

GRONDONA, Ana, 2014, *Saber de la pobreza. Discursos expertos y subclases en la Argentina entre 1956 y 2006*, Buenos Aires, Ediciones del Centro Cultural de la Cooperación Floreal Gorini. 222 pp.

Ana Grondona's first book, *Saber de la pobreza*, inaugurates the *Historia del Presente* collection. This is a long-term historization, which investigates efforts to delimit and define the meaning of "subclasses" by **expert knowledge** linked to the Argentine state apparatus between 1956 and 2006, as well as the ways in which these meanings or "truths" circulate at present. That is, it is the history of a set of statements that were made at a given time and were reformulated as the result of a variety of inquiries.

Following Michel Foucault, Mitchel Dean, and Robert Castell, the author is interested in the ways that the conduction of behavior is organized starting with an area of comprehensibility for intervention, focusing on the analysis of **discursivities: programmatic** aspects aimed at "achieving certain goals, certain **transformations**, which implies delimiting certain **problems**, particular **populations** [...] and, consequently, designing specific intervention **mechanisms**"* (p. 14). Thus, Grondona sets aside the concept of rationality since she understands that the concept of discursivity is more conducive to tackling the dispersion/contradiction that organizes a specific regime of speaking in a complicated manner. And she affirms that in every **regime of enunciation**, in as much as it is a dynamic that organizes what should and can be said, there is room for **discursive heterogeneities** (contradictions, inconsistencies).

In this manner, Grondona submerges us in archival work and, following certain working hypotheses, she simultaneously constructs and analyzes various series of documents complemented by interviews with key informants.

The principal hypothesis is discussed and presented in relation to a number of interrelated factors: marginality (Chapter 2), informality (Chapter 3), basic needs (Chapter 4), poverty (Chapter 5), and poverty and vulnerability (Chapter 6). The author offers an epistemological provocation: the starting point is not this delimitation (pre-established categories) but the result of research. At the same time, she notes that the different types of delimitation of subclasses is not rigid but is juxtaposed in different layers.

According to the hypothesis, between the end of the 1950s and the mid-1970s, analyses of **marginality** and **informality**, at least in some versions, brought issues related to the

* Translation by *Apuntes*.

labor market and living conditions together in one set of questions. At the end of the 1970s, this framework started to be subdivided into differentiated issue areas. On the one hand, there were questions about "atypical" forms of insertion into the labor market (**informality, job insecurity**), and on the other, there were debates about degraded living conditions (**poverty, vulnerability**).

The question that brings together the different analyses resides in the delimitation of the populations that are "on the outside." What is interesting is that this does not always coincide with the idea that these populations were **excluded**. According to Grondona, the **mutation** described in the hypothesis can be explained, in part, by the displacement of the question by the peculiarities of the capitalist mode of production in dependent conditions. At the same time, this is linked to the specificities of the Argentine case such as the fact that the expansion of the social state after 1944 assumed a future with full employment. When this began to be deconstructed, starting in 1976, there were no stable forms of protection for the populations affected by the growth of unemployment. Thus, the way that the effects of the "new social question" were managed did not imply institutions linked to the labor market nor to the extension of citizenship but rather conceptions such as "the fight against poverty, exclusion, and vulnerability." The **new** delimitation of subclasses brought with it the construction of a ubiquitous category: **poverty**. Starting in the 1980s, the delimitation of this concept was converted into a way of dealing with the crisis of the labor market without dealing with the issue of the capital-labor relationship, or deregulating it.

From another point of view, it should be noted that this research falls within the field of studies of the **expert knowledge of the state**, framed in a more general question about the government of populations. In this case, the author supports those perspectives that affirm that social policies and their diagnostics do not represent an environment that "reflects" on social problems but rather are an arena in which these are produced **polemically**.

In contrast to other studies that focus on the role of international organizations or think-tanks in "developed" countries, the emphasis here is on the production of **expert local knowledge**, opening up the question of the specific **conditions of production** in which these are developed.

Grondona notes both the fragility and the discontinuity of Argentine institutions such as the subordinate position of the knowledge produced locally in international regimes of enunciation. These conditions create difficulties in accessing sources at the same time as making opaque the emergence of local "innovations."

In the conclusions, the author points out that "there does not exist a place of homogeneous and pre-defined enunciation from which diverse experts have produced their diagnostics"† (p. 189). Instead, there are complexly defined spaces of speaking defined through changing delimitation in respect to others ("academic knowledge" or "political rhetoric") to which they connect. In this separation, **expert knowledge** turns out to be relatively subordinate, with effects on the discontinuity of its memories. At the same time, Grondona understands that conditions of dependency operate within the forgetfulness and the silences of local memories just as they are expressed in this sphere of social life: that is, through the "importation" of knowledge.

In addition, the author argues that the link between **expert knowledge** and social interventions varies over time. If in the 1960s we find experts linked to social and political intervention producing explicative and programmatic discourses ("reformers"), starting in the 1980s the descriptive dimension would become central ("technical specialists"). But far from there being a unity of meaning among certain diagnostics and forms of action in regard to "the social," one finds contradictions between the programmatic orientations of the experts and the derived modes of intervention. This is the case of the association between the discourse about the heterogeneity of poverty and the focalization of social policies. At the same time, the author points out the existence of different moments in the production of **expert knowledge**: those linked to the **emergence** of a problematic are more reflexive, while other contexts are more prone to **mystification** (circulation of concepts as given and evident).

Finally, it is worth pointing out that Grondona's work skillfully blends her theoretical, epistemological, and methodological approaches, applying them to a specific area of study. The harmonious articulation of conceptual deployment and relevant empirical findings is the principal merit of this study. The result is an interesting exercise in the genealogical **historization of the present** that provides valuable contributions to different facets of contemporary social research.

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