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## Social work and elites: An agenda to research and action for the discipline

### Trabajo Social y élites. Una agenda de investigación y acción para la disciplina

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#### Abstract

Understood as social groups that are located at the top of the social scale, elites are a central actor in contemporary societies. Although heterogeneous, these groups can be characterized by their social and political influence on local, national and global levels, their deep intertwined relationship with knowledge production and distribution, and by the use of meritocracy as the main rationale for justifying privilege. Although these characteristics position elites as relevant social subjects in contemporary societies, Social Work has scarcely explored intervention and disciplinary research agendas with/on/for these subjects. As a way of addressing this research gap, this paper explores the manner in which it is possible to understand elites as subjects of social intervention. The paper explores four possibilities of disciplinary research and action: creating interventions that

**Keywords:**  
*elites; Social Work; social intervention*

lead to terminating or limiting the processes of elite reproduction; developing intervention and research mechanisms and devices that allow for the reduction in social gaps while bringing the elites closer to the rest of society; the need to understand elites as a key part of contemporary political communities, highlighting their role in addressing challenges such as the climate crisis, xenophobia and/or the crisis of democracy and; the need to discuss the ways in which the discipline itself generates processes and mechanisms of (re)production of knowledge elites. The paper concludes by reflecting on the extent to which this agenda allows us to question the very locus of Social Work, as well as the historical and political foundations of the discipline.

## Resumen

Entendidas como los grupos sociales que se ubican en la cúspide de la escala social, las élites son un actor central en las sociedades contemporáneas. Aunque heterogéneos, estos grupos pueden caracterizarse por influir política y socialmente en los niveles locales, nacionales y globales, por estar altamente imbricados con la producción y distribución del conocimiento, y por utilizar el mantra meritocrático como fundamento principal para justificar sus privilegios. Aunque estas características posicionan a las élites como sujetos sociales relevantes en nuestras sociedades, desde el Trabajo Social no se ha explorado mayormente cómo podría pensarse una agenda de investigación e intervención disciplinar con/sobre/para estos sujetos. Como forma de abordar este vacío, en este artículo exploro cómo es posible entender a las élites como sujetos de intervención social. A partir de un ensayo teórico, se exploran cuatro posibilidades de investigación y acción disciplinar: la generación de intervenciones que permitan romper o limitar los procesos de reproducción de las élites; la construcción de mecanismos y dispositivos de intervención e investigación que permitan disminuir brechas sociales y “acercar” a la élite al resto de la sociedad; la necesidad de entender a las élites como parte de las comunidades políticas contemporáneas, destacando su rol en desafíos como la crisis climática, la xenofobia o la crisis de la democracia; y la necesidad de discutir las formas en cómo la propia disciplina genera procesos y mecanismos de (re)producción de las élites de conocimiento al interior de la disciplina. Finalmente, se reflexiona en qué medida esta agenda permite interrogar el locus mismo de lo que es el Trabajo Social, así como algunos de los fundamentos históricos y políticos de la disciplina.

**Palabras Clave:**  
élites; Trabajo Social;  
intervención social



## Introduction

As a discipline, Social Work was born and developed as a response to the so-called social question that has accompanied the emergence of capitalism since the mid-19th century. With the deployment of the capitalist project, as well as the development of other forms of modernity throughout the world (Wagner, 2015) -including the so-called “real socialisms” and Latin American developmentalist projects-, Social Work diversifies its object of study, gradually moving away from its monochromatic focus on poverty, increasingly considering “new” subaltern groups (under labels such as vulnerable, excluded or neglected), as well as other disadvantaged groups in cultural, social or political terms (gender, women, masculinities, LGBTQI+, migrations, racialities, children and old age).

Although with geographic and epistemological nuances, this focus on subaltern or disadvantaged groups continues to this day in the theory and practice of Social Work, constituting the very locus of the discipline (Parton, 1996). This particularization can be clearly observed at three levels: (i) at the ethical-valorical level, since the profession is conceived and self-described as a discipline that has an ethical impulse oriented by the improvement of the conditions of the most needy (Dominelli, 2004) and by a focus on social justice that emphasizes human relations (Ioakimidis, 2021); ii) at the thematic level, since Social Work training, research and intervention tends to focus on problems arising from social exclusion and various forms of vulnerability (Healy, 2018); iii) at the professional level, since a significant number of social workers work primarily in social programs that tend to seek to improve the conditions of these groups (Stoeffler, 2019).

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In contrast to this orientation, other disciplines -especially economics and sociology- have experienced a shift from vulnerability-poverty to inequality and inequities as the fundamental axis of their action. Motivated by the development of an extreme phase of capitalism, which Piketty (2020) has called hypercapitalism, by the evidence of national and global economic inequalities never seen before (Milanovic, 2017), by the deepening of what Klein (2015) has designated as disaster capitalism and by the development of an economic-social model based on the depredation of nature and the geological transformation of the planet (Chakrabarty, 2021), various researchers in the Social Sciences have promoted the development of an analytical-conceptual turn that has questioned the centrality of poverty as a univocal object of analysis. In this questioning, a relatively forgotten actor in recent decades has been repositioned at the center of the debate: the elites.



Defined as those subjects who possess disproportionate access to or control of a resource that gives them advantages over the rest of society (Khan, 2012) and who, by the same token, can be understood as historical agents that have the capacity to transform societies (Wright-Mills, 1960), elites have been the focus of analysis in recent decades in disciplines such as economics (Piketty, 2014; Chang, 2018), sociology (Milner, 2015; Kornses et al., 2017), anthropology (Abbink and Salverda, 2017), education (Van Zanten et al., 2015; Khan, 2011) and political science (Binder and Woods, 2014). In contrast, in Social Work the discussion on elites (political, cultural, economic and intellectual) has remained largely absent and unexplored. Problematizing this aspect and outlining an agenda for research and action are, broadly speaking, the main objectives I propose to develop in this article.

How can we reconcile the ethical-moral impulse for justice and the historical tradition focused on vulnerable groups with/in social interventions towards the most favored groups of society? Does it make sense to intervene -with public funds and from the State apparatus- in sectors that have the greatest privileges and run societies? What tools -for research and intervention- can be imagined to intervene with/above/for the elite? In what areas and fields of research and action can Social Work operate in this challenge? Even if in a preliminary way and with more questions than answers, approaching to answer these questions is the main focus of this text.

To achieve the above, I organize the article into three sections, in addition to this introduction. The second section synthesizes and summarizes some of the concepts, debates and characteristics of research on elites, with a particular focus on developments in recent decades. This characterization allows me, in a third section, to outline a research and action agenda from Social Work delimited by four areas or focuses: i) to break or limit the processes of elite reproduction; ii) to generate mechanisms to reduce social gaps and “bring the elite closer” to the rest of society; iii) to understand the elite as part of contemporary political communities, accounting for their role in current societal challenges; and iv) to discuss the potential role of Social Work as a (re)producer of the elite or elite spaces. Finally, and by way of closure, some challenges are outlined and some tensions that could emerge in the development of this agenda are problematized.



## The elites: Concepts, debates and characteristics

Briefly, elites have been defined as the social groups at the top of the social scale. Although overshadowed for decades by the bourgeoisie-proletariat separation developed by Karl Marx, as well as by the conceptualizations of bureaucracy and power proposed by Max Weber, the notion of elite began to be a relevant object of study in the first decades of the 20th century, with the seminal works of Wilfredo Pareto (1980) and Gaetano Mosca (1984) being fundamental. Although with (slight) differences, both conceptions developed a naturalized vision of the elites, who were understood as socially validated and respected social groups, with high turnover rates, in charge of reproducing social life and providing order to the booming capitalist societies.

In contrast to these perspectives, the texts of Torsthen Veblen (2014) and, later, of Charles Wright-Mills (2005) are going to propose more critical visions regarding the elites. On the one hand, and from the connection of Weberian notions and concepts of classical economics, Veblen will postulate in *Theory of the Idle Class* that the elites -especially the economic ones- have a central role in the processes of (over)production in capitalist economies, since they allow the promotion of conspicuous consumption patterns that allow them to differentiate themselves from other social groups without developing productive value, thus questioning the myth of the American self-man. On the other hand, Wright-Mills (2005), based on an eclectic (and original) combination of Marxism, pragmatism and Weberianism, develops in his work *The Power Elite* the idea that modern societies -specifically the American one- were dominated by three differentiated elite groups, but with interlinked interests: the economic elites (bankers, big businessmen and managers of large companies), the political elites (congressmen, government leaders and members of the political establishment) and the military elites. For Wright-Mills, these three groups would have the capacity to transform history (1960), being like social super-agents responsible for the destiny of humanity, at that moment, on the brink of World War III.

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Although with differences, the works of Veblen and Wright-Mills, added, for example, to the theorizations of the role of the State in the reproduction of the elites by Ralph Miliband in *The State in Capitalist Society* (1991), or the networks and links between aristocracy, bourgeoisie and elites described by Maurice Zeitlin and Richard Ratcliff in *Landlords & Capitalists. The Dominant Class of Chile* (1971), made it possible to discuss the immanent character of the elites, showing, in addition, the differences and relations between the different factions of these groups. A complementary contribution



in this line -although not limited to the discussion of elites- was Bourdieu's theory of fields, habitus and capitals (1984; 1986). For Bourdieu, contemporary societies were characterized by a relative autonomy between economy, politics and society, constituting fields with their own logics, dynamics and hierarchies. Therefore, the dominant subjects would not be naturally dominant in all areas, requiring transmutation processes that would allow the transformation of capitals from one field to another (Bourdieu and Passeron, 2009). For all these arguments, it is possible to affirm that in contemporary societies there would be elites -in plural- rather than a single elite (Milner, 2015).

During the last decades, different works have sought to define and delimit what elites are and how they behave. Synthetically, it is possible to characterize these groups by three central elements. First, elites operate in a dynamic that moves fluidly between the local, the national and the global. They are no longer exclusively national elites, but neither are they a select group of tycoons or politicians who manage the entire world without any counterweight. Rather, elites are "constellations" of very different subjects (Savage and Nichols, 2017) - including entrepreneurs, philanthropists, politicians, technopols, agents of international organizations, academic figures, intellectuals (right and left, it must be said), people from the entertainment world, high-performance athletes, influencers, among others - (Bishop and Green, 2009), who are connected at global levels, but who have a definite impact on the organization of countries and local communities. This form of "glocal" development determines different forms of relationship with nation-states. In some cases, relations are based on what has been termed elite capture of the state, i.e., the increasing degree of control that the various elites (especially economic and political) have over the public apparatus (Hellman et al., 2000). In other cases, the elites have sought to replace the public function, promoting an increasing reduction of the state function and generating a favorable view towards any private initiative (Bishop, 2013). Be that as it may, the first central characteristic is that contemporary elites are, at the same time, global, national and local (Hartmann, 2017), constituting heterogeneous groups in their characteristics, capacity of incidence and relationship dynamics, but with a common characteristic: possessing disproportionate resources and social advantages.

Secondly, it can be said that contemporary elites are increasingly intertwined with knowledge, both in terms of its production and acquisition. Although the works of Foucault (2007) had highlighted that the very constitution of modern science is linked to processes of production and legitimization of power, today it is evident that contemporary elites operate with and from knowledge (theoretical and practical), under the recognition of the premise that power is knowledge, and that, conversely, knowledge is also power. This has led Khan (2012) to speak of the existence of "knowle-



dge elites”, defined as those groups of academics, researchers, intellectuals and/or policy makers who produce, control and manage knowledge and promote certain forms of access to reality. Likewise, several investigations have focused on analyzing the networks and flows between knowledge elites and members of other fractions of the elites, which develop through strategic positions such as symbolic analysts (Brunner, 1993), technopols (Joignant, 2011) or governmental social researchers (Davies et al., 2000) who have the capacity to translate knowledge into the political and economic practice of the elites (including, not infrequently, social workers).

Finally, unlike in other historical moments, most elites do not have a blood consecration (like kings or queens) or a transcendental-spiritual consecration (like monks or priests), so they need more sophisticated validation processes. In general, in modern societies this process has developed through the meritocratic mantra and the principle of meritocracy as a distributor of justice and social equality (Young, 1958). In this process, education -more than the family or the community- plays a central role, as it not only allows the acquisition of knowledge, but also promotes socialization processes and networks of contacts that are fundamental for being and feeling part of the elites (Bourdieu, 2013). Likewise, the acquisition of educational diplomas would be the “litmus test” that would allow elite groups to enshrine their privileges (Sherman, 2017), promoting, in turn, a vision where the most privileged positions in society are developed by the existence of high levels of effort, talent, or both factors.

Thus, although heterogeneous and increasingly differentiated, contemporary elites can be characterized as groups that operate - at the same time - at local, national and global levels, are highly imbricated with the production and distribution of knowledge, and operate using the meritocratic mantra as the main basis for their justification of privilege. With these three characteristics in mind, in the following section I seek to delimit a research and action agenda from Social Work on and in elites.

### **Towards a research and action agenda: A preliminary effort**

Defining a research agenda is, almost inevitably, a risky undertaking. The possibility of omitting important issues, of questioning the canonical foundations of the discipline or, simply, of not projecting certain ideas with sufficient force are always latent problems. For the same reason, the agenda I outline here should be understood as an always adaptable and open script or, following Bassi’s (2014) idea, as a score, which seeks to ima-





gine and project a research and action agenda for the discipline, but without delimiting it. Moreover, and like any conceptual enterprise, this agenda will have to be contrasted with the daily realities of implementation of the discipline, being, by the same token, an agenda of a generic nature (an especially important issue to keep in mind for someone far from the practice of the profession, as I am). Considering the characteristics of contemporary elites outlined above and the different contemporary perspectives of Social Work, I propose below four preliminary research and action topics for the discipline on elites.

### **Breaking, diminishing or limiting the reproduction processes of elites**

In their operation, elites generate different mechanisms that seek to reproduce their position in the social structure, thus seeking to perpetuate their privileges (Bourdieu, 2011). This reproduction process is diverse, including family reproduction strategies (marital unions or birth and sexual reproduction policies), social reproduction strategies (generation of friendship networks or specific work networks), belonging to certain social circles or having certain memberships (being part of a school or living in a certain neighborhood or sector), the possession of distinctive credentials (being part of scientific, academic or cultural associations or belonging to social clubs) and the generation of patterns, or behaviors associated with elites (playing certain sports, wearing specific clothes and having/adopting particular ways of speaking and acting). In this way, the processes of elite reproduction include material, social and symbolic elements that seek to separate elites from the rest of society (Lamont and Molnár, 2002) and generate a distinction between “them” and “us”. Generating social interventions and research from Social Work that allow breaking, limiting or making these processes more porous constitutes a first field of action of this agenda, and we can imagine three main components.

On the one hand, Social Work could contribute to the generation of discussions, actions and research in elite institutions (schools, universities, artistic institutions, social or sports clubs), oriented to the development of democratization processes in these spaces, promoting discussions that allow, among other things, to introject the sense of privilege, discuss social inequities and inequalities or thematize the role of these groups in societies. Mediation tools and other collective discussion strategies developed from Social Work (Martin, 2008) could be fruitful to achieve this objective.

Secondly, and from perspectives such as organizational social work (Gould and Baldwin, 2004), and especially from the idea of critical management (Adler et al... 2007),



social workers could use the tools of mediation and other collective discussion strategies developed from social work (Martin, 2008), 2007); social workers could, from within the organizations, discuss the criteria and mechanisms of entry and selection in elite spaces (for example, by accounting for the naturalization of certain criteria, or by investigating the origins of the barriers of elite spaces), making it possible to imagine new forms of social management of these places, through studies or intervention experiences that would expand the boundaries of these spaces and reduce social closure. Exercising a position of internal critique of organizations appears, then, as an axis of work for the discipline, seeking to “challenge the predominant instrumentalist view that suggests that organizations should be organized primarily to ensure a profitable and efficient development of services” (Lawler, 2020, p. 152).

Finally, Social Work could have a relevant role in promoting social interventions with people who are in elite spaces but who have experienced processes of mobility or “unexpected” possibility to access these spaces. These people, who tend to feel like “fish out of water” or “strangers in paradise” (Reay et al., 2009; Villalobos et al., 2022) often have feelings of distress, resignation or non-belonging, which Aries and Seider (2005) define as class marginality. Designing and implementing accompaniment processes, monitoring the insertion processes of these people, promoting organizational changes in favor of these subjects and investigating the factors that could allow the insertion of these subjects are, in short, aspects that social workers could also contribute to reduce or limit the processes of elite reproduction.

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### **Generating mechanisms to “bring the elite closer” to the rest of society**

As I have mentioned, economic, political and social elites are understood as social actors distanced from the majority of the population. This distancing is promoted by processes of social closure (Parkin, 1979), as well as by polarization dynamics (Duclos et al., 2004) that not only construct distinct groups (“us” versus “them”), but also distance these groups, limiting or preventing contact or social interaction. Considering this, a second axis of research and action from Social Work has to do with the generation of mechanisms and interventions to reduce the social distance of the elites from the rest of society, which could be translated into several axes or lines of work.. On the one hand, Social Work could actively contribute to the design and implemen-



tation of social programs and mechanisms that allow the elites to be integrated into the social security, education, health, employment or social protection systems in conditions similar to those of the rest of the population. Historically, elites have tended to build parallel systems in these areas, perpetuating a difference regarding how social services are generated for this fraction of the population in contrast to the rest of society, which has occurred both in Europe, the United States and Latin America (see, for example, Van Zanten et al., 2015, for the case of education, or Cook and Moskowitz, 2013, for the case of social security). For the same reason, contributing to the discussion on the universalization of social systems, systematizing the negative effects of targeting systems and implementing intervention strategies to integrate elites into these systems (e.g., adapting instructions, expanding coverage, redesigning instruments, specifying interventions for these groups) are ways to contribute to the construction of universally guaranteed (but not necessarily uniform) social systems. Obviously, this implies rediscovering the role of the State itself (and of states, in plural) not only as a distributor, but also -primarily- as a collector, which implies generating new consensuses for contemporary societies (Piketty, 2020) on national and global taxes.

Secondly, Social Work could play an important role in the coordination and generation of intervention spaces for the development of projects that intentionally seek the incorporation of non-elite groups in spaces of power. In this way, Social Work could contribute to the incorporation of non-elite actors in spaces of political government (for example, through training, development or support for reserved seats) or in company boards (encouraging and supporting the integration of workers in spaces of strategic management); elements that Social Work has already developed in some historical moments.

Finally, it is also possible to apply this agenda in processes of territorial integration of elites. Elites tend to concentrate in segregated neighborhoods, a trend that occurs in countries as different as Chile (Gayo and Méndez, 2019), Mexico (Camus, 2019) or Norway (Kornses et al., 2017). This physical and territorial isolation affects, and in some cases determines, that economic and political elites do not meet or coexist with others. Therefore, promoting territorial integration processes, generating gentrification processes (in middle-class neighborhoods) or de-gentrification (in upper-class neighborhoods), as well as enhancing social interventions to promote coexistence are, among others, actions from which the discipline could contribute.



## Understanding the elite as part of contemporary political communities

Elites are part of societies and, in fact, an inherent part of their evolution (Wright-Mills, 1960). Although obvious, this statement allows us to reposition the discussion on elites and Social Work on a new plane, which, rather than denying their existence, promotes the development of these actors in pursuit of the construction of a more just society. Although it may sound contradictory, this implies rethinking the elites as social actors and, therefore, as subjects of social intervention, at least from two components or forms that constitute this third imaginary axis of research and action.

On the one hand, it seems to me that it is possible and relevant to develop interventions that discuss the processes of subjectivation and social perceptions of the elites, including the problematization of inequality, wealth, poverty, talent and/or merit. Through gamification processes, using modeling strategies or generating social discussion activities -among other possibilities-, it seems possible to think of strategies that aim at having elite actors (sons and daughters of elites, current members of elites, former members of elites) problematize their life experiences, thus mobilizing judgments and prejudices and developing interventions that integrate the gaze of the “others”, thus activating policies of recognition (Fraser and Honneth, 2006), but which, rather than empowerment, self-management and development of group confidence (Houston, 2020), promote especially a critical discussion about their privileges, their actions and possibilities for change.

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On the other hand, it seems to me that it is interesting to start imagining intervention processes that allow engaging elites in common contemporary global problems. Our current societies are transversally crossed by phenomena such as the problems of social cohesion, xenophobia or the (re)growth of racism (Hobsbawm, 2009), the collapse of traditional and limited forms of the exercise of democracy and the delimitation of citizenship (Dalton, 2008), and especially, global change and the crisis of humanity caused by the geological transformation of the biological patterns that have allowed life on the planet until today (Chakrabarty, 2021). In these problems, the role of the elites is fundamental and, therefore, managing their participation and inclusion in global solutions - rather than in individual or limited searches only for them<sup>2</sup> - is one of the challenges of Social Work. This challenge could be addressed through interventions, through social action projects limited to the elites, or to part of these groups, as well as in the development of social or environmental intervention projects that incorporate the elites, but also other social groups.

<sup>2</sup> Individual or small-group elite solutions have taken different forms. Faced with climate change, fractions of the capitalist techno-elites are designing solutions to global change for a reduced minority of people, even contemplating off-planet travel. Something similar is happening with the highly xenophobic solutions tested in some European countries in the face of the migratory crises of recent decades or the increasingly strong authoritarian proposals that are being put forward to placate the democratic crisis in most Western countries.



## To discuss the potential role of Social Work as a (re)producer of elite or elite spaces

Historically, an important part of Social Work currents have been (self-)visualized from subaltern positions or, paraphrasing Camus (2021), as a profession that refused to dominate. Is this, however, possible? From a perspective that understands power as a relation, Foucault (2003) has shown how power relations are not limited to the dominators/dominated dichotomy, since power is constituted through relations of force, domination being spread in multiple spaces and dimensions. This relational perspective of power allows us to rethink the question of Social Work in the production and reproduction of elites, moving away from Manichean views that unequivocally (and almost inevitably) position the discipline in a dominated position, allowing us to advance in a more nuanced discussion on how it also contributes to the processes of maintenance and creation of existing unequal structures, allowing, in this same operation, to reconfigure certain forms of disciplinary operation.

In this sense, it is possible to think of research and action agendas for the discipline from different perspectives. In the first place, it seems important to address the historical and increasingly established division between doing and researching -or between theory and practice-, which crosses the discipline as a whole (Dominelli, 2004). Rather than seeking a synthesis or designing mechanisms to flank this division, the central point is to recognize that the division between doing and researching is constituting a structure of domination within the discipline, generating a knowledge elite within Social Work that also perpetuates the distinction between individualistic visions (of those who “practice” the profession) versus critical visions (of those who theorize it), as Teater and Hannah (2021) have shown for the United States. Recognizing, studying and analyzing this fact will make it possible to imagine mechanisms that allow us to dimension the role, meaning and effectiveness of this “intellectual elite”, typical of any professional field, thus making it possible to account for the forms of construction of “organic intellectuals” of the discipline (Vivero-Arriagada, 2021) and to promote the generation of alternative or counter-hegemonic spaces of disciplinary production.

On the other hand, the consideration of the discipline as a space of production and reproduction of a fraction of the elites makes it possible to update the discussion on the mechanisms of ascent proper to the discipline. As Bourdieu (2013) has shown for the French case, the consolidation of a select group is not purely by intellectual or

academic merit, but also through the use of social networks, contacts, personal favors, and other strategies of social reproduction. Questioning these criteria, as well as the formation of “castes” or “lineages” within the discipline, will make it possible to re-imagine the criteria, methods and techniques of selection proper to the spaces of power in Social Work, thus promoting greater coherence between what is said and what is done in terms of the critique of power and the generation of unfair practices, promoting greater levels of (self-)reflexivity in the collective work of the discipline.

## Final reflections

Based on an analysis of the relevance of elites and their main characteristics in contemporary societies, in this essay I tried to outline a preliminary research and action agenda for Social Work, starting from the idea - little explored in the discipline - that it is possible to understand the people who have the most privileges and capital as subjects of social intervention. The analysis delimited four main focuses of research and action: the generation of interventions that make it possible to break or limit the processes of elite reproduction; the construction of mechanisms and devices of intervention and research that make it possible to reduce social gaps and “bring the elite closer” to the rest of society; the need to understand the elites as part of contemporary political communities, highlighting their role in challenges such as the climate crisis, xenophobia or the crisis of democracy; and the need to discuss the ways in which the discipline itself generates processes and mechanisms of (re)production of the elites of knowledge within the discipline.

As an exercise, this delimitation raises new questions -and perhaps also- poses new challenges, beyond those already described. On the one hand, it makes it possible to question the very status of the discipline, that is, what Social Work is (or is becoming). This questioning can be linked to the discussions on multi- or transdisciplinarity, or to the discussion on theory and practice in the discipline, since it is clear that the discussion on interventions for/with/about the elites must be accompanied by discussions on the tax structures of the countries, transformations of democracy, the role of the State, or the mechanisms of reproduction of the elites in the educational systems, to give some examples. In this way, it seems to me, the disciplinary construction itself is put in tension, remembering that Social Work does not work with “individuals as such”, but with analytical categories that can be stigmatizing (Campana, 2021).

On the other hand, the inclusion of elites in the map of Social Work allows us to broaden the idea of possible “intervened” subjects, putting in tension the historical efforts for subordinate or subaltern subjects. In this way, some of the traditional schemes (epistemo-

logical, political, ethical) of functioning of the discipline and the profession are broken. From a radical perspective, Vasilos Ioakimidis (2021, p.37) indicates that “if we ignore inequality and poverty as a structural factor, our professional intervention is reduced to a useless and superficial function, as if it were a social aspirin”. Although it may seem small, the absence of the elites (or dominant groups in general) in this radical discourse is symptomatic, to my taste, of a forgetting of the elites as central factors in the production of inequalities, an aspect that should be deepened in the configuration of “critical social work”.

Finally, the (still imaginary) Social Work with/about/for the elites enhances discussions on the ethical-political impulse of the profession. Starting from the idea that critical social work understands that “justice is not possible without the abolition of capitalism” (Gray and Webb, 2020, p.21), the incorporation of the elites does no more than recognize (instead of ignoring) in these actors key pieces of contemporary capitalist functioning, creating a space - little explored - to generate practices, struggles, resistances, creations and actions that allow “examining the common as an effective political principle of our transformations” (Campana, 2021, p.19). Although this is not the space to discuss these points, and perhaps it is not possible to do so only through this format, opening up these questions will, it seems to me, expand and re-imagine the historical discipline for the dawn of the twenty-first century. The challenge is, then, already posed.

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