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ARTICLE

The Social Work Collective: a reflective approach in times of dictatorship

El Colectivo de Trabajo Social: una apuesta reflexiva en tiempos de dictadura

Camila Veliz Bustamante¹

Alberto Hurtado University, Chile

Katia García Benítez

Alberto Hurtado University, Chile

Hanna Magdalena Troncoso del Rio

Alberto Hurtado University, Chile

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Abstract

The Social Work Collective was a professional group that generated an alternative space for reflection and critical action to rethink Social Work in times of civil-military dictatorship. In this article, we want to recover the experience by historical reconstruction to account for a common narrative that allows us to connect with our disciplinary past-present, through the testimonies of those who made

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¹Corresponding author: Camila Veliz, Alberto Hurtado University: cveliz@uahurtado.cl

up this Collective. Methodologically, we have approached it through testimonial interviews of its members and the analysis of secondary sources, particularly the personal archives of those involved. We have retrieved the experience of the Collective, giving an account of the scenario from which it emerges, emphasising its collective logic, its written production as a space for reflection and professional communication, as well as the way in which these elements are intertwined from the different professional trajectories. We seek to account for the way in which this group operates, whose ways of being and doing Social Work we have called “the collective of the Collective”.

Resumen

El Colectivo de Trabajo Social fue una agrupación profesional que generó un espacio alternativo de reflexión y acción crítica para repensar el Trabajo Social en tiempos de dictadura cívico militar. En este artículo, queremos recuperar la experiencia en clave de reconstrucción histórica para dar cuenta de una narrativa común que nos permita conectar con nuestro pasado-presente disciplinar, a través de testimonios de quienes conformaron este Colectivo. Metodológicamente, nos hemos aproximado a través de entrevistas testimoniales de sus integrantes y el análisis de fuentes secundarias, particularmente el archivo personal de quienes lo conformaron. Rescatamos la experiencia del Colectivo, dando cuenta del escenario desde donde emerge, enfatizando en su lógica colectiva, en su producción escrita en tanto espacio de reflexión y comunicación profesional, así como la forma en que estos elementos se entrelazan desde las diversas trayectorias profesionales. Buscamos dar cuenta de la apuesta de funcionamiento de esta agrupación, cuyas formas de ser y hacer Trabajo Social hemos denominado “lo colectivo del Colectivo”.

Palabras Clave:
*Trabajo social;
reflexión; inter-
vención social*



Presentation

Fifty years after the civil-military coup, as social workers and researchers, we consider it highly relevant to recognise the studies on history and professional memories (Queirolo et al., 2019; Queirolo and Zarate, 2020; Illanes, 2007) that invite us to reflect on the processes of professionalisation in different disciplines, and with this, to problematise particularly the role of women in these spaces. As Queirolo et al. (2019) point out, with the intention “to nourish our ‘actualities’ with remnants of the past” (p.12).

Particularly, for the case of Social Work in Chile, the works of Aguayo et al. (2018), Aylwin et al. (2004), González (2010) and Vidal (2016), among others, recover milestones, moments and processes on the history and memory of our profession, where the need to recover and revisit the reflections that have been given to this subject in the disciplinary production converges.

In the current context, marked by a neoliberal model of society and relations, as well as by a growing tendency towards negationism of recent history, we are mobilised and activated by “the imperative need to expand the records and debates on the professional memories of Social Work in order to confront the tendency to take the past for granted” (Véliz and García, 2022, p.39).

Within this framework, we would like to share our first reflections on the Social Work Collective, as a professional group that operated between 1981 and 1990. We wanted to delve deeper into this collective whose singularity lies – at least – in the convergence of professional experiences of social intervention outside the state apparatus, the periodic and systematic reflection on its own work, the questioning/ denaturalising gaze in the midst of a context of dictatorial homogenisation, and the concern for writing and documenting the work of Social Work.

These elements allow us to approach these professional experiences with the aim of understanding Social Work in the socio-political situation during the times of the civil-military dictatorship. We also wish to recover the experience in terms of historical reconstruction in order to give an account of a common narrative that allows us to connect with our disciplinary past-present, through the testimonies of those who made up this collective. For us, it represents a way of betting on a strategy of collective recognition of our disciplinary work. As Aylwin et al. (2004) point out, the “utopian dimension contained in memory as a promise, as an inexhaustible path, as a nexus that makes it



possible to link past-present in an innovative way, to re-signify one's own project, in this case that of Chilean Social Work" (p.9).

Methodological elements

Forty years after the formation of the Social Work Collective, we are preparing ourselves for a dialogue with time, its protagonists and collaborators, establishing an alliance for the production of memory that contributes to situating in the present time and projecting possible futures for the processes of Social Work in terms of its training and profession.

This article is part of a project that aims to study memory from a disciplinary/professional framework, understanding it "as a means of thinking and interpreting history, society and cultures through the recording of the experience of the protagonists" (Thompson, 2004 in Cornejo, 2018, p.31). Thus, the aim is to collect the experience of this professional collective, understanding that "exploring memory allows us to enter into past times that are narrated from the present" (Cornejo, 2018, p.32); narratives of professional practice that "is [are] nothing other than a future that is already latent in a present" (Zúñiga, 1997 in Sánchez, 2018, p.187).

Methodologically, we have approached the experience of the Collective through testimonial interviews and the work of secondary sources.

To date, we have conducted individual interviews with five members of the Collective, *the collectives*, a colloquial way of calling them, in order to recover their testimonies. We understand the testimonies as:

a personal, relational and historically situated narrative, in which the subjective positions and dispositions of the person giving the testimony, the constructed meanings, their elaborations and difficulties, as well as the listening scenarios and the social contexts of openness, decibility or occlusion that make them possible, take centre stage (Lampasona, 2023, p.4).

In coherence, a flexible guideline was used that was organised according to the following topics: motivations and purpose of their participation, conceptual approaches from which they positioned themselves, the process of production and dissemination of the journal *Apuntes de Trabajo Social*, and lessons learned from the experience. In order to comply with ethical safeguards, informed consent forms were used².

² The research project and its respective instruments were submitted for evaluation to the Ethics Committee of the Universidad Alberto Hurtado.

With regard to the analysis of secondary sources, we have worked with documents from the personal archives of the collectives. In this article, specifically, we incorporate contents and reflections found in the document “ Social Work Collective: A meeting space for Social Work in Chile, autumn 1985”. Considering this document as a source and its respective analysis requires an integral treatment of it “not only to recover information contained in the document but also the context of its production” (Weber et al., 2021, p.501).

Scenario from which the Social Work Collective emerges

With the coup d'état in 1973, an intellectual process was cut short, mainly in Chilean universities, which fostered political and social debate, recognising their intertwined relationship, as well as the production of knowledge. The ideas under discussion were related to the present and future of the country, its democracy, the reasons for underdevelopment, the social structure and its transformations, the growth model and other issues, as well as the debate on political proposals to address them, which at times were antagonistic and reflected different ways of thinking about the country. Social science academics put their knowledge and analysis at the service of the debate in spaces such as seminars, workshops and colloquiums (Moyano-Barahona and Mella-Polanco, 2017).

Towards the end of the 1970s, the aim was to accompany those who were being hardest hit by the effects of the dictatorship, in the context of the violation of human rights and the installation of the neoliberal model, which did not provide space for the necessary social transformations (Bastías, 2013 in Moyano-Barahona and Mella-Polanco, 2017). In the 1980s, according to Moyano-Barahona and Mella-Polanco (2017), the Chilean intelligentsia, made up of social scientists opposed to the dictatorship, focused on generating knowledge about social issues, poverty, human rights and rethinking Chilean society in the midst of repression and exile, revaluing the collective construction of multi- and interdisciplinary knowledge, which would allow an approach to social problems by rescuing the link with the popular world (Moyano, 2016).

In this context, and as part of the emergence of intellectual spaces linked to praxis, especially with the popular world (Moyano and Pacheco, 2018; Moyano, 2022), the Social Work Collective was born, with the aim of generating discussion, debate and reflection; an imperative exercise in the moments of crisis that the country was experiencing. It became necessary to think of alternatives for a new social order as opposed



to the dictatorship, and this was inextricably linked to the task of re-creating the professional identity in the light of the experiences and learning from the social interventions of those who made it up (Colectivo de Trabajo Social, 1985).

From the testimonies of its participants, it is possible to recognise at least two milestones that would be the prelude to the Collective's commitment, and which would reflect the motivations of its members to question themselves about Social Work, its work and possibilities, in a context in which discussion and reflection were felt as a "threat" to officialdom, to "official" Social Work, which was expressed both in university training spaces and in the practice of the profession.

The milestones recognised as a prelude to the formation of the Collective are spaces for reflection of a group of social workers linked to the Vicaría de la Solidaridad, to the social programmes of SUR, and to the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences FLACSO. These women had a common past as students and teachers at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile.

The first of these corresponds to a reflection workshop in 1980, the purpose of which was to systematise the experience of "social solidarity work" developed in the Vicariate of Solidarity. *The collectives* indicate

We wanted – through the exchange of experience, analysis and discussion – to define our professional identity within the vast and complex field of human rights. We wanted to make a critical reading of practice as social workers. (STS, 1985, p.3).

The second initiative corresponds to the seminar "Social Work and Urban Problems", organised by SUR and FLACSO, held in August 1981. In this seminar, the linking of social workers in popular urban activities and organisations was discussed; "this group appeared with a wide experience in animation programmes; with a more real perception of the problems of the popular world; to a certain extent with a privileged contact and closeness with popular groups" (CTS, 1985, p.3).

From both spaces, the reflection on the possibilities of Social Work is installed, which for the collectives is expressed in,

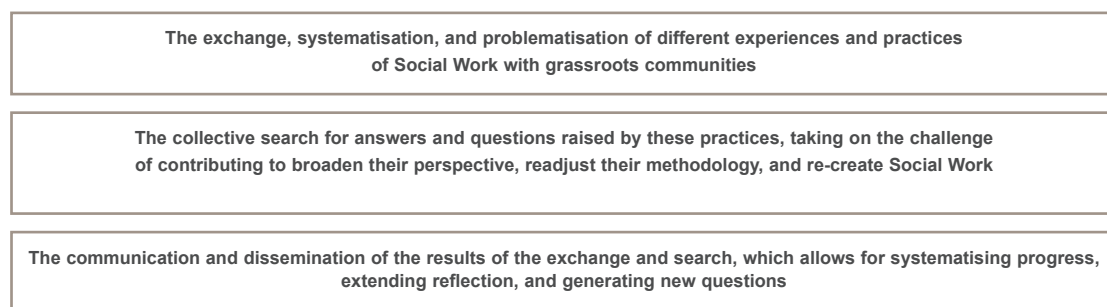
a sort of struggle between 'solidarity social work' and 'official social work' (...) the concerns, problems and challenges that arose found resonance in a group of social workers who felt attracted by the idea of creating a space for this process of rethinking social work in the light of the changes produced in the national situation, the new experiences of social work carried out in Chile during the dictatorship; the basic concepts of the process of reconceptualisation of social work experienced in Chile at the beginning of the 1970s. (CTS, 1985, p.4)

Recovering an experience of collective functioning: Ways of being and doing Social Work.

In November 1981, this group was formed with the aim of “creating a Social Work Collective that would open a space for reflection and support for social action with popular sectors in Chile today” (CTS, 1985, p.4). This is linked to a particular social and political context, as one interviewee recalls, “when the perspective of the dictatorship’s validity is institutionalised” (E1), which, added to the professional experience of commitment to dignity and human rights, drives the birth of this collective space.

In the document “Colectivo de Trabajo Social: Un espacio de encuentro para el Trabajo Social en Chile” (1985), three central aspects of its sense of being as a Social Work Collective are detailed:

Figure 1: A commitment to being as a Collective



Source: Own elaboration based on CTS, 1985, p.4.

At the same time, they propose a way of functioning that outlines a way of doing Social Work, marked by a collective logic, network articulation, autonomy in its functioning, an open space with an animating team and an internal organisation based on responsibilities (See figure 2).

Figure 2: The Collective's ways of doing things

Web	UA space that will facilitate the construction of a network of people involved in research and action projects in Social Work with popular groups.
Collective logic	We defined it as a Collective, because it would be built with the contribution of everyone. According to the capacities and rhythms of all those who participate, because it would not be a new institution to add to the already extensive list of existing centres.
Autonomy	An autonomous space, which, although it would maintain relations with various institutions and organisations, would not depend on any of them.
Open space animation team	An open space and, for this reason, the initial group was constituted as an animating team, but always taking care that the different initiatives: seminars, workshops, meetings, etc., meant the active participation of other people.
Responsibilities without hierarchies	There are no hierarchies in the collective. Responsibilities are defined jointly according to the tasks to be undertaken and the areas of greatest interest to each of the members.

Source: Own elaboration based on CTS 1985, p.4-5.

Based on the above, a horizontal and participatory organisation is revealed, which is developed with an open call, reinforced by one interviewee when she comments that “we started with all those who wanted to participate in this Collective. The initiative group – or facilitator – invited everyone who wanted to participate according to their abilities and availability” (E1). We also highlighted other values that are part of what mobilised the functioning of the Collective and contribute to the reflection: respect for others, which included the recognition of people as social actors, their knowledge and cultures; dialogue, “this Freirean idea that no one teaches anyone, but that we all learn from each other” (E3).

Behind each meeting of the Collective there was a “back room” that can be seen as the central focus of their work and a particular way of generating it. They stamped a horizontal seal on their organisation, with roles that were rotated and distributed according to the needs and activities they proposed to carry out:

the important thing was the collective, which is a question that marked me, and that is that there was no hierarchy, only responsibilities. You take on this task (...) according to your abilities [and availability] (...) and you give an account of that task to the collective and take on another one, but there was no boss. (E1)

To this end, they explained that as an initiative group or animating group they dedicated partial and voluntary time to meet weekly, “we had a meeting day, a meeting day and the other activities depended on availability, but it was quite fluid” (E4), where “we discussed what we were going to do, we took initiatives, evaluated activities and gave each other new responsibilities” (E1). This group was made up of Daniela Sánchez, Ana María Medioli, María Teresa Marshall, Ximena Valdés, Paulina Saball and Andrea Rodó. In time, Gloria Vío, María Angélica Morales and Ana María de la Jara joined them (CTS, 1985).

The commitment to revisit the ways of being and doing Social Work implies recovering what characterised the functioning of the Collective. One of these elements refers to the spaces of shared gratuity, as some of the interviewees (E1, E3, E4) point out, based on a commitment to being a collective that would contribute to rethinking Social Work, contributing to society and to the recovery of democracy. One of the interviewees reinforces this aspect by explaining that it is a collective gratuity,

in a sense that you give to others as well. You learn and you teach. And you value what you teach, you don't play the fool [or keep it] bottled up... the Collective forced us to take our experiences outside, the important thing was that they were there. (E3)

The way the Collective functioned implied a humanising way of relating to its members, where their differences and characteristics were respected and supported, allowing moments to express their emotions and experiences as women, mothers, workers, professionals, political activists (E3, E4, E6). The responsibility with “the collective” implied an organisation of life that became meaningful beyond the individual; the interviewees refer to a space of affective intimacy, where things were talked about. One of them explains: “from a personal point of view, it was a very rich space of welcome (...) to feel a welcome there, an appreciation of what I was doing” (E3).

As we pointed out earlier, remembering the way of being and doing Social Work sheds light on the present and contributes to future projection. We highlight the way of commitment, the collective logic and the horizontal functioning, creating a space for collective reflection that is validated beyond the historical moment in which the Collective lived. As one of the interviewees said: “I think that the first thing is this valuing of work, creation and collective thinking that is capable of generating knowledge, of generating academic value, of research, of creation, of putting together new things” (E3).

The journal Notes for Social Work: a space for reflection and communication

According to its purpose and with respect to its ways of doing and thinking about the collective work space, the following lines of action were proposed: Social Work reflection, communications, services to social workers, creation of a network of social workers, contact with people and/or national and foreign groups (CTS, 1985).

In particular, the communications action line was strengthened with the creation of the journal Notes for Social Work.

The Collective believes that it is important for social workers to communicate with each other, to communicate their experiences and the conclusions they draw from them (...) For this reason and with the aim of providing a space for social workers to relate their experiences in a concrete way, without subjecting them to rigid schemes of interpretation and to provide elements that illuminate reflection, the Collective publishes the journal ‘Notes for Social Work’ (CTS, 1985, p.17).

Although the Collective is recognised for the production and dissemination of its magazine, this paper refers to the strategy of meeting, reflection and production that this publication represented.

On the basis of the work developed, the Collective systematically published the Journal, producing 17 issues during its operation. The relevance of this publication “implied an opening of the ‘field of knowledge’ and a democratisation of it. At the same time, they provided a foundation, historicity and theory to the actions and demands” (Moya-no and Pacheco, 2018, p.4). In a 1984 interview ³ the *collectives* indicated:

³ In May 1984, Teresa Quiroz, a Chilean social worker who was part of the board of the Latin American Centre for Social Work, CELATS, a professional organization that collaborated in the formation and functioning of the Collective, conducted an interview with its members, entitled “En busca de la identidad. El Colectivo de Trabajo Social de Santiago-Chile”, published in magazine Acción Crítica, number 15.

The magazine, for the Collective, is something very important; it is not only a space to publish what we and others produce, but it is an invitation and a challenge as social workers to speak our own language, with all the precariousness we have, we can say what we do, in our own words and not wait for a sociologist or a journalist to come and do it for us, that our practice speaks; the magazine wants to be a space for communication, an organ of social work about our practice. And this means a way of approaching our reality and the socio-political management of the country. (Quiroz, 1984, p.3)

The magazine as a strategy for reflection and communication was part of a learning process that took place within the collective, linked to self-management for its financing, editing and production.

We started out and everything was self-managed with an effort that I can't even tell you about, so we did everything among ourselves, from typing when we started to have a little money. We had this idea of writing and we didn't have much of an idea of how to write in a way that would reach and be accessible, that's why we didn't use academic language, but a very practical language. We wrote texts, we criticised each other's texts and then based on one of them we wrote "temporal, ollas y orden", which was an article published by SUR⁴. (E2)

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On the dissemination and circulation of the magazine, one interviewee comments:

We started to distribute it among the people. We put together a database of 250 copies that we sent by post, to social workers, popular educators, people who asked us and students who came from different schools. They asked us from outside [Chile]. It wasn't that much, but for that time, it was an important distribution and people photocopied it when they could. I remember that's when the photocopies started to come out. (E2)

Another interviewee highlights as a central aspect:

to have been able to write, and then to break the myth that we [social workers] were not capable of writing and to have published two books and 17 issues of the Journal (...) not all of them were written by social workers, but there were professionals who were interested in writing in a Social Work journal. (E3)

⁴ Javier Martínez, like other SUR professionals, was recognized by the collectives as a collaborator and motivator for the formation of the Collective and particularly for writing about professional experience. The text referred to is published in *Proposiciones*, 1982, Vol. 7, Ediciones SUR



In addition, the commitment to promote new ways of thinking about professional identity is highlighted.

it was obvious that we were going to end up trying to influence others, to promote, (...) to come up with something that would be a possibility to expand and say: here we are and there are other ways of doing things. It wouldn't have been any use if we had all stayed quiet and happy together (E4).

An example of this is what is stated in the presentation of the third issue of the journal, which states: “We want to go beyond mere reflection and exchange; we want to recover the capacity to ‘speak’ and propose; we want to contribute from our particular insertion, to the formulation of a project of social and political transformation for our country” (Notes for Social Work, 1983, p.3).

The challenge of writing is illustrated by one of the interviewees between questioning and affirmations referring to the questioning of actions, of those concrete acts carried out in the spaces of intervention:

What did they do to make it happen? How did they do it? What did people say? Well, and then came the reflection – which was at one point very shattering and from there we started again – and I think that was a great achievement of the Collective, to go back to the practices of asking what social workers did in certain contexts, in certain situations, and from there to conceptualise, something I don't know if the Collective manages to do, but it manages to at least pick up those practices (E5).

The main purpose that the Collective sought with the written production was to transmit the professional experience from the profession of Social Work. Referring to this, one of the interviewees said “it was to communicate the experience, the profession, the needs” (E1).

This implied an attitude of attentive vigilance to the social and political events that the country was experiencing, without ceasing to question fundamental issues for their professional being and doing. This questioning and permanent exercise of denaturalising, in a context that demanded precisely the opposite, was part of this other Social Work, as a core element of its professional and disciplinary relevance.



In relation to the above, the Collective advocated a different, alternative Social Work, as a parallel path to that established by the dictatorial regime. The Collective was not linked to the universities or to “the official world at that time... we were looking to recover our identity... to open up to other ways of doing things” (E4).

Intertwining trajectories: Individual and collective trajectories

For the members of the Collective, this space for reflection nourished the social intervention; it was a kind of “inspirational compass” (E4), as one of them points out, becoming a virtuous circle of constant feedback, situated in a scenario of common social intervention where “we all work at the same time in institutions and social work projects with popular sectors, that work is the center of our contribution to common reflection” (CTS, 1985, p.5).

Some were active in different political parties at the time and others were not, but as one of the interviewees says, they all had “a common commitment to Social Work”, the main focus being, as another interviewee explains, “the commitment to human dignity, to Human Rights... we shared the idea that democracy was going to be achieved socially, not just politically” (E1).

Along the same lines, the need to participate on different fronts to put an end to the dictatorship was raised, and Social Work had an ideal space to act and contribute to this. The challenge then, as one of the interviewees pointed out, was,

To be able to create strength in different parts through Social Work to recover democracy, was to be able to contribute to the recovery of democracy from Social Work...before the military coup there was not such a strong appreciation of democracy as there is today...we came from a generation that had not valued democracy enough; the most important thing for us was change because this unjust society could not continue to exist, with unequal distribution of wealth, with extreme poverty. (E3)

One of the lines of action defined to materialise the purposes of the Collective was the line of “Reflection of social work” which was

oriented towards rediscovering the meaning of Social Work in its practice, and in its relationship with the social actors, with the State, and with the social sciences. This reflection also includes significant themes for a social practice from a transformative perspective, which allow for a deepening of thinking and theories for action (STS, 1985, p.17).

At the beginning, and according to the Collective in 1985, its members belonged or had belonged to different organisational spheres. The organisations in which they were situated included: the Zones Department of the Vicaría de la Solidaridad, of which Daniela Sánchez had been head, and Ana María Medioli, who at the time was head of the Vicaría's eastern zone; Unidad de Investigación para la Acción of the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO), where Daniela Sánchez was a researcher; SUR's Urban Programme, in which María Teresa Marshall worked; the Creation, Education and Social Animation collective CREAS, where Ximena Valdés worked; the SUR Women's Programme, where Paulina Saball and Andrea Rodó worked; the company Refimet, in the commune of Tiltit, where Gloria Vío worked; and the Centre for Social Studies (CESOC), where María Angélica Morales worked (CTS, 1985).

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From these spaces, they worked as social workers, carrying out social intervention with children, women, communities, relatives of disappeared detainees, among others, which enriched debate and reflection at a time when the country lacked these freedoms.

One of the Collective's areas of reflection was on the subject of intervention, which was also being discussed within political and social groups. The question of whether or not there was a single type of subject ('the popular subject') or whether there were various subjects from different social sectors, was an issue that was strongly debated for some time. As one of the interviewees put it, "the popular subject triumphed, which was Gramsci's theory; the influence of Juan Eduardo García Huidobro, who brought Gramsci to Chile, was another influence we received. We were very permeable and open to dialogue" (E1).

In another aspect, for the Collective the construction of the "subject of their own development" was of singular importance; they believed that it was possible from Social Work to have this view of subjects that promotes their self-determination, where Social Work professionals do not remain in a position of expertise that designates the way in which people should live. This idea is reinforced by one interviewee when she states



“respect for the other was the fundamental principle and this included the recognition of people as actors, among the social actors, the recognition of their knowledge, of their own culture... the idea that nobody teaches anybody” (E1) and the recognition of the strong influence of Popular Education in social intervention.

In relation to the above, in the 1950s and until the mid-1960s, Social Work was strongly influenced by North American concepts and theories oriented towards welfare-dependent countries. As stated by Samperio et al. (2004) “there was a need for ‘agents of change’ to improve, to modify those aspects that were dysfunctional to the social development guidelines established by the power of the North” (p.5), where the main method implemented by professionals was “Case Work”, centered on intervention with individuals and families. Subsequently, work with groups and communities was promoted with clear guidelines from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and based on the guidelines of the Alliance for Progress (Samperio et al., 2004). It is precisely the Reconceptualization movement that begins to problematise this panorama of technologisation, proposing a revision of concepts, theories and methodologies adopted by the discipline.

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The Reconceptualization movement – which was interrupted in Chile by the dictatorship, as well as in other Latin American countries where it was developing – questioned the traditional methods of intervention; as one interviewee states “I arrived at the School when the traditional methods, in the case of Social Work at the Catholic University, were forbidden for being welfares” (E1). In the same sense, another interviewee refers that “it was a mortal sin at that time to be managers of change... however, it became a virtue in the environments in which I lived and worked” (E4) in the 1980s.

The intervention experience of the members of the Collective allows us to state that there was a “recovery of the meaning of assistance” (E1), as one of them mentions, which opens a space to revisit and redefine the place occupied by the methodologies and professional tools that had been criticised at a historical moment. There was the certain possibility of taking a critical look that was also made in a very complex socio-political context.

Another area of reflection was linked to the notion of the “forgotten subject”, developed by Ricardo Zúñiga, one of the Collective’s close friends. This author reveals a great difficulty which, at the same time, constitutes a professional challenge in the reflective work and is related to,



remember that this intervening subject has the hard task of being aware of his own subjectivity, as a personal actor, with all his history and social position, and also as a member of an institution, of a culture and of the parameters that they determine for his intervention (Zúñiga, 2014, p.15).

In this sense, the positivist approach previously marked the way of thinking and doing in Social Work, as one of the interviewees comments,

reality there and me here, and not a hint of subjectivity, of subjectivism at all. That began to change in the 1980s when Ricardo Zúñiga came to Chile and told us: 'you are forgotten subjects, you are not seen and it is very important that you are seen because that tinges the action'. (E1)

The challenge, then, becomes doubly complex when integrating into the reflection this “forgotten subject”, this professional who intervenes with other subjects as part of the construction of society, which in times of dictatorship becomes urgent.

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For the Collective, systematisation has become a strategy for interweaving realities, an exercise that today makes it possible to generate professional memory.

The generation of knowledge from Social Work continued to be an imperative, as stated by one of the interviewees who experienced it as a student before the coup d'état: “there was a story about how to produce knowledge, the issue of systematisation, research, participatory action research, there was a whole Latin American movement about it” (E5). Another interviewee reinforces the relevance given to systematisation when she was a lecturer at the Catholic University, a month before the coup d'état

...there was the whole line of systematisation and I actually came in with a lot of interest in working in that line, always with trainees and I worked in the population area. The coup came and everything fell apart, Social Work as well. (E3)

The wealth of knowledge and reflections on social intervention, systematised and produced by the Collective, enabled one of them to collaborate in the systematisation of intervention experiences in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as she points out: “I collaborated in the systematisation with one of them [another collective] that worked

with families of the executed in the north; I collaborated with another in Melipilla with the effects of the earthquake” (E1). Another member recounts her experience of systematisation in the 1990s in Latin America, in Peru and Ecuador, in charge of training and supervision “...working with the [professional] teams so that they could carry out their systematisation” (E3) and forming part of a systematisation collective. Towards the end of the 1990s, in Chile, she was a university lecturer in systematisation courses.

Beyond the different understandings and ways of systematising, what emerges from it, in terms of the work of the Collective, is the configuration of a strategy that is taken up again as a way of communicating, documenting, circulating information and reflections on what was happening in Chile, in the spaces in which the members of the Collective participated and in a country where there was a systematic violation of human rights. As one of the interviewees said

we felt that we had a masterful experience in the trade that we wanted to pass on to the young people, because maybe we were not going to continue [alive], because in 1981 there was not much security that you lived in your little house and they were going to break down your door and take you or your children or your partner into custody. (E1)

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The different personal trajectories are intertwined from a particular and common imprint, at the same time becoming collective trajectories. The way in which they are connected by the subjects who participate in the intervention and in the transmission of these experiences, means the Collective, through reflection and dissemination, manages to revisit them in the perspective of a Social Work that contributes to the processes of democratisation seen as unaffordable on the horizon, with the defense of human rights and the improvement of living conditions being imperative at that time.

Final reflections

The Social Work Collective was a professional group that during the 1980s sought alternatives for critical reflection in order to rethink social work. Mobilised by their work in institutions for the defense of human rights, its members made a commitment to professional identity. Throughout this paper we have tried to go through, in part, the experience of the Collective, giving an account of the scenario from which it emerges, its ways of being and doing Social Work, emphasising its collective functioning, the



journal Notes for Social Work as a space for reflection and professional communication, and how these elements are intertwined in professional trajectories.

The Collective is part of professional history and memory; revisiting its experience is an act of memory, which opens up ways of re-signifying our own professional practices and stakes today, mobilising the past-present link, as Aylwin et al. (2004) point out. The motivation to recover this experience, which materialises in functioning as a collective, brought to the present for analysis, acquires relevance in the face of the negationism of recent history and depoliticisation in the framework of the current neoliberal context, which leads us to individualise relationships, personal and professional experiences in the various dimensions of human endeavour. In a society marked by immediacy, how do we generate strategies of resistance from Social Work? The Collective calls and challenges us to seek collective strategies, to group together and create spaces for joint work, reflection and production of knowledge that are available to everyone, and to sustain them collectively. This implies – at the very least – cultivating reflexivity, a critical view, patience, and a shared sense/horizon of professional articulation.

At the same time, the Collective challenges us to broaden the ways of understanding the generation of knowledge; to recover professional experience, both in content and in the way of understanding Social Work, to link the spaces of professional practice and academic spaces, integrating experience as a source of knowledge. In this way, the journey through the Collective's experience highlights the value of a way of generating and disseminating knowledge that collects, communicates and makes visible the intervention, the daily professional practice of social workers. The audacity and courage of the collectives in this – in the midst of a dictatorial context – leads us to question the current ways of being and doing social work.

Finally, the way in which the Collective structures its way of working makes sense to us today more than ever, because it challenges the individualistic way of producing knowledge in academic work. It invites us to think and materialise our research practices to the point of learning the collective reflexive exercise, which we have called “the collective of the Collective”.



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Authors' biographies

Camila Véliz is a Social Worker from the Universidad Alberto Hurtado, Master in Psychology, mention in Community Psychology from the Universidad de Chile and PhD in Social Work from the Universidad de la Plata, Argentina. She is currently an academic and coordinator of the History and Social Work Study Group of the Department of Social Work at the Alberto Hurtado University.

E-mail: cveliz@uahurtado.cl

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8043-2732>

Katia García is a Social Worker with a degree in Social Work from the Universidad Tecnológica Metropolitana and a Masters in Interdisciplinary Social Intervention. She is currently an academic and director of the Department of Social Work at the Alberto Hurtado University.

E-mail: kgarcia@uahurtado.cl

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4973-7877>

Magdalena Troncoso del Rio is a Social Worker and holds a Master's degree in Interdisciplinary Social Intervention from the Alberto Hurtado University. She is currently an academic and director of the Social Work programme at the Alberto Hurtado University.

E-mail: mtroncoso@uahurtado.cl

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-2085-1908>