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ARTICLE

Lights and shadows of social work under Franco's dictatorship (Spain, 1939-1975): a story yet to be told

Luces y sombras del trabajo social en la dictadura franquista (España, 1939-1975): una historia aún por contar

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Abstract

The differences between Franco's dictatorship (Spain, 1939-1975) and those that, like Chile's (1973-1990), ravaged Latin America in the last decades of the twentieth century, are clear and numerous. Fifty years ago, during the coup d'état in Chile, the long-lasting Spanish dictatorship was already immersed in a process of disintegration that culminated in the natural death of the dictator in 1975 and the beginning of the democratic transition. However, both dictatorships consolidated their power through brutal political repression and have gained international notoriety in recent decades with the revelation of the practice of stealing

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babies from opposition families. However, in the literature on the history of social work in Spain we find a great silence around these issues and a narrative focused almost exclusively on the "lights" of the profession's trajectory (milestones, achievements and aspirations). While this approach is understandable given the historical context in which social work had to develop amidst many difficulties in the country, and from "the spirit of the transition", this article will argue that it is essential, today, to look back and also investigate the "shadows" and nooks and crannies of the history of this profession. Exploring these shadows will reveal episodes of which we may not be proud, but also stories of courageous resistance. Most importantly, it will help social work in Spain to know itself better (including its dangerous potential) and to take its place in the processes of recovery of historical memory and reconciliation, both internally and in the service of society, in accordance with its ethical commitment to human rights and social justice.

Resumen

Las diferencias entre la dictadura franquista (España, 1939-1975) y aquellas que, como la de Chile (1973-1990), asolaron América latina en las últimas décadas del siglo XX, son claras y numerosas. Hace 50 años, durante el golpe de Estado en Chile, la prolongada dictadura española ya estaba inmersa en un proceso de desintegración que culminó con la muerte natural del dictador en 1975 y el inicio de la transición democrática. Sin embargo, ambas dictaduras consolidaron su poder mediante una brutal represión política y han ganado notoriedad internacional en las últimas décadas al desvelarse la práctica de robo de bebés a familias opositoras. No obstante, en la literatura sobre la historia del trabajo social en España encontramos un gran silencio en torno a estas temáticas y una narrativa centrada de manera casi exclusiva en las "luces" de la trayectoria de la profesión (hitos, logros y aspiraciones). Si bien este enfoque se entiende atendiendo al contexto histórico en el que tuvo que desarrollarse entre muchas dificultades el trabajo social en el país, y desde "el espíritu de la transición", este artículo defenderá que se vuelve fundamental, al día de hoy, volver la vista atrás e investigar también "las sombras" y recovecos de la historia de esta profesión. Explorar estas sombras develará episodios de los que no estaremos orgullosos/as, pero también historias de valiente resistencia. Más importante todavía, ayudará al trabajo social en España a conocerse mejor (incluido su peligroso potencial) y a ocupar su lugar en los procesos de recuperación de la memoria histórica y reconciliación, tanto de puertas adentro como al servicio de la sociedad, de acuerdo con su compromiso ético con los derechos humanos y la justicia social.

Palabras Clave: *Trabajo Social; historia; franquismo; España; derechos humanos*

Introduction

The differences between Franco's dictatorship and the dictatorships that, like that of Chile (1973-1990), ravaged Latin America in the second half of the 20th century are evident and numerous. Even at the time the coup d'état was taking place in Chile, the long Spanish dictatorship was already in a process of disintegration, with the natural death of the dictator in 1975 paving the way for the transition to democracy. There are major differences in terms of the ideology of the regime (both are extreme right-wing, but fascist - National Catholic in the Spanish case, and aligned with a neoliberal doctrine in the Chilean case), international connections, social policy, etc. Nevertheless, both dictatorships were entrenched in ferocious political repression, resulting in numerous victims of political imprisonment, torture, disappearances and political exile. Both dictatorships have also become world-renowned in recent decades for the theft of babies from anti-regime families for appropriation by pro-regime families (Amnesty International, 2021; Commission of Inquiry, 2018).

Another important aspect in common is that, in both countries, the perpetrators of repression have been able to evade accountability for their crimes under the cover of amnesty laws and pacts of silence. Although these pacts fulfilled the short-term function of facilitating democratic transitions, their effects continue to rarify social coexistence in both countries, and generate a climate of "helplessness, desolation and isolation" for the victims (Muñoz and Campana, 2023, p. 127), which prevents a complete healing of the invisible division in society between those who supported and those who did not support the dictatorships (between "victors and vanquished") and the collective traumas resulting from the violence of both dictatorships.

In the Spanish context, as we shall see, some of these barriers to historical memory and reconciliation seem even more difficult to overcome, even today. In both countries, and although it is not an easy task, social work as a human rights profession has had and continues to have much to say and contribute to the processes of recovering historical memory and reconciliation. However, the literature on the experiences and positions of social workers in Spain regarding the human rights violations that took place in the country during the Franco dictatorship (1939-1975), in the field of social work, is practically non-existent. Research and reflection on this "silence" and what lies behind it is fundamental, and can lead to a series of lessons and conclusions, some of which are shared below.

Some key facts about Franco's dictatorship

Spain was ruled between 1939 and 1975 by Franco's dictatorship. In 1936, a bloc of Spanish army generals supported by nationalist and highly conservative groups and parties staged a coup d'état against the government of the Second Spanish Republic, which triggered a three-year civil war. In 1939, the rebels, who called themselves the "national side", came to power after winning the civil war, and General Francisco Franco was invested as caudillo - supreme leader - of the dictatorial government. With the establishment of the Franco dictatorship, power and government institutions were divided among the three pillars of the regime: the army, the Catholic Church and the single party (the Falange) (Moradiellos, 2000).

As noted in Martínez-Herrero (2023), the Spanish Civil War was a source of division and strong passions and reactions, not only within the wounded society of the country, but also in the international context. In the international context, marked by the advance of fascism and in which the Second World War was being forged, the atrocities committed by both sides during the civil war and on "the defeated", once Franco had taken power, were a prelude to the horrors that the Second World War would bring.

From 1939 to the 1960s, Spain was immersed in a dark period marked by devastation and poverty, a consequence of the war, autarchy (international isolation), political repression and the indoctrination of the population around the national-Catholic ideology promulgated by the regime. To a large extent, on the ideological level, there was "a return to the past" (Sanz-Cintora, 2001, p.12) with the reimposition of traditional values that underpinned national Catholicism in the face of the progressive currents of thought (liberal, democratic, socialist, communist, etc.) that were in full swing during the Second Republic. However, it is important to note that, in addition, political repression incorporated elements (eugenic, pseudo-scientific) of the "more avant-garde" fascism of the time, if we can call it that. As we shall see, both ideologies, national-Catholicism and fascism, led to abuses and crimes against families identified as political enemies of the regime, as well as those who deviated morally from it.

At the end of the 1950s, the problems and imbalances of the Spanish economy led the dictatorial government to adopt, not without reluctance, developmentalist policies (framed in the Stabilisation Plan of 1959) which promoted, during the 1960s, a break with the economic and cultural autarchy of the previous period, in favour of the stabilisation and liberalisation of the national economy. Even though rights and freedoms continued

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to be restricted, the process resulted in intense socio-demographic changes, especially migration to the cities and abroad, and made possible the influx of cultural and intellectual influences from abroad.

The 1970s marked the transition from dictatorship to democracy around the natural death of the dictator Francisco Franco in 1975, amidst a climate of uncertainty and violence on the part of different groups, but in which citizen mobilisation and hope for change also took centre stage. The main trigger for the change in the political system was Franco's death, and state institutions, such as political parties and the Crown, played key roles in the transition. However, by then the dictatorship was already in crisis and had lost much of its power and legitimacy by the mid-1960s, when opposition movements and protests from a large part of Spanish society spread widely and began to exert great social pressure. Thus, the efforts and hopes of all these actors led to the consensus that led to the approval and ratification of the Spanish Constitution of 1978, which established Spain as a (non-denominational) social and democratic state governed by the rule of law. This climate of social mobilisation, enthusiasm for the future, and consensus came to be known as "the spirit of transition".

The spirit of the transition, with its many good things, nevertheless led to the choice of an abrupt break with what was left behind, which materialised in social pacts of silence and, at the legal level, in the 1977 Amnesty Law. In force to this day, this law grants amnesty for "all acts of political intentionality, whatever their result, classified as crimes and misdemeanours" committed prior to the enactment of the law (Article 1). The amnesty covers crimes such as rebellion and sedition, expression of opinion and crimes committed by authorities, officials and law enforcement officers in connection with the investigation and prosecution of political crimes and those committed by officials and law enforcement officers against the exercise of the rights of individuals.

Despite the fact that this law was enacted with the aim of "overcoming and transcending the divisions that separated and confronted us in the past" (Congress of Deputies 1977, p.973), its controversial validity in the current historical moment represents a great barrier to historical memory, justice for the victims and reconciliation. In the international context, it represents an extraordinary and scandalous case of impunity and inconsistency with international human rights law, as has been denounced by numerous organisations, including the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

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The faces of Franco's violence

When we talk about Francoist violence, we are talking about political violence. The study of political violence has a long history and, to date, there is no complete consensus on its definition. However, a defining feature of it is its instrumental character; political violence is exercised and justified as a means to achieve political ends and changes in government systems (Herranz-Castillo, 1991). Lawrence (1970, in Herranz-Castillo, 1991, p.430) defined violence as "the kind of actions that result, or are intended to result, in serious harm to life or its material conditions". Furthermore, according to Herranz-Castillo (1991), many authors link violence to the violation of "personality" as well as of rights, duties and established social norms. As with other types of violence, political violence, the author explains, is not only exercised through physical force, but can also take psychological and latent forms (generalised fear, self-censorship, etc.). What is characteristic of political violence is that it is used consciously (although not always premeditated) "by individuals, institutions, entities, groups or parties" with the aim of achieving "the control of spaces of public power, the manipulation of decisions in all or part of the instances of government, and, ultimately, the conquest, conservation or reform of the state" (González-Calleja, 1991, in González-Madrid, 2012, p.2).

González-Madrid (2012) argues that the state has three main resources at its disposal to impose its authority: repression, social control and legal coercion. All of these were used vehemently during the Franco dictatorship, giving rise to the many faces of violence that afflicted Spanish society, marking it, as many of us believe, to this day.

Although it is not possible to estimate the exact number of victims of Franco's repression, and there are discrepancies between experts' proposals, there is no doubt that the figures have "many zeros to the right" (Lafuente, 2013, p.5). According to the figures used by the Platform for the Truth Commission (quoted in Lafuente, 2013, p.5), the balance of victims between 1936 and 1977 would include: "between 115,000 and 130,000 disappeared, 150,000 murdered, 30,000 children stolen, 2,800 mass graves throughout Spain .... half a million exiles, up to 300,000 political prisoners at the beginning of the military regime alone, and a million war dead".

González-Madrid (2007) explained that the main instrument for physical repression by Franco's regime was military justice, within the legal framework of the "state of war", the declaration of which was maintained from the beginning of the civil war (1933-1936) until 1948, under the pretext, in the post-war period, of combating guerri-

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lla warfare. However, the author points out that although the physical repression was organised "from above" by the military, it was only possible thanks to the broad public collaboration, the result of fear and sufficiently broad social support to guarantee the consolidation and long-term survival of the regime.

Franco's dictatorship also established the necessary legislative mechanisms to guarantee the economic plundering and labour exclusion of "the defeated", so that being prosecuted as an enemy of the regime resulted in "civil death, the ruin of the accused and his/her family" (González-Madrid, 2007, p.10). To the physical (executions, disappearances, torture, imprisonment, forced exile, etc.), economic and social repression suffered by men and women considered enemies of the regime, known as "the Reds", was added an even more cruel plundering: the appropriation of their sons and daughters by the state.

In Martínez-Herrero (2020; 2023) I provide more details on the complex legislative and power networks that made possible the abduction, between 1940 and 1954, of around 300,000 children from families considered opposed to the Franco regime (Amnesty International, 2021) for their proper guardianship and re-education in adoptive families sympathetic to it and in Catholic institutions. These networks would eventually lead to baby-stealing networks in hospitals and maternity homes throughout Spain, for economic and social influence reasons, which would remain active until the end of the 1980s, and whose scope continues to be revealed, among other difficulties, to this day.

Beyond the numbers, the stories of the fate and abuse suffered by many of these children, stolen for political reasons, reflect the cruel consequences for both the families and the child victims of this crime against humanity (defined as such in international law and in article 607 of the Spanish Penal Code – Organic Law of the Code Penal of 1995). Works such as 'Nos Encargamos de Todo' (González-de-Tena, 2014), "The Lost Children of Francoism" (Vinyes et al., 2003) or "The Republican Children" (Pons-Prades, 2005), bring us closer to the mechanisms that made them possible and to the experiences of their protagonists.

This brings us to a key theme of this article: the role of social welfare in Franco's dictatorship. Parallel to the most violent repressive policies, Franco's dictatorship developed "its own social and welfare policy with the intention of taking advantage of the tremendous social inequality that prevailed in order to broaden its social base and attract the favor of the disaffected population" (González-Madrid, 2012, p. 28). In this context,

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poverty relief was left in the hands of organisations linked to the Catholic Church and the regime's single party.

It is worth highlighting the role of Auxilio Social, an originally secular and local organisation (Valladolid), inspired by similar initiatives in Nazi Germany, which ended up being integrated into the Women's Section of the regime's party, spreading throughout Spain and taking on a particularly important role in the functions of social assistance, indoctrination and propaganda for Franco's regime. Its large Central Propaganda Office was charged with showing "Franco's generosity towards the defeated", particularly with the education and protection of children, "the hope of the New Spain" (Armengou and Belis, 2002).

While in Nazi Germany the link between social assistance and the national fascist project revolved around the concept of race, in the Spanish case it revolved around the "purity of the Spaniard", which had less to do with physical traits than with a national, political, social and cultural identity. A purity that could only be achieved by combating communism, modernity and democracy, as well as the mental degeneration suffered by those who militated for such ideals or were influenced by them in the family (González-Duro, 2008). The actions of Auxilio Social, along with others such as those of the social visitors and the Women's Section, made up the more fascistic social assistance of Francoism, presented as an organised and rational national project that sought to differentiate itself from traditional charity and beneficence.

However, all these currents coexisted and carried out tasks to help the neediest in a Francoist Spain in which for decades it was very difficult to differentiate the roles of experts, religious men and women and apostolic volunteers, all of them with little or no training for the tasks they faced, and highly influenced by the prevailing Catholic doctrine (Acero et al., 2010). It is essential to bear in mind that it is in this chaotic and strongly ideological context, and in order to respond to it, that schools of social work emerged and expanded in Spain.

History of social work in spain

Las luces[2], or what we know about the history of social work[3] in Spain

A review of the more generalised literature on the history of social work in the country leads to the conclusion that it focuses on the progress of social work as a scientific discipline and profession, concentrating on the “lights” and victories of the struggle of a profession committed to the advancement of rights and democracy, but without explicitly linking (with rare exceptions and some interesting approaches) social work with Franco’s repression or exploring in depth its possible complicity.

The history is as follows. The birth of social work as a profession in Spain is practically unanimously linked to the opening of what is considered to be the first school of social work: the “School of Social Assistance for Women” (1932, Barcelona), inspired by a Belgian branch school and the result of the convergence of efforts of different currents of social Catholicism. This school soon had to cease its activity during the Civil War (1933-36), only to resume it later, under the name of “Training School for the Home and Women’s Social Work”. During the war and the post-war period, there was a “return to the past” in the country, and to charitable assistance marked by strict Catholic morality, which in turn slowed down the development of the new profession (Sanz-Cintora, 2001). Between 1939 and the first half of 1957 only three more schools of social work were created, two in Madrid (School of Family and Social Training of Madrid, 1939, and San Vicente de Paúl School, 1957) and two in Barcelona (School of Psychiatric Social Visitors, 1953, and School of Male Social Education, 1955). It was not until the 1960s that there was a boom in the number of schools and an opening to visits by experts from abroad with modernising ideas (Latin American reconceptualisation and new Vatican dynamics that would change the orientation of Caritas), which allowed social work to take its next firm steps towards professionalisation (Molina-Sánchez, 1994). This exponential growth was driven by the need to cope with the new social situations (the result of internal and external migrations) resulting from the introduction of the developmentalist policies mentioned in the previous section. Between the end of 1957 and 1964 alone, 27 new schools of social work were created, and by 1970 there were already 42, mostly promoted by orders and movements of the Catholic Church (Sanz-Cintora, 2001; De-la-Red and Brezmes, 2009).

[2] The terms ‘lights’ and ‘shadows’ are taken from Barbero and Feu (2016), who use them in their analysis of the origins of the Barcelona School, founded in 1932.

[3] Although this article makes general reference to the profession of social work, it is important to note that the most common name for the profession we know today as “social work” in Spain was “social assistance” until the 1980s (its professionals being known as social workers). Debates that proposed replacing this terminology with the terms “social work” and “social worker” had been gaining momentum since the late 1960s, but the definitive change of name came about with the incorporation, from the early 1980s, of social work studies into the university sphere, through the University Schools of Social Work.

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As we have seen, the period surrounding and following the death of the dictator (1975) was characterised by a context of uncertainty and political instability, but also by the illusion for the future and unprecedented efforts of consensus among the political spectrum and from civil society, which allowed the establishment of Spanish democracy. Gil-Parejo (2013, p.141) gave an account of how social work was no stranger to this transition:

> *With Franco's death (...) Spanish society is preparing for a change of regime after nearly 40 years of dictatorship. It is time to clear up doubts and insecurities. Continuity, reformism and revolution will be the axes along which Spanish society will move in these years. Ideological coordinates that would have their translation in the field of Social Work (...) Trends that, in spite of manifesting themselves antagonistically on many occasions, complemented each other and collaborated in the different actions and demands of the profession: the classification of studies, the professional association, the defence of the profession against professional intrusion, etc.*

The tensions and illusions of the time are also reflected, for example, in the testimonies of students from the first promotions of social workers in Las Palmas (Escuela Nuestra Señora del Pino de las Palmas, founded in 1963), dependent on the ecclesiastical hierarchy but run by the Xaverian nuns, who managed to introduce progressive and transformative ideas in the training of the social workers (despite receiving instructions against this from their superiors in the Church). In the words of one of those first students:

> *The atmosphere was absolutely political. My political concerns came together with what I was studying, with the people I knew, with the Christian groups of that time that had a glorious moment (...) It allowed you to get out of an asphyxiating environment. It was a beautiful time because we had the illusion that something was going to change (...) (Siendo, 2018, p.16).*

The Spanish Constitution of 1978 was a major milestone in the history of the country, and also in the history of social work, as it established numerous social rights and a public system of social services which, together with the health, education and pension systems, formed the four "pillars" of the Spanish welfare state (Domenech, 1990). Social workers (still called social assistance at the time) would assume central roles in the implementation and development of public social services.

The following milestones in the better known history of the profession are marked by the achievement of university level for social work studies, in 1983, with the introduction of the "Diploma in Social Work" (Charfolet, 2009), the recognition, in 1990, by the Ministry of Science, of the area of knowledge of "Social Work and Social Services", belonging to law and social sciences (Vázquez, 2004), and the introduction of the Degree in Social Work, with the Convergence Process with Europe, initiated with the Bologna Declaration in 1999 (Vázquez, 2004), which sought to take advantage of the previous efforts to raise the standard and position of social work studies in Spain (Martínez-Román and Campanini, 2011).

Taking into account the socio-political context and the climate of the development of social work in Spain, it is easy to understand the tendency towards consensus, looking forward and focusing on raising the scientific and professional status of social work, which has characterised the narratives and efforts of the profession up to the present day. However, and without failing to appreciate this view and its great contributions, I consider it essential to recognise, at this historical moment, the void that exists around the beginnings and the shadows of this professional history.

The shadows, or what we don't know about the history of social work in Spain

Despite the extremely complex and turbulent context in which social work developed as a profession in Spain, we usually find a narrative of the history of the profession that considers it, to a large extent, politically committed to progress and social justice, and also very linear (continuously advancing).

Both a systematic search of academic literature and a free search of grey literature, or other online sources of information on the link between social work and the abuses of Franco's repression, proved fruitless. There seem to be hardly any sources that explicitly point to such a connection or explore in depth the role of the first schools of social work and the first promotions of social workers during the "darkest" years of the dictatorship, in the face of the most oppressive practices of the time in the field of charitable assistance and social welfare, or that analyse the persistence of continuities and ramifications of these practices over time. Some notable exceptions are the work of Molina-Sánchez (1994) and Barbero and Feu (2016).

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Molina-Sánchez (1994) analysed in her book "The Teachings of Social Work in Spain 1932-1983: A Socio-Educational Study", in great depth, the political context of the emergence of the schools of social work, as well as their affiliation, ideology, mission, organisation and evolution during this critical period. The author does not explore the more "repressive" or ethically questionable (at least from the point of view of current social work ethics) functions of the activity of these schools, or the professionals trained in them, and expresses towards the group of their promoters a "feeling of admiration for the people who dedicated their efforts in such a hostile and almost always incompetent climate" (p.132), without distinguishing between the different schools.

However, the political contextualisation of her work is pioneering and clear, and opens the door to continue "pulling the thread" and exploring these aspects in greater depth. An interesting aspect that becomes clear is how both teachers and students in schools have often been religious, so that the separation between "the church" and social work professionals has often not existed as such. Another relevant point made in this book is to highlight the influence of the social work schools of the early Franco era, despite their small number, since many of their students and founders would later go on to direct and lead the social work schools of the following decades. For example, nine of the schools founded between 1958 and 1964 were directed by nuns trained at the "San Vicente de Paul" School of Social Workers in Madrid.

Barbero and Feu (2016), for their part, have explored the unknown two-way collaboration between the Franco regime and the profession of "social welfare", delving into the career of Raül Roviralta, founder of the first school of social welfare in the country (Barcelona School), who wrote and dedicated to Franco the first Spanish book on "social welfare". This work positively highlighted the fascist influences of the proposed professional project and its powerful capacity to control social "disorder".

Also interesting is the analysis of social work dissertations (1938-1983) carried out by Acero et al. (2010), which shows the complex transition from the first dissertations, which placed the origin of family problems in "the mother's lack of religious, moral and intellectual education" (p.96) towards an understanding of structural conditioning factors. A transition, the authors point out, clearly non-linear and with enormous differences in the ideology of the dissertations throughout the period analysed.

However, despite these approaches to "the shadows" of social work history, certain uncomfortable questions remain unanswered in social work research. Prominent are

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those related to the level of knowledge and complicity of social workers, throughout the dictatorship, with the policies of indoctrination, family segregation and the theft of children and babies. It is interesting to consider that the little work done on historical memory and social work in Spain is to be found in final year studies of the last decade, and comes mostly from the concerns and initiatives of social work students, and not from those of us who are dedicated to research and should be able to perceive the signs that research in this field has to do, and a lot, with a profession that owes its duty to the promotion of human rights and social justice. On the contrary, as far as I have been able to ascertain, we in social work have not taken a position or "taken the hint" in these situations. It is essential, I believe, to become aware and ask ourselves why.

It is very likely that, in most cases, and especially during the first decades of the dictatorship, these practices were largely unknown and/or very difficult to problematise for social workers who received the extremely conservative training of the first schools, even though many of them came to develop a critical awareness in the enabling context of later periods. It is striking, for example, that Montserrat Colomer, a pioneering Catalan social worker, known for her theoretical contributions to social work and for her role as a vindicative community social worker, recounts in her memoirs (Colomer, 2009) in a fairly neutral way her practices in the Social Service of the Women's Section of the Falange (the only party of the regime).

The author refers, for example, to her bitter experience in a Falange children's home, where the children were treated with rigidity, military spirit, were educated and disciplined out of guilt for their sins and received poor food (except if there were official visits). In those practices, she explains, "the girls could only show affection to the children and try to entertain them". Regarding the origin of these children, Colomer claims not to remember where they came from, stating however that "surely they were all from poor families" (p.34). He also mentions his positive experience in a Children's Feeding Centre and Children´s Office of Social Assistance, where some social workers, most of them with pre-war qualifications, were employed.

Tying things together and with all the current information to hand, it is easier to see how many of those children interned in the cruel Childcare Center, where Montserrat Colomer did part of her internship, could have been victims of family segregation policies and how the social workers of the first school (Barcelona School, 1932) ended up working for the Women's Section of the regime's party, from which aid was granted in exchange for the adoption of the dominant ideology and the regime's major propaganda

campaigns were deployed, masking the violent repression and the origin of the devastating poverty that spread throughout the country. They thus collaborated in the task of "winning hearts and minds" and shaping the "new Spanish" at the national level.

We can also deduce that a significant number of students and social work professionals of the time, both secular and religious, will have witnessed, throughout the dictatorship, the mistreatment and abuse of children in Francoist and Catholic institutions. Some may even have been accomplices or perpetrators of the most serious human rights violations in the context of the dictatorship, such as the theft of babies. This is the case of Sister María (María Gómez Valbuena), a nun of the Daughters of Charity and social worker at the main hospital in Madrid between the early 1970s and 1984, and one of the most well-known personalities involved in illegal adoptions. She was brought to trial in 2012, but died at the age of 87 before the trial was concluded (ABC, 2012). Other social workers have been charged with similar offences (RTVE, 2018). However, this is an episode that has not yet been recognised and studied as part of the history of social work in this country.

In seeking to explain and remedy the silences and amnesias about the past of social work in Spain, we can focus on two circumstances experienced in the field of research and in professional social work organisations (related to each other and to the historical context). Firstly, the exposure to a predominant narrative of the history of social work in the country focused, almost exclusively, on the milestones and struggles won in the process of professional recognition and scientific advancement, an issue raised in the previous point. Secondly, the predominance of a search for improvement and progress focused on the future and on influences from other countries, but almost never stopping to look "within" and "back", very much in line with "the spirit of transition".

In these lines, it has become clear that the publications, including some of the most critical and contextualised ones on the history of social work in Spain, practically unanimously place the birth of social work in Spain at the time of the founding of the Barcelona school in 1932, or later. For example, Molina Sánchez (1994, p.47) stated that "Professional social work began in Barcelona in 1934 with the first promotion of professionals graduating from the recently created School of Social Work". Also, like most authors, Molina Sánchez speaks of social work as "a new profession that emerged in England as a response to the needs posed by industrial society" (p.48). Barbero and Feu (2016, p.18) situate the origin even later – at the end of the 1960s when external influence returns to the profession – stating that until then "we cannot find a body of practitioners with an internal identity and socially identified exercises worthy of the adjective 'professional'".

Under these generalised views, it is easy to dismiss as alien to the social work profession everything that happened before (classifying it as the antecedents of social work) or in the periods when circumstances forced a pause in the process of "professionalisation". Also, by clinging to the European model of the social work profession, as an officially recognised, institutionalised, secular and free profession, we can close our eyes to the role of "social workers" in the ideological practices integrated in the institutions of the Catholic Church and the dictatorial regime. However, as we have seen, such distinctions do not correspond to what happened in the complex reality of the country during the dictatorship, where the training itself was strongly politicised, even from different ideologies and with changes of orientation (Estruch and Güel, 1976), the student body could be secular or religious, and the social workers were integrated and exercised their functions both in organisations of the regime and the Catholic Church, and, above all, in later periods, in pro-democratic and opposition initiatives.

The literature on the dark histories of social work at the international level may provide some further clues.

Dark histories of social work worldwide

The "dark" histories of social work are not, unfortunately, exclusive to our country. Social work, by its very nature and its proximity to and power over the most vulnerable groups throughout the world, has demonstrated its destructive potential when it has been placed at the service of oppressive regimes and interests and has been unable or unwilling to prioritise its ethical commitment to human rights and social justice in the face of illegitimate demands. These dark histories tend to be unknown and/or little recognised by the profession at the international level, but they are receiving increasing attention as social workers understand that the recovery of historical memory, reconciliation and learning to avoid the mistakes of the past necessarily involve this exercise of self-knowledge and self-criticism within the profession. Chapman and Withers (2019), Loakimidis and Wyllie (2023), Ferguson et al, (2018) or Martínez-Herrero and Tedam (2023), compile many of these stories in which social workers have been accomplices of serious human rights violations in the service of fascist (Nazi Germany or Spain), imperialist, colonialist (abduction of indigenous children for their transformation into "white citizens" in countries such as Canada, Australia or Greenland), racist (Apartheid in South Africa) or eugenic (USA) agendas.

The study of these dark episodes in the profession requires a broad view, very focused on the socio-political contexts in which they took place and open to complexity and a non-linear understanding. That is to say, a look capable of detecting the origin, the triggers, the advances and setbacks and the ramifications of what happened, without sticking to rigid temporal and conceptual categories (open, for example, to rethinking when social work began to be considered "a profession" and to exploring the multiple roles and identities of the social worker: religious/secular, political activist, etc.). It may seem that such an analysis will result in historical narratives that are unwieldy and difficult to interpret and manage. However, the above-mentioned research shows that it is possible to analyse, understand and deal with these stories.

Ferguson et al. (2018), among others, have shown how in these dark histories, social work organisations prioritised their own interests and the advancement of their professional status under the patronage and control of states (or institutions, such as ecclesiastical ones) over their commitment to social justice. We can clearly see the analogy with what happened in social work in Spain. The authors also highlight the dangers of the recurrent quest for the depoliticisation of a profession which, as we have seen, is by nature deeply political, under the banner of scientism (capable of legitimising Darwinist and eugenic theories on how to achieve racial purity) and positivism (which rejects moral value judgements in research and intervention).

Chapman and Withers (2019) carefully analyse the socio-political contexts in which these dark histories take place, but also highlight the complexity of complicity in these abuses, showing how the perpetrators, protected by the prevailing ideology of the profession or context, often believed that by covering up, enabling or committing these practices they were contributing to a greater good, including for the victim. This aspect brings us back to the stories of the theft of children and babies in Spain for their own "salvation" and the creation of the "new Spain".

All the authors mentioned above, as well as other works, show, however, how there are also certain spaces for resistance that social workers have been able to use courageously and fruitfully, not without having to pay a high price at times. These possibilities are expanded when they have received political, historical and human rights awareness training in the profession (see Rubilar-Donoso, 2018). This is a clear difference between the professional profile of Latin American social workers, who resisted the dictatorships of the 1980s, and the social workers of the early Franco regime in Spain.

CONCLUSIONS: From the approach of the Spanish transition to that of the recovery of historical memory from a human rights perspective

Throughout this article we have seen how the literature on the history of social work in Spain, marked by the Franco dictatorship, has focused on the "lights", that is to say, on the struggles won along the path taken by the profession up to the present day. This part of the history is important and the approach is understood and valued in the historical context in which the social work profession had to develop, amidst many difficulties, in the country. We can affirm that it is a history written, for the most part, from the perspective and in the spirit of the "transition": focused on consensus, on building and looking forward.

Well then, recognising the courageous and tireless work of so many, including their political commitment, I consider it essential at this time to go a step further and dare, from a social political context that makes it easier for us, to review and enrich the story about the origins and evolution of social work in Spain, also taking into account its "shadows" and nooks and crannies, in a spirit of recovery of historical memory rooted in human rights. This review reveals new lights and shadows, episodes of which we will not be proud, but also stories of courageous resistance. Most importantly, it helps social work in Spain to know itself better (including its dangerous potential), to heal, to close stages and to take its place in the processes of recovery of historical memory and reconciliation, both internally and in the service of society, in accordance with its ethical commitment to human rights and social justice. Although this is a path with obstacles and resistance (many of them personal and emotional), history and research teach us that, without an adequate collective effort of historical memory, historical traumas and the impunity of political violence will continue to be reproduced, to a greater or lesser degree, intergenerational, and even within professions such as social work.

The example of social workers who resisted dictatorships in Latin America and continue to work openly for the recovery of historical memory, as well as the prism of human rights, can help us greatly with this exercise of self-knowledge and healing, facilitating a more objective and emotionally secure common perspective from which to work together in the reconstruction of the history of the profession in our country. Incorporating these issues in our research agendas and in the training of future social work professionals is, of course, a political exercise. However, it is not a question of "one Spain or another", one party or another, but a question of seeking justice for

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those who were victims of political violence, as well as a question of promoting truth, peace, well-being and social cohesion, not only for these people, their descendants and ascendants (as in the case of the stolen children and babies), but for Spanish society as a whole. For me this could not be more aligned with the role of social work.

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