

Journal of Social Intervention: Theory and Practice –
2012 – Volume 21, Issue 4, pp. 89–94
URN:NBN:NL:UI:10-1-113935

ISSN: 1876-8830

URL: <http://www.journalsi.org>

Publisher: Igitur publishing, in cooperation
with Utrecht University of

Applied Sciences, Faculty of Society and Law

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Adriane Feustel (2011). **Das Konzept des Sozialen im
Werk Alice Salomons**. Berlin: Metropol,
296 p., €19,00.

ISBN: 978-3-86331-029-5

SOCIAL WORKER ALICE SALOMON AS PIONEER OF CRITICAL SOCIAL SCIENCES

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It is often argued that social workers and those involved in social work education should take the history of their profession more seriously. This is easier said than done, however. How exactly could contemporary practices benefit from knowing more about the pioneers and early theorists? This book about Alice Salomon (1872–1948), the founder and for many years the director

of the first German school for social work is an excellent example. Adriane Feustel shows how early social work training in Germany (and in many other countries, since Salomon's international influence was huge) was based on the conviction that society can only be understood through a combination of theoretical knowledge and practical intervention. In this review, I will discuss the

lessons that 21st-century social work can draw from this past.

Feustel is an historian and archivist who looks after the archives at the Alice Salomon Schule in Berlin and who has published and annotated the collected works of Alice Salomon in several volumes. With her intimate knowledge of Salomon's life and work, Feustel explores the connection between Salomon's life and work. This approach corresponds neatly with Salomon's own intellectual conviction that the theory and practice of social commitment exist in close interaction. The target readership for this book are German-reading students and scholars of social work. The book's three themes are particularly relevant for social work in the 21st century. First, the book addresses the cross-over between class, race and gender in the life of Alice Salomon and in her conception of social work. Secondly, Feustel explains the innovative role played by Alice Salomon in the new social sciences of her time because she explored the idea that the practice of social work constitutes a source of knowledge about "the social". In that sense Feustel provides a "pre-history" of "reflective practitioner" which will be very valuable for those interested in practice-research and what is known as new materialism. Last but not least, the book shows how to reconstruct insights that have been excluded from accepted wisdom in professional social work as a result of the vicious and racist regime.

Feustel's study is divided into three parts. The first eight chapters trace the different periods of Salomon's life, work and writing. Alice Salomon was born into a liberal and assimilated Jewish bourgeois family in Berlin and in 1908 she converted to Protestantism. Feustel describes Salomon's repeated references to the Jewish concept of *Tzedekaa*, which combines charity with justice and explains how this religious background remained important in her life. The book also shows how it is impossible to understand Salomon without considering her deep involvement in the German women's movement. All her life, Salomon argued for women's emancipation, and training for social work in her eyes provided a crucial road to a socially relevant future for women. For Salomon, society was shaped through the work of its members, and as such all "work" was an intervention in and a contribution to social relations. Without work, women would never become full members of society. In that sense, all work was social work, and without work women's emancipation would not be possible. Other chapters show how Salomon's international contacts inspired others and herself to think about the social as a transnational domain, and this served as a basis for her choices in the many political conflicts that occurred in Imperial Germany prior to 1918 and during the Weimar Republic that followed. The moving chapters about her persecution by and flight from the Nazi regime tell not only of the personal tragedy of a woman compelled to run for her life at

the age of over 60, who was robbed of her income and possessions, and forced to live in poverty and loneliness as a refugee in the US, but also of the writing and research that came to a halt as a result of Nazism. Salomon had instigated a huge project on the future form of family life in Germany. Social workers, women economists, women doctors, teachers and some male university colleagues from all over Germany were working together on this project, but in 1933 it was cancelled. Feustel compares this project with the much more famous 1936 study by Erich Fromm and other members of the *Frankfurter Schule* on *Authority and Family* (1936). She states that Salomon's project constituted the "first major research project in social work and in gender studies" (p. 150). Salomon was committed to the idea that the German women's movement should not only take account of discoveries made by researchers in other countries, but also that German women should develop social and political alternatives by conducting research themselves. With this argument Feustel supports the idea that schools of social work were an intellectual safe haven for "women's studie *savant la lettre*", an argument that Waaldijk (1996) has used in favour of women's history in Dutch social work education in her dissertation.

The second part of the book *Verdrängen und Erinnern* (Suppress and Remember) deals with the fate of Alice Salomon's intellectual heritage. Anti-Semitic propaganda, together

with the cowardice displayed by her institution and many of her colleagues, resulted in a vacuum around her work within years after 1933. After 1945, Salomon's rehabilitation initially took the form of remembering her as a victim of persecution, while her work went largely overlooked. This changed in the 1970s. Feustel shows that one of the problems that Salomon scholars face is reading texts on social work that were written 100 years ago. She reflects on the old-fashioned, seemingly "elitist" and often "irritating" character of Salomon's writing. Feustel considers the distance that separates modern readers from the 1910s and 1920s, but she refrains from restoring Salomon's intellectual heritage by neglecting the style. Feustel shows that Salomon was also "irritating" to her contemporaries, because she did not make the arguments that were expected of a social scientist and of women writers, and neither did she conform to the stylistic expectations of the day. Salomon was much more factual, empirical and comparative than other German social scientists and *Lebensphilosophen* of her period. She advocated empirical studies, like those conducted by Booth and Webb (1889) on poverty in London. In most of her texts, Salomon included references to the specific and practical political stances that she and her readers would have to take. For Salomon, "academic distance" and scientific "objectivity" were not priorities. For her, writing about a social problem meant reflecting on what could be done and what should

be done. She argued for full and personal commitment to improving social life, she used words like *love* to describe such a commitment and in Feustel's term to *eroticize* the social. For Salomon, social workers who intervene in the lives of socially threatened fellow human beings had to expect the deepest personal gratification from their work. Feustel paraphrases Salomon: a "good heart was not enough for good social work", but she was adamant that without a good heart, social work was utterly impossible (p. 103). Feustel contends that Salomon was crossing boundaries here, and that her writing was more personal and more political than her contemporaries would have expected from an author writing about social issues. Feustel also suggests that this approach could be a lesson that social workers may still want to follow.

In the third part of her book, Feustel concludes that Alice Salomon provided a new and innovative answer to the question of how we can know about the social. She places this pioneer of social work in the context of the rise of social sciences. Employing concise comparisons with sociological texts from the turn of the century, Feustel shows how Alice Salomon was struggling with the same questions, but arrived at different conclusions to those of her canonized social science contemporaries. Just like other pioneer social scientists of her generation, Salomon was convinced that "knowing" about the social differed from "knowing" about the natural

world because the "knowers" were themselves part of the social: involved and responsible for creating their own social connections. But while for many sociologists this meant that the social scientist had to abstract from messy details of social life in order to gain real insight, for Salomon the priority was to explore this involvement and social responsibility. Alice Salomon applauded British social research by Charles Booth and Beatrice Webb on poverty as examples of involved empirical studies. For her, women involved in social work had a crucial role to play in this new form of scholarship relating to the social: when well-educated in conducting research they could combine theoretical insights with "intime Kenntnis der Entwicklung und der Lage der Industrie, der Lebensbedingungen der Arbeiter, der Methoden und Erfolge der Berufsorganisationen" (intimate knowledge of the development and the situation of industry, the living conditions of workers and the methods and successes of labour unions). For Salomon, working as a *Sozialarbeiter* with those who were socially weak, threatened or excluded as anti-social, was the ultimate road to knowledge about the social. In her eyes, social work meant acquiring knowledge, helping people and solving social problems meant understanding causes of social problems.

With this approach, Feustel rehabilitates Salomon as an innovative intellectual, who can be ranked among the pioneers of critical social sciences. Her ideas would seem to be

of value to social workers who are inspired by gender studies specialists who turn to *materiality* and the *affectivity* of producing knowledge (Ahmed, 1998; Braidotti, 2002) and authors that study “practices” as a basis for knowledge (Mak, 2012; Mol, 2006). At the same time, Feustel’s book is a very down-to-earth description of curriculum design, the importance of gender, class and “race” as sources of inspiration for social work, research projects for and by social workers, international cooperation and the political struggles of German social workers in the first half of the 20th century. For me the value of this book lies in this combination of ingredients. The study is of particular interest for those in social work who advocate practice-oriented research by social workers, knowledge production by “reflective practitioners” (Schön, 1983) and the break-down of barriers between theory and practice in social work (Schilder, 2013; Van der Laan, 1995; Van Ewijk, 2011) and some professors (*lectors*) appointed at professional training colleges in the Netherlands such as Kwakman and Dijkstra. The example of Alice Salomon as elaborated by Adriane Feustel demonstrates that such approaches can benefit from diversity-based practices as well as from transnational exchange. The book therefore deserves readers beyond the German-speaking community. Although contemporary scholarship from Anglo-Saxon contexts is taken into consideration (Walzer), references to French scholarship on “the social” are limited. This reviewer would have enjoyed more specific

references to Foucault, Donzelot and Deleuze, whose work on “the social” has been so crucial in the move to “materialism” and “affectivity”. But this is a minor point and I am convinced that this book is so clear and rich that it will invite its readers to explore these connections for themselves. Most of all, I think the book will be helpful for those teaching and involved in curriculum design for social professions: it constitutes a spirited defence of practical work in education for social professions – not only because practical assignments make for better professionals, but also because practices of intervention in the social result in “better knowledge” about the social.

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