professional project of the category demonstrate this fact, as well as the rupture with the existing conservatism since the genesis of the profession. However,

the theoretical break with conservatism was not eliminated from the profession, nor does it prevent its new manifestations and conformations in contemporary times.

The scientific production of Social Work is configured as a space of resistance, although Social Work is anchored in the foundations of critical social theory, it is not immune to the repercussions of theoretical eclecticism. It is essential, therefore, to defend this perspective in the production of knowledge of the category, in addition to productions that denounce this eclectic tangle that has been part of the writings within the academic scope.

It is a fact that the Brazilian political and social conjuncture favors the expansion of Postmodern Thought in the country, therefore, the importance of a critical formation based on the Modern Project and focused on the ontological foundations of the social being stands out. Training based on critical social theory and social transformation produces critical professionals who develop interventional actions that permeate the immediacy of phenomena and demands that arise in daily professional life.

The formative process is the moment to resist the onslaughts of movements that insist on renewing conservative postures, putting the category back in the past. “The role of the critical-dialectical perspective in professional training and practice is to weaken the conservative project” (LUIS, 2019, p. 08).

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