# Alice Salomon: Critical social work pioneer

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Early pioneers of critical social work have not always been recognised as such. This paper examines the theory and practice of early German social work researcher, activist, social work author and educator, Alice Salomon (1872–1948) with reference to Fook's understanding of critical social work. Salomon's work is characterised by her orientation on social justice, her internationalism, her concern with the structural inequalities that shape clients' lives, her sensitivity to oppression in society, and her commitment to feminist social work. Acknowledging that Salomon's theory is still underappreciated in her home country, this paper, published to coincide with the 150th anniversary of her birth, uses her own words and ideas, many translated into English for the first time, to present the case for regarding her as an early pioneer of critical social work. We argue that her approach to social work practice, in which the practitioner is constantly mindful of their own potential biases, of questions of gender, ethnicity and poverty, and of the grave inequalities and injustices facing the client, anticipates modern anti-oppressive, feminist and critical social work.

Pioniere kritischer Sozialarbeit wurden bisher als solche nicht immer (an-)erkannt. Dieser Artikel untersucht die Theorie und Praxis einer deutschen Wissenschaftlerin der Sozialen Arbeit, einer Aktivistin, Autorin und Lehrenden, Alice Salomon (1872-1948), und zwar unter Bezugnahme auf Jan Fooks Theorie kritischer Sozialer Arbeit. In der Berücksichtigung, dass Salomons Theorie in ihrem Heimatland noch immer unterschätzt wird, möchte dieser Artikel anlässlich ihres 150. Geburtstages ihre Worte und Ideen vorstellen, von denen viele hier erstmals ins Englische übersetzt wurden. Wir behaupten, dass ihr Ansatz Sozialer Arbeit, der an sozialer Gerechtigkeit und Internationalismus orientiert ist, moderne anti-oppressive, feministische und kritische Soziale Arbeit antizipiert hat. Denn sie hat nicht nur Fachkräfte aufgefordert, sich immer wieder auf ihre mögliche Voreingenommenheit hin zu reflektieren, sondern hat auch Fragen von Geschlecht, Ethnizität reflektiert sowie die damit zusammenhängenden gravierenden Ungleichheiten und Ungerechtigkeiten kritisiert, von denen Klient:innen betroffen sind.

Keywords: feminist social work; gender; social work history; Germany; critical social work; Alice Salomon

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## Introduction: Life and work of Alice Salomon

Alice Salomon's international recognition as the preeminent figure in pre-World War II German social work can be put down to diverse achievements. She founded a one-year social work training programme in 1899 which evolved into the first German school of social work in 1908 (Kendall, 2000, pp. 78–81), and in 1917 established the national conference of welfare colleges, which she headed. She was a formative figure in the development of social work methods such as social diagnosis and social casework in Germany, her textbooks and experiences guiding practitioners for decades (Salomon, 1921/28, 1926a). She was a key early social work researcher, her empirical studies on the lives and environment of the poor grounding social work practice in the harsh realities of the working classes' biographies and life circumstances (Salomon, 1930a). She was a formative figure in the professionalisation of German social work, establishing it as an academic discipline with its own knowledge and theory base (author's). She co-founded and was president of the German Academy for Social and Pedagogical Work for Women in 1925 (Salomon, 1926b). Her international profile supported social work's growth as a global profession: Salomon co-founded the International Association of Schools of Social Work in 1928 and chaired it from 1929 to 1937. Her importance went beyond social work. She was a committed social reformer, advocating passionately for child welfare (Salomon, 1902a), ethical consumption

(Salomon, 1902c) and the peace movement (Salomon, 1919b, 1928c). Finally, she was a prominent member of the early twentieth century German women's movement, being on the managing committee of the Federation of German Women's Associations (BDF), and active as corresponding secretary (of the president, Lady Aberdeen) to the International Council of Women (ICW). Her promotion of women's rights (particularly those of working-class women) made her a key German first wave feminist (Salomon, 1902a, 1908b). Salomon was also a prolific author, both on social work, and on the social issues she campaigned for. When, in 1924, Salomon travelled through the United States, she was repeatedly referred to as the 'German Jane Addams' (author's), and the parallels between the two figures' passion for both social work and social justice makes this comparison legitimate (Schüler, 2004, Kniephoff-Knebel, 2006).

Forced to leave Germany by the national socialists (she had been interrogated by the Gestapo), Salomon settled in the United States (Wieler, 1987), and her later autobiographical writing was published in English (Salomon, 2004a). Despite her international reputation, most of her key German social work texts remain untranslated, and there are few English-language papers dealing with her ideas rather than her life (author's). This paper addresses the paucity of English-language literature on Salomon's social work perspectives, by taking the 150th anniversary of her birth as an opportunity to reconstruct them, recalling her own words and ideas about the theory and practice of social work, and contextualising them in terms of their contemporary relevance.

We argue that Salomon can be seen as an early critical social work pioneer. By making this suggestion, we are also consciously questioning Salomon's late-twentieth century reception in her birth country, and suggesting that her perspectives have long been underappreciated there (Feustel, 1997). International readers might expect the émigré Salomon to have been rediscovered in her home country. In fact, for various

reasons, often founded on misrepresentations of Salomon's work (author's), this did not occur. Salomon as a person is more familiar in Germany today (ASH, 2022), but her substantial theoretical contributions to the social professions still receive less attention than that of her male contemporaries (for instance the research university-based Herman Nohl or Christian Jasper Klumker, see Rauschenbach & Züchner, 2012, 163–173), perhaps still reflecting gendered distinctions within academic social work (Sakamoto, et al., 2008; Parker and Ashencaen Crabtree, 2014).

Indeed, it was not Salomon's social work literature which was revisited in late twentieth-century social work theory discussions, but rather her autobiography. The suggestion was made that her interest in social work came not from a commitment to addressing social concerns, but rather from *ennui* and sexual frustration (Winkler, 1988, p. 262; Konrad, 1993, p. 27; Sachße, 1994, p. 13). Such interpretations attempted to implicate Salomon in maintaining conservative nineteenth century traditions of care, damaging the long-term professionalisation and democratisation of social work. The twenty-first century has seen Salomon's ideas slowly receiving more attention (author's, Schüler, 2004, Kniephoff-Knebel, 2006, Braches-Chyrek, 2013). Nonetheless, an assessment of her work stressing a self-interested striving for personal self-fulfilment has stuck stubbornly (for instance, Niemeyer, 2012, p. 142). Current reflections on her contributions to social work theory still merely draw on her autobiography, at best supplemented by one of her practice handbooks (Engelke et. al., 2018, p. 229 ff.). It should be stressed, a detailed case *has* been made for the coherence of Salomon's theory, and its place in the canon (author's). Nonetheless, a firm recognition of this has yet to be found in mainstream theoretical discourses.

A new edition of Salomon's (1997, 2000, 2004b) writings has returned her work to print. The 150th anniversary of her birth is being celebrated (ASH, 2022). Nonetheless Salomon's work is still not appropriately acknowledged as a substantial contribution to contemporary social work. It may be speculated that the trend in Germany of seeing social work as value-free 'services' rather than value-based services, lies behind this (Staub-Bernasconi, 2007; Chechak, 2015), such perspectives being incompatible with Salomon's social justice-based approach. Salomon's ideas are therefore ripe for rediscovery, not just internationally, but also in her country of origin.

We will first examine the international development of critical social work before presenting and discussing Salomon's pioneering critical perspectives in theory and practice.

**Critical social work**

The term 'critical social work' raises a range of questions. Primarily it depends on the definition of the key elements: critical and social work. We know that social work is complex, contested and that definitions are embedded both within the cultures in which it is practised and, as are those cultures, in history – here seen as a dynamic process, not necessarily linear but contingent, cyclical but nonetheless socially progressive to an extent. However, we also know that throughout history and throughout social work's various iterations there has, with some notable exceptions, been an emphasis on human and relational interactions. Increasingly this concerns power relations and dynamics and a dual focus on the micro and the macro, human rights and social justice, as it affects the person-in-environment (Germain and Gitterman, 1981; IFSW/IASSW, 2014; Parker, 2021).

Critical theories in social thought derive much from an interpretation of Marx's concept of alienation to see its roots within relations between sectional groups; a view that delineates how dehumanising and exploitative experiences are made possible by the abuse of assumed power relations which lead to dissatisfaction and agitation for change (Parker and Ashencaen Crabtree, 2018). Of course, Marxist and neo-Marxist understandings have held, and continue to hold, great relevance for social workers in understanding the positions in which people who use social workers find themselves (Garrett, 2021). The generative potential of conflict is recognised in critical theories, however, in which alternative understandings, practices and structures might result from dialectic positionings (Parker, 2020). It is these that have relevance when considering Salomon's contribution.

The word critical implies criticality which represents a kind of self-researching exercise, in which one's own working hypotheses are challenged and reviewed (Fook et al., 2000; Parker, 2021). Criticality extends breadth and depth of understanding that balances the subjectivity of the practitioner with the objectivity to weigh up different situations and perspectives and to make a judgement (Parker, 2021).

These definitions are important in underpinning discussions of critical social work as a thought and practice. All social work is necessarily political as it deals with human relations. Critical social work brings this into sharp relief. The roots of critical social work are often identified in the overt political drive of radical approaches starting in the 1960s and associated with growth in civil rights movements and neo-Marxist revolutionary thinking. The explosion of radical literature in the UK (Corrigan and Leonard, 1978; Langan and Lee, 1989; Bailey and Brake, 1975; the politically-charged social work magazine CaseCon) focused on consciousness-raising, challenging previously psychodynamically subsumed structural inequalities. It questioned a

previous over-emphasis on the functionalist desire to ‘fix’ the person and the assumption of personal failing, psychopathology and weakness which sees social work as a purely individual-focused activity ignoring structural conditions and social relations.

Contemporary critiques of social work policy and practice have continued to highlight the contribution of structural power to individual and societal problems. Many of these have used neo-Marxist and critical theory perspectives (Ferguson, 2008; Rogowski, 2010; Singh and Cowden, 2013; Lavalette, 2019; Garrett, 2021) to examine the implications of globalisation and neoliberal capitalism in respect of poverty and other structural social problems. Other strands of radical social work morphed into anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice in the Anglo-Saxon world (Thompson, 2020), and to practices addressing social exclusion in continental Europe (Lorenz, 2001).

However, Fook (1993, p. 7; 2003, p. 124; 2016, p. 5–6) has argued, importantly for our understanding of Salomon, that personal emancipation was always part of radical social work, identifying the four core elements incorporated within it as:

(1) ‘an understanding of how personal problems might be traced to socio-economic structures, and that the “personal” and “political” realms are inextricably linked’ (Fook, 2016, p. 5)
(2) ‘a commitment to emancipatory forms of analysis and action (incorporating both anti-oppressive and anti-exploitative stances)’ (Fook, 2016, p. 6)
(3) an analysis of the social control functions of social work and welfare
(4) goals of personal liberation and social change

Fook (2016) champions an integration of the personal and the political by locating critical social work in a context of relational practice within recognised and challenged structural conditions. She summarises this as:

> … primarily concerned with practising in ways which further a society without domination, exploitation and oppression. It will focus both on how structures dominate, but also on how people construct and are constructed by changing social structures and relations, recognising that there may be multiple and diverse constructions of ostensibly similar situations. (Fook, 2016, p.19)

We argue that Fook's perspective, particularly with reference to her points 1, 2 and 4 above, echoes social work positions which can be traced back to Salomon. We draw attention, also, to how Salomon's perspectives anticipate the critical stance of the global definition of social work (IFSW/IASSW, 2014).

It should, however, be explained why we are using international reference points such as Fook's to present Salomon's ideas, rather than those of German *kritische Soziale Arbeit* (Anhorn, Bettinger, Horlacher, Rathgeb, 2012). Firstly, we see Salomon as an early feminist social worker. The German-speaking countries have a younger tradition of feminist social work, and Salomon's work would not necessarily be cited there as part of this project (Maurer, 2016). Secondly, the bridging of theory and practice in Germany's critical social work project is less developed than in the Anglophone countries; a mainstream theory of anti-oppressive practice (Erath, 2006) has yet to establish itself in Germany. This German underappreciation of the practical component of critical social work grates when considering Salomon's ideas, in which theory and practice are intermeshed. Finally, the different strands of German critical social work have mostly evolved sectionally: the aforementioned feminist social work is

evolving independently from *rassismuskritische Soziale Arbeit* (a form of anti-racist social work), both discourses quite separate from the capitalism criticism of post-1968 social work discourses. In contrast, Salomon's perspectives are characterised by a mindfulness of the intersectionality of all three of these elements. For these reasons, we are choosing to relate Salomon's work to the global critical social work movement, rather than the national one of her birth country.

**Salomon's structural analysis of the social at the macro level**

> One cannot advocate economic individualism, an unchecked profit-oriented economy, and the right of the strong to exploit others as desirable societal principles, and be a social worker at the same time. (…) One cannot, as a thinking and feeling human being, become acquainted with the squalor of the city residents' housing, the life of the proletarian children within their gloomy four walls, the barren and alienated life of the workers, and the blunting troubles of the proletarian women, without demanding a new social order: one in which the enjoyment of the few is not at the cost of the collective. One cannot live to see all this without becoming aware of *the social debt* which needs to be redressed. (…) (Salomon, 1919a, p. 267-268; *italics in original*)

Salomon was an economist, as can be seen in the quote above, and already in her early work, such as her PhD thesis, *The causes of the unequal pay of men and women's labour,* addressed structural inequalities. Economic relations became the basis of her later social work theory. Economic knowledge reveals those macrostructures which lead to social injustice. Her framework started with a consideration of the effects of capitalist modes of production on individuals. Salomon (1921/1928a) challenged Adam Smith's

suggestion that the unlimited freedom of the capitalist system led to greater wealth for all. Instead, for Salomon (1921/1928a, p. 58), economic freedoms had led to the formation of 'a new monied aristocracy' and to 'mass poverty'. Salomon did not see unemployment as a personal failing, but rather as a consequence of the overproduction crises which were an inevitable part of the economy's profit orientation. Capitalism had its strengths, for instance the liberation of the lower classes from feudal relationships. However, basic human needs were being forgotten in the drive for profit and consumption. Old injustices were being resolved at the expense of new ones. The capitalist economy was not serving all equally (Salomon, 1922a, p. 14).

Salomon's awareness of this injustice led to her proposing social legislation to rectify it. However, Salomon stopped short of supporting the abolition of private ownership of the means of economic production, instead proposing restrictions to it where it clearly failed to protect the interests of the community. While mistrustful of the ideology of the free market, she was sceptical that abolishing private property would create a classless society, since the industrial economy's division of labour inevitably produces hierarchies (Salomon, 1919a, p. 267). Salomon's political position can be contrasted with that of her contemporary Rosa Luxemburg. In '*Social reform or revolution?*', Luxemburg (1899) argued for the revolution, in contrast to her party comrades such as Bernstein who proposed transitioning to socialism via trade union-facilitated social reform. Following an extensive examination of Marx's writings, Salomon, who was repeatedly drawn to SPD politics, decided firmly against SPD membership. As a committed feminist, she could not reconcile herself to the idea of violent revolution: women would always be vulnerable to gendered violence, wherever violence, not the rule of law, determined outcomes. Instead, Salomon anticipated a form of social(ist) market economy with a

pedagogic component: re-educating the citizen, since the capitalist system had conditioned the human being to assume selfish values:

> How can we, in our child-raising, bring to bear a different fundamental attitude, when our society is one in which the economic life is based on the premise of everyone taking as much for themselves, and giving as little as possible in return?' (Salomon, 1922b, p. 20).

Her answer was thus necessarily a combination of economic and social work measures which mutually support one another. Salomon was proposing a welfare state with a social work and social pedagogy component. We do concede here that when retrospectively viewed from a twenty-first century critical position, Salomon's Weimar-period optimism displays a certain naivety. Like many of her time, she did not foresee state welfare becoming a controlling and oppressive apparatus, and in this sense, we acknowledge her position emphatically does *not* fulfil Fook's (2016) third core element of critical social work.

**Working with 'inextricably linked' personal and socio-economic problems: social justice, inequality, and power**

> Just as the doctor who wishes to heal has to become acquainted with the human organism, the causes of illness, and the means and methods of healing, whoever wishes to help must become acquainted with the causes of distress and the means and methods of helping (Salomon, 1908a, p. IV)

Salomon was Jewish, but socialised amongst Christians in her schooling; she was later baptised, in Ireland, at the outbreak of war in 1914. Her Jewishness is nonetheless discernible in her writing, particularly in her orientation on social justice ideas. Her friend Jeanette Schwerin introduced her to the Jewish ethical concept of *Tzedakah*. This

term combines two separate ideas, charity and social justice. Following this idea, there is an obligation for actions to be just actions, and thus constitute social justice. However, Salomon was painfully aware that there was no scientific argument for social justice, and many (for instance social Darwinian or Malthusian perspectives) which promoted the acceptance of injustice. There were scholarly rebuttals to such suggestions, but an obligation to social justice could not be *scientifically* substantiated, only ethically.

This makes Salomon's theory of social work ethics-based, rather than natural science-based (author's). Salomon (1912b, p. 317) saw social work as part of a wider social justice project: 'striving everywhere to bring community life in closer concordance with the demands of justice'. Social work is therefore 'not the good, not charity, but rather just actions' (Salomon, 1909a, p. 209). This understanding of social work has two consequences. Firstly, Salomon's *soziale Arbeit* was a broader notion of social work than the modern Anglo-Saxon sense of the term suggests, overlapping with much welfare: everything which protects social justice in the community, so to say (author's). Secondly it meant that Salomon's campaigning for social legislation was part of her social work, not something separate to it. An example of Salomon's activism was her advocacy for workplace legislation giving extra protection to expectant and nursing mothers. While liberal approaches might insist on women having equal rights and protection to men, Salomon stressed the importance of additional protection 'against the excessive power of the strong' (Salomon, 1909b, p. 37). In her insistence on women receiving additional rights and protection, Salomon departed from the English liberal feminist position, for instance as represented by Beatrice Webb who was against additional maternity protection (author's). Salomon saw 'equal rights for unequals' as only achievable by 'unequal laws' protecting different members of society differently (Salomon, 1902a, p. 725).

**Salomon's sensitivity to and interest in forms of oppression**

We now turn to investigate Salomon's practice. One of its key features is her sensitivity regarding oppression. First, therefore, her heightened awareness of individual and societal oppression shall be contextualised with a sketch of her interrelated personal and professional experiences of the mechanisms of oppression in three particular areas: social class, gender and race/ethnicity/religion.

Salomon was the daughter of a Berlin leather trader and she enjoyed a middle-class upbringing. Following school, she volunteered with a private welfare agency, becoming acquainted with the living conditions of the poor during her house visits. This made her mindful of her material privilege, and the contrast between the circumstances of the wealthy and the poor.

Salomon was aware poverty impacted on men and women differently: it was a gendered poverty. Social class and gender were tied oppressions (Salomon, 1900; 1902ba; 1909a, 1911). Middle class women were denied the right to work, while women from the property-less classes were forced to endure long, unhealthy, underpaid factory shifts. Speaking of the interrelationship of the women's and workers' movements, she noted how both are responses to oppressions:

> Each one attempts to break the bondage that has arisen from economic dependency: the dependency on husband and family in the one case, and the dependency on the entrepreneur and capitalist in the other. (Salomon, 1900, p. 213)

Salomon campaigned for women's issues throughout her life. Speaking of social workers' insights here she noted:

> They learnt to recognise that our laws do not protect the woman effectively from the brutality of the man; that other laws punish the

> woman alone, or make her responsible for a shared guilt, where the equally guilty man walks free. They learnt about laws, which prevent the woman from establishing rights in carrying out her profession, and about laws which deeply humiliate the woman and rob her of her human dignity. (Salomon, 1912a, p. 120)

Salomon's social work was thus an early feminist social work, anticipating a movement that progressed over the century to come (Dominelli, 2002). Indeed, Salomon almost saw social work and the feminist movement as two sides of the same coin. The feminist would be naturally interested in social work due to the occupation's concerns with the realities of family life, and of gendered biographies; the social worker would, in turn, instinctively pick up a feminist attitude and be led to questions of women's rights, in the parlance of the time, the 'woman question':

> Ultimately, social work is necessary for women's movement adherents, because the distress of women which it addresses is tied with a thousand threads to *general societal distress*: it arises from it, and can only be tackled together with it. The woman question cannot be separated from other parts of the social question, and each answer to the woman question also sheds light on other social abuses. (Salomon, 1912a, p. 125; *italics in original*)

Salomon's ties to first wave feminism is perhaps a reason for her work's peculiar underappreciation in Germany. German critical social work's roots go back to the 1968 movements, but the second wave feminists distanced themselves from the first wave, whose politics and activities were often portrayed as middle-class conservatism. Salomon's predecessors in German nineteenth century women's social welfare were less progressive than her, and were willing to promote the caring 'motherliness' of their

charitable activities (in German, *geistige Mütterlichkeit*; see Schrader-Breymann, 1868/1962), often in a subservient relationship to male practitioners/theorists such as Fröbel (1826/1961). The distinct feminism of Salomon's work was overlooked, and her position misconstrued as belonging to this conservative tradition, despite her contrasting terminology and ideas (Salomon, 1908b).

We are arguing that Salomon's concern with women's rights made her social work committed to combatting the 'social abuse' of gender oppression. However, while Salomon addressed many other 'social abuses' in her writing (the vulnerability of those with health problems, or children for instance), one particular cause of oppression may be additionally cited here: oppression due to one's ethnicity or religion. Salomon's socialisation, as we have noted, was in a Jewish family, and her friendship to the Jewish feminist Jeanette Schwerin made her mindful of discrimination resulting from ethnicity or religion, and how it can interact with other forms of discrimination and oppression. Salomon's own experience of anti-Semitism within the women's movement would have made her painfully aware of such issues in society: in 1920 she resigned from her post on the management board of the Federation of German Women's Associations on account of the rise in antisemitism and nationalism in the conservative women's movement. In today's language, Salomon's understanding of the interaction of different oppressions – social class, gender, race – can be described in terms of intersectionality. The complexity of clients' situations, in terms of multicausality, became for her a feature of social work itself.

**Salomon's social work practice: 'Emancipatory forms of analysis and action'**

Salomon's approach to practice is captured well by Fook's (2016, p. 6) phrase 'emancipatory forms of analysis and action', and we now turn to the 'action' of her

social work. The starting point for work with individuals and families was social diagnosis (Salomon, 1926a). This was to include information on the social environment, personal experiences, hopes, life plans, and attitudes of the client. It was to reflect the client's life, but also had to be non-judgemental. Salomon was always mindful of the danger of the social worker's own social background biasing their perspective. Acknowledging the role of interpretation in social diagnosis, Salomon cultivated a healthy scepticism regarding conventional judgements of the everyday. Generalisations were only common hypotheses – perhaps useful, but always to be critically questioned. The wish to have one's own initial assessment confirmed should not be allowed to distort one's own judgement. The social worker's greatest asset was their reflective competence, their criticality:

> The only way to proceed, is to train the welfare worker so that they develop an understanding of their own biases as such, so that they can appraise their own attitudes correctly, and in doing so avoid the danger of assessing certain facts too strongly, and others too mildly. (Salomon, 1926a, p. 16)

Support planning processes require empathy of the highest order:

> The ability to understand and to empathise with others is indispensable, because only in this way does that tact and that understanding develop, which is essential for a helping interaction with people. (Salomon, 1917, p. 266)

The invasiveness into the personal matters of another human being can only succeed if the social worker approaches the other as an equal, demonstrating an appreciation of their life conditions. Lay workers may believe to be able to counsel someone in personal matters after only one or two meetings, but Salomon considered this a misjudgement of human

nature. Only after trust has been gained through offering concrete support could meaningful counselling take place.

Salomon understood the relationship between helper and client as that between two subjects. She rejected the reification of human beings (Salomon, 1928a, p. 7). Salomon saw assistance as designed to support clients' development. This also had a psychological component: some people need more self-confidence, others, in contrast, need to improve their capacity to be self-critical. Alongside material difficulties, emotional states are triggers for neediness in families, since an 'undercurrent' of love as well as hate is present 'in all blood relations' (Salomon, 1926a, p. 24).

> The antagonisms which one sometimes finds in a family arise not so much from profound differences, but rather from the conviction that there should actually be no differences at all. (Salomon, 1926a, p. 24)

Salomon (1930c, p. 8) saw practice as being about enabling the client to acquire what she considered collective 'goods and values': health, 'strength', education, and happiness.

> The purpose of social work is to make these (goods and) values accessible to those people who are unable to appropriate them alone, or unable to pick them up from universal state measures and facilities. (Salomon, 1930c, p. 8)

Salomon acknowledged that social workers are in a position of power in relation to their clients, and that there was a risk of abuse of this power. She cautioned against the danger of the social worker perceiving the client's weaknesses and coming to a moralistic judgement on the basis of them. 'The connection between culpability and fate, and of culpability and need, is often close, but is often so unfathomable that one should best refrain from passing judgement (…)' (Salomon, 1922b, p. 19). The client has the right to decline

help, for that which others consider need may be seen by the client simply as a different way of life.

**Social work, social change and internationalism**

> Social work is based on the premise that the collectivity must take responsibility for its weaker members. And the collectivity bears culpability for all injustice, selfishness and inconsideration that it has tolerated in the social struggle. (Salomon, 1930b, p. 532)

Salomon saw the growth of the social work profession as part of a broader project: of social progress to a better society, in which the vulnerable are protected and supported more comprehensively. The historical context for her work was the early twentieth century, a period in which social legislation multiplied and German welfare shifted from private charity to a public state concern. Despite the conservative and nationalistic undercurrents of the period, it was, at least until the end of the 1920s, a fertile period for progressivism. As a social reformer, Salomon understood the key role of vibrant social movements in bringing about new laws. As an example of this, she noted how Weimar Germany's comprehensive child welfare legislation's passage through parliament was a direct consequence of women's entrance into the political arena (in English, Salomon, 1922/2004c, p.155).

Salomon's attendance at international conferences, and her international network of friends, allowed her to gain insights into why social work took a different form everywhere it was found. Salomon (1932) accounts for this in terms of the link between countries' cultural values and social policy histories, for instance with the example of England's traditions of liberalism and self-reliance restricting the early twentieth-

century growth of its welfare and social work. Alongside such short sketchy analyses, she also conducted systematic and detailed international studies, notably her English-language sociological survey of international social work education (Salomon, 1937). Her understanding of the dynamic links between a country's social policy, social movements, and social work academic training thus anticipates Walter Lorenz's (2006) 'critical European social work'.

For Salomon, social welfare and social work were international projects. Her writing is prescient in foreseeing borderless welfare and the globally interrelated social problems of today:

> It is in its nature, its motives, that (welfare) cannot fundamentally be felt bound by the borders of nations. … For we need assistance for the national comrades who are temporarily or permanently living abroad. And this leads to an organisation of welfare which commits peoples and states to reciprocity. … We ultimately also have an interest that other countries each develop an ordered care system. For unchecked distress brings epidemics and dangers, that will in some way spread from one country to another. (Salomon, 1928b, p. 495–496)

Salomon (1930b) actively attended the 1928 Paris conference and subsequently published a paper marking the moment when national social professions began to converge into a single, global one.

> The world has become smaller. The achievements of technology have changed it. People and goods have become more mobile. International relations issues have developed, which our ancestors, with their more narrowly limited living environments, did not know. … All international gatherings and associations for poor relief and social welfare have, as

> their basis, the regulation of the mutual support entitlements between countries, the knowledge exchange to support better social work methods, shared support of the measures to prevent emergencies (…) and the setting up of peaceful relations between the social workers of different peoples. (Salomon, 1930b, p. 531–532)

Acknowledging the internationality of social work leads to a consideration of its role in the international peace movement. Salomon related the 'social peace' within a country to the peace between nations. This 'social peace' was tied to the robust social welfare and social work system of the country:

> The peace between the peoples can only be secured when, within each country, social peace is guaranteed. Governments, which are unable to manage the social struggles in their own country, shall always be inclined to divert attention instead towards foreign relations and developments; for this reason, friends of peace in all countries have to give their attention to social work (Salomon, 1928c, p. 2)

The roots of twenty-first century social work's response to such diverse issues as globalisation, trade justice, and armed conflict can all be found in Salomon's work. In addition to claiming she was a pioneer of critical social work, we are thus arguing her international interests made her a pioneer in international social work as well.

## Conclusions

Acknowledging our historical roots and the complex, fluid and cyclical aspects of social work development enables us to build on the work of our forebears and identify connections, correspondences and progression within the social work profession. This overview, collecting Salomon's ideas from across her extensive corpus of writing,

demonstrates how her thinking stands up as an early self-contained theory. Salomon outlined coherent explanations for the causes of social problems, and proposed a valued-based theoretical framework for social work practice addressing them. A mindfulness of the structural dimensions of this work, of the real oppression individuals faced, of the political dimensions of practice, and of the ways in which clients could be empowered and their life circumstances changed, characterises her work. And it is these features, which place her still modern-looking theory and relationship-based practice firmly in the critical tradition.

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