



## CHAPTER 4

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# Professions and Profiles: Epistemic Communities and the Registration of Human Rights Violations

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Although I had some experience with individual case management and interviews, I was not prepared for what we faced at the Vicaría. It surpassed everything we knew in theory and in practice. (Social worker)

I had been in the profession for seven years and no one had ever taught me anything about human rights. (Lawyer)

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## INTRODUCTION

The varied range of actors, histories, and know-how that came together around the socio-historical context of the Chilean dictatorship was not limited to the victim–perpetrator binary that is often the focus of truth commissions, as of much human rights scholarship. Our research, and the entirety of this book, instead address the labour of a third actor, one that is usually absent from studies of the period. This actor is constituted by the diverse range of social workers, lawyers, doctors, psychologists, clergy, nuns, political party members, people with no political affiliation, recent university graduates, and experienced professionals who came together to express solidarity with people persecuted by the dictatorship. These long-overlooked human rights workers engaged in all manner of critical activity, organised by the Comité Pro Paz, the Vicaría, and other civil society organisations that sprang up to resist oppression.

This chapter starts from the premise that any analysis of what amounted to an unprecedented moral and political crusade, must address the role of the epistemic communities that were configured by this work. One of the central arguments of this book is that the act of registering and documenting systematic violations of rights to life and physical integrity was neither neutral nor objective, but rather a cognitive and political action. Consequently, we need to take note not only of the procedures artefacts, uses and effect of registry, but also, and in particular, of ways of thinking about and acting upon the situation at hand that shaped the services these organisations offered. In short, we contend that the inscription of political violence depended, in part, on the ways professional, moral and political service were envisioned.

In this context, this chapter explores the contributions made by a range of professions, and their respective epistemologies, to the support of people persecuted by the military dictatorship. We focus particularly

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on the Legal Departments of the Comité and Vicaría, which worked with relatives and direct victims of political repression. What professional tools did department staff draw upon? What skills did they have to develop? What epistemic practices and know-how enabled staff to deal with repression? How did different disciplines meet and overlap, in day-to-day functioning of the organisation over time? What epistemic controversies arose, and how were they resolved? How did these new ways of thinking, processing, and providing assistance affect the management of disasters in post-dictatorship society? How do these workers evaluate, today, the impact of their involvement in the Comité and Vicaría on their lives and subsequent professional trajectories? In order to answer these questions, the chapter reviews the history of collaborative working between lawyers and social workers. These constitute the two groups of professionals who were at the heart of a model of legal aid work hitherto unprecedented in Chile, one that took place in the non-violent, resistant, space staked out by the Comité Pro Paz and the Vicaría de la Solidaridad.

We conceive of that unique experience as a prime example of the production of social knowledge by different epistemic communities (Haas 1992; Adler and Haas 2009), generating a field of shared practices (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger-Trayner et al. 2014). In this regard, and following Gherardi's proposed notion of a "community of practice," we understand the everyday working practices of Comité and Vicaría staff to have gradually created, and over time sustained, "recurrent patterns of action" (2009, 536). These patterns engendered a shared language for assessing and evaluating the world, in order to develop an identity and epistemic practice related to the activities they undertook in it. We similarly understand the assistance provided, and the artefacts and knowledge that facilitated its administration, to be *situated* activities and objects (Haraway 1988). By this, we mean that they reflect the various categories of gender, class, profession, race, and ideology to which the speaker, any speaker, belongs; and from which any and all authors write in a located fashion (Jefferies 2012, 134).

In terms of methodology, the chapter draws on a series of interviews conducted with former staff members and support personnel of both the Comité and Vicaría, as well as on secondary documentation available in the FUNVISOL archive. Additional sources included previous academic publications about both organisations, including academic theses written by two of the chapter's co-authors.<sup>1</sup>

The chapter shows that confronting state violence through assistance and denunciation was an activity sustained by a combination of basic professional acumen; a substantial degree of professional innovation in the face of an urgent and uncertain situation; a certain amount of political, community, and labour union organisational skill and experience, and the adoption of a humanitarian ethos. This latter, inspired by the urge to protect and foster human dignity and the collective empowerment and liberation of victims, drew no distinctions based on class, origin, political affiliation, or religious belief. The chapter particularly demonstrates how different epistemic communities converged—not without disputes and heated discussion—to shape interdisciplinary work that was sustained over a long period of time. A community was forged that put into practice and expressed a shared identity. The interdisciplinary convergence arose because nothing in these professionals' university training or previous work experience had prepared them for what they were now to encounter each day. Practice, language, and actions were transformed to meet the demands of an entirely new situation, one that exposed staff to contexts without precedent in the country's history. We therefore conclude that the work that went on within the Comité and Vicaría generated know-how and practices specific to the human rights field, absent from traditional academic training. This required the integration of different professional disciplines in ways that shaped human rights activism for years to come.

### ASSISTING VICTIMS OF DICTATORSHIP

The Comité Pro Paz came into being on 6 October 1973 without a predefined programme. By that time, the effects of the violence exercised by the Armed Forces and their civilian supporters, were already substantial. Repression had affected nearly every sphere and space of human existence. The churches became the only place persecuted people could turn to: “for consolation and support in facing a situation affecting themselves or their relatives.” The dynamics of repression guided the Comité's course of action. As one report of the Comité explains, “Nothing was planned in advance. Each department or service came about because a need arose. The staff of lawyers and social workers grew in response to the volume of people needing assistance” (Comité de Cooperación para la Paz en Chile 1975, 5). At first, the work was

reactive. As the religious and professional personnel associated with the Comité began to grasp the magnitude of the political persecution and its consequences, the institution gradually grew to respond to the needs generated by the situation.

One of the earliest tasks the organisation faced was how to provide emotional support and actively listen to the people who came to its offices, based at 2338 Santa Mónica Street in downtown Santiago. Before long, the Comité centralised and professionalised the kind of listening and emotional support that was habitually part of clerical pastoral practice. The Comité became the place to which people tended to gravitate when they felt compelled to tell someone what had happened to them, and to express the impact violence was having on their lives, and the lives of their families and communities (Fernández 1996, 78). Through listening and extending help in individual cases, staff gradually detected clusters of shared issues that gave rise to the Comité's different departments. The Legal Department was founded in 1974 to add a juridical dimension to the other issues that the organisation was dealing with. The Legal Department initially coordinated the work of prosecutors, in-house lawyers, and external lawyers across three main areas of action. These were: defence of civilians spuriously accused before military courts, the filing of *habeas corpus* writs on behalf of all detainees, and the filing of motions with special investigative magistrates assigned to oversee cases of detainees. The Legal Department was complemented by four more departments: Labour, Relocation, Students, and *Campesinos* (farmworkers). Each department had its own permanent staff of lawyers and social workers. The Comité's structure expanded in response to needs generated by different repressive situations, and victims' corresponding defencelessness. As a result, groups of professionals came on board whose knowledge and skills were vital for handling complex cases in which the very lives of detainees were at stake.

#### THE LEGAL DEPARTMENT OF THE VICARÍA DE LA SOLIDARIDAD

The Vicaría de la Solidaridad came into being with a more clearly defined programme than had the Comité Pro Paz. The experience that professional staff and religious had gained during the Comité's earliest years had given them a clearer understanding of the repressive situation, as well as a variety of common working methods that were adequate for the

task, and had proved relatively effective. A shared ethical framework had also already been defined, one that centred on the two key concepts of solidarity and human rights.<sup>2</sup>

When the Vicaría was founded, in January 1976, its work was divided into six different thematic areas. The Legal Assistance Department supported direct victims of political repression and their families. The so-called Zone Department was entrusted with the mission of coordinating the Vicaría's social work in Santiago's poorest neighbourhoods. The Farmworker Department provided support for agricultural workers and other rural dwellers who had previously been granted land during pre-coup agrarian reform, now violently reversed. The Labour Department continued to attend to workers dismissed from their jobs for political reasons, and a Support Unit took charge of administrative work. Finally, there was a Communications Department, which among its tasks took on the publication of *Solidaridad*, the official in-house news publication (Vicaría de la Solidaridad 1976a) (see Chapter 5).

Vicaría personnel consisted mostly of lay people, hired on the basis of their professional skills rather than their religious or political affiliation. Although at first priests and nuns headed each department, over time, lay people came to run the institution on the strength of their professional skills (Lowden 1996, 55). The core nucleus of employees was essentially the same as that of the Comité Pro Paz: it numbered approximately 150 people, most of whom were left-leaning Christians. This despite the desire expressed by Cardinal Silva Henríquez, and some other members of the Catholic hierarchy, that the Vicaría's staff list should reflect a more moderate or neutral religious and political stance (*ibid.*, 56). One great fear, ignited by rumours circulating in the official, pro-regime press, was that the Vicaría and the Catholic Church had been infiltrated and were being politically manipulated by leftists (*ibid.*, 73). Despite such fears, Vicar Cristián Precht, titular head of the Vicaría in its early days, did not alter the organisations' hiring policy. He continued to prioritise professional skill and commitment to human rights over political or religion affiliation.<sup>3</sup> This shaped the Vicaría's identity as a secular, pluralistic, and non-proselytising institution, notwithstanding its clearly Catholic and ecclesiastical nature.

The Legal Assistance Department's work focused on offering legal assistance and representation to politically persecuted people and their family members, especially when that persecution directly affected the person's freedom and physical safety. The primary activity of Legal

Assistance Department lawyers was the filing of *habeas corpus* petitions before the courts on behalf of people who had been arbitrarily arrested, or who feared they were about to be (see Fig. 4.1). The department also filed denunciations of detentions in secret prisons or illegal places of detention (Vicaría de la Solidaridad 1980, 18). The lawyers' actions were always accompanied by "moral and economic" assistance to those affected by political persecution, aiming to foster "respect for, and full effectiveness of, the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (Vicaría de la Solidaridad 1976a, 8). Lastly, they strove to support and coordinate with other churches or similar groups working in the same area of concern. These general objectives, mapped out during the Vicaría's first year of existence, guided the legal department's actions in subsequent years. They gave rise to a range of programmes, organised around the work carried out by lawyers, social workers and administrative staff.

The Legal Assistance Department also has social workers on its staff. They carried out assistance and advocacy work for survivors of detention and torture and their families, and for relatives of forcibly disappeared detainees. Grouping cases by shared issues, the social workers aimed to "help people understand the problem they were experiencing, encouraging them to take an active role in searching for solutions (...), while also contributing to the development of solidarity in the face of those problems" (Vicaría de la Solidaridad 1977, 27). The legal and administrative actions arising from that work were undertaken in a centralised manner by Vicaría staff. Up until the enactment of the de facto Amnesty Decree Law of 1978, staff also supported political prisoners. This was done by attending to prisoners' basic welfare needs, and helping to sell the handicrafts and artworks they made while imprisoned. One change from Comité practice, however, was that the problem of subsistence for families of those victimised or imprisoned ceased to be addressed via individual donations and direct economic support. Instead, Vicaría territorial zone solidarity organisations, and other groups (such as FASIC, after 1975) took charge of supporting victims' families and helping ensure their economic subsistence. Social workers therefore began to prioritise connecting family members of political prisoners and the disappeared with local organisations and Christian base communities. These contacts were made as part of the organisational efforts that also led to the formation of neighbourhood lunchrooms for children, labour workshops for jobless people, and all the other groups that the Vicaría's Zone



**Fig. 4.1** Detainees' relatives seeking assistance at the Vicaría de la Solidaridad (Source Photographic Archive, Fundación de Documentación y Archivo de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad)



Department was fostering in working-class neighbourhoods of Santiago (Vicaría de la Solidaridad 1977, 28).

At first, the Legal Assistance Department of the Vicaría was structured along the same lines of that of the Comité Pro Paz. Distribution of tasks remained differentiated by profession, as the department was subdivided into the Legal and Legal Assistance Units. Lawyers and paralegals worked in the Legal Unit, while social workers were assigned to the Legal Assistance Unit. In May 1977, however, the Legal Assistance Department was restructured. Instead of being divided into two, on the basis of professions, it diversified into four programmes: one dedicated to the issued of disappeared detainees; another for prisoners who had been charged or sentenced, one for initial client care, and one for legal analysis (Vicaría de la Solidaridad 1978, 20). With the exception of the legal analysis programme, each programme was dedicated to the needs of a specific category of victim, generating greater specialisation to address common problems. More new programmes were gradually incorporated, while others were discontinued, as the department's work shifted in response to the changing legal context and characteristics of political repression.

Important changes occurred in 1978, the year the de facto Amnesty Decree Law was enacted. That year the legal department created a "programme for the protection of personal freedom," to compile information and support people who came to the Vicaría after suffering illegal detention, abuse, and often torture. To this was added a "legal denunciation programme," dedicated to the juridical aspects of the needs of that same group of people, plus a specific support programme to assist exiles to re-enter the country (Vicaría de la Solidaridad 1979, 22–27). This came about because, in theory, the Amnesty Decree Law allowed some previously forcibly exiled persons to return to Chile, although this rarely occurred in practice at that time. Most exiles did not come back, either because they did not receive the individual permit needed to authorise return, or from fear of being subjected to further repression. A second effect of the law was the release of prisoners who had been charged with, and/or were serving prison time for, politically motivated crimes. Once those prisoners were released, the Legal Assistance Department closed its programme for people who had been charged and sentenced (Vicaría de la Solidaridad 1979, 22–23).

Another important change came in 1983. The Reception and Support Unit added a medical attention component, which thus far had been carried out by collaborating doctors and clinics with which the Vicaría had contact, in each of the archdiocesan zones of Santiago (see Chapter 3). The onset of days of mass protest in the 1980s, and the accompanying intensification of repression, required that centralised medical care be provided at the Vicaría's Plaza de Armas office (Vicaría de la Solidaridad 1983, 126). In addition, when the DINA was replaced, in 1977, by a new intelligence agency named *Central Nacional de Informaciones*—CNI (National Information Centre), repressive methods changed. Although the tactics of summary execution and enforced disappearance of people did not completely end, torture became the prevalent repressive practice (Corporación Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación 1996, 44–46). More people who had been tortured began coming to the Vicaría, requiring immediate medical care to treat and verify injuries inflicted by repression (Vicaría de la Solidaridad 1983, 126). This work structure remained basically intact until the closure of the Vicaría.<sup>4</sup>

Professionals who joined the staff of the Comité and Vicaría were motivated by the pressing needs of the repressive context. Each one brought a repertoire of resources acquired over the course of their lives and previous experiences, whether as students or in the workplace. Consequently, different practical ways of understanding and intervening in the world converged in the Comité and Vicaría. This is what we refer to as the process of convergence—certainly not without friction—by which various intersecting, mutually acknowledging, and complementary *epistemes* met in the course of the work undertaken.

### SOCIAL WORKERS: THE PROFESSION MOST TESTED BY THE REPRESSIVE CONTEXT

Social workers who joined the Comité and Vicaría were mostly women. Some were professionally trained, and had had their initial work experience during a period of heated discussion inside the profession. The debate was centred around a process known as *reconceptualización* (reconceptualisation), which emerged in the 1960s throughout Latin America, and involved vigorous questioning of the profession's predominantly condescending mode of action (Castañeda and Salamé 2009, 8). According to historian María Angélica Illanes, reconceptualisation sought to cast aside the “visiting social worker” model, with its

asymmetrical and paternalistic associations. In this model, the poor had traditionally been perceived as passive recipients, dependent on help from professionals and the state. In contrast, social workers who adhered to the reconceptualisation movement developed a more democratic social work practice that they conceived of as mutually symmetrical. In this new model, social workers acted more as mediators between governmental agencies and the concerns of working-class communities, especially the urban poor. The latter were to be treated as a collective actor, fully aware of the problems affecting its members, and capable of finding solutions (Illanes 2010, 31). From this time on, social work training and practice would emphasise community-based work at the service of liberation. The means to be adopted included *concientización*<sup>5</sup> and promotion of inclusion and participation of working-class sectors of the population.

The reconceptualisation process came to an abrupt end when the military seized power. Mass layoffs, the outlawing of all political activity, and persecution in universities and government entities virtually expelled progressive social workers from public life. Every social work training school in the country was reorganised after the military coup, and some were temporarily or permanently closed down. Curricula were censored, and staff were vetted. Libraries were purged, and books or theses that the military considered unacceptable, were burned. Eventually, the career was reorganised and restructured: only certain universities were authorised to train new social workers, under lecturers who had been approved via the vetting process or had been newly hired after 1973. In addition, any trainee social worker who wished to continue their university training was required in effect to retrain, i.e. to undertake a full four more years of study, irrespective of the level they had reached prior to the coup (Castañeda and Salamé 2013, 59).

The civil service and other types of government employment were subjected to similar ideological and political purges. Through Decree Law No. 22, enacted a few days after the coup, the Military Junta authorised the summary dismissal of any public employee, with no respect for previous employment regulations or tenure provisions. Public services were subsequently reorganised towards the explicit, express purpose of re-establishing “order and discipline” within government (Corporación Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación 1996, 59). According to journalists Cavallo et al., by May 1974, more than 15,000 people had been compelled to leave their jobs in public administration. A further 31,000 were forced to resign before the end

of 1975 (1973, 56). Mass dismissals such as these were part and parcel of an economic policy that aimed to reduce fiscal expenditure (Valdivia 2010, 183). Social work was dealt a particularly hard blow because the state was one of the main employers of its practitioners. A host of social and public reform programmes had been implemented under the previous two democratic administrations (presided over, respectively, by presidents Eduardo Frei Montalva, 1964–1970, and Salvador Allende, 1970–1973). These reformist and/or radical drives had created numerous posts for social workers, in projects to improve the condition of the working class; agrarian reform; educational reform, and even the collectivisation of industry. Spheres more traditionally associated with social work, such as public health, had meanwhile been reoriented towards community-based models, rather than personal or family practice.<sup>6</sup> The closure of all these programmes, and the subsequent complete reorientation of government, meant numerous job losses for social workers, other professionals, and administrators.

Real or perceived opposition and political sympathies were the most common basis for expulsion from academia or government posts. Supporters of the Popular Unity's political project, especially those who had worked closely with the Allende government, were rapidly removed from their posts in the first months after the coup. Their ideas alone constituted sufficient motive for dismissal, given the prevailing mood of complete ideological and political reorganisation. In the case of social workers, their connection to radical or reformist government was not only partisan in a narrow, party affiliation sense: it also stemmed from the epistemological shift represented by the reconceptualisation paradigm. The profession had embraced a new identity as an agent of social change, and had therefore espoused advocacy work with working-class groups and communities. A great many existing social workers had participated directly in this shift in the profession, making them prime targets for dismissal once the dictatorship was installed.<sup>7</sup>

The social workers who came to work at the *Comité* had considerable ties to leftist political parties and/or to the Catholic Church, and were experiencing personally and professionally critical situations. Many had suffered layoffs or the premature termination of their studies after the coup. Working at the *Comité* offered one solution, at a time when it was nearly impossible to find a new job or resume university studies. Participating in the *Comité* enabled social workers to continue engaging in their profession, whether in a paid post or as a volunteer. It allowed

them to keep alive the ideals and dreams that had motivated and mobilised them in the previous period.

Work at the Comité and Vicaría involved providing assistance to the segment of the population hardest hit by the conditions imposed by the dictatorial regime. To meet these needs, social workers were forced to adopt an admixture of traditional service providing practices and more progressive models drawn from the reconceptualisation paradigm. The result was a new synthesis of social work duties, one which had to integrate different methods to respond to each specific type and mode of challenge posed by the military dictatorship over time (see Fig. 4.2).

The magnitude of the initial catastrophe, the nature of the repression, and its effects on individuals and families impelled the Legal Department's social workers to offer personal, one-to-one help to families and those affected. Personal interviews offered a space for listening and initial emotional support, complemented by psychological and psychiatric support in cases of most serious need. This mode of action meant reviving older working practices, that had become practically



**Fig. 4.2** Support Reception Department, Vicaría de la Solidaridad (*Source* Photographic Archive, Fundación de Documentación y Archivo de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad. March, 1981. *Credit* Helen Hugues)

obsolete after the 1960s shift towards a community empowerment paradigm. As can be seen throughout this volume, however, personalised interviewing and follow-up of each individual case also enabled compilation of detailed documentation and an overview of how repression in Chile operated. Case files produced by the organisation's social workers to register the serious incidents they were hearing about, subsequently became one of the most significant sources available today to those who wish to trace the history of human rights violations in Chile. For the younger social workers, who had been trained during the Popular Unity years, this type of personal or individual casework was an unfamiliar learning experience. Comité and Vicaría former official Angela Cofré recalled:

I never did individual casework in college. I had been trained to participate in a socialist government, in which we [social workers] had a totally different function: namely, to organising society in the working class world - in factories, industrial zones, and in the countryside. The idea of [case by case] advocacy was a totally different mind-set. (...) I had never studied individual casework in the university. I remember a social worker, Ninfa Pérez, who was also a Catholic University professor who had been expelled just like Daniela [Sánchez]. She taught us a case-type format that I still use today whenever needed.

Individual attention on a case-by-case basis was the point of departure for a holistic offer of assistance that encompassed legal, medical, and economic support for individuals and families. None of this however necessarily impeded the development of a more collective advocacy dimension of the work, which found expression in the formation of a range of organisations of relatives and/or victims. This development fundamentally influenced the characteristics of Chile's human rights movement, in ways that are still visible in the present day. Thus the revival of an older working approach based on personal casework, combined with empowerment of family members and victims, became a significant professional innovation for social workers in the new context. It allowed relatives and survivors to take charge of their situation, work together, and demand their rights: constituting a form of resistance to the dictatorship, leaving behind testimony about how repression operated.

As discussed above, at first the Comité's Legal Department provided direct economic aid to victims' relatives, to enable them to survive the

emergency, and be able to travel to visit their relatives in prison. These visits, alongside optional participation in weekly meetings for spiritual and religious accompaniment, gave rise to self-organisation among relatives, and shaped relatives' work. Social workers recognised that one of their major potential contributions to the human rights movement was, precisely, the ability to work in a systematic and organised way with groups. This in turn stimulated and enhanced the groups' own capacity to act to solve their own problems, taking on "a preponderant role in denouncing the injustice of which they were victims" (Vicaría de la Solidaridad 1980, 43). The AFDD is the most persistent long-lived organised group that was initially supported by the Comité and Vicaría. Others initiatives had a more limited lifespan. These included certain associations grouping political prisoners or their relatives, that were active in the mid-1970s.<sup>8</sup>

Cofré describes the AFDD's origins in organising activity fostered by social workers:

At first we would call them together, then they would meet with a social worker present. They gradually gained autonomy, they were given their own office, and people from international entities came to visit them or they would travel. But in the beginning, the group sprang from us, we empowered them and then they grew and became independent. And the organisations of former political prisoners, of relatives of the disappeared, and of relatives of victims of political execution still exist to this day.

This alliance between the AFDD and the church-based organisations continued until the Vicaría closed in 1992.<sup>9</sup> That said, it is important to emphasise that many individuals who became involved in founding the AFDD had been political activists in their own right since before the military coup, and possessed leadership skills that helped build the group. Attempting to exercise leadership in turn over these individuals was not always an easy task for social workers. Cofré began working at the Vicaría when she was just 22 years old, as a recent university graduate, with no significant political experience. At the interview, she recognised that working with the women of the AFDD was a challenge for her:

It was very hard for me, because I had no political training. You have to understand that the Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos was made up of the wives of great political leaders, and many of them were

[Communist or other political] party activists in their own right. They had their share of arguments (...) and it was very hard for me to coordinate such a daunting situation.

For new family members to take on the role of protagonists was not something that happened spontaneously. It was often the product of slow, patient work over the course of many years. According to Cofré, the moment at which a new family started to take part in the organisations was key because it “gave them strength: they overcame their fears, realised they were not alone, and their voice was listened to.” Cofré believes this process also constituted a road of lessons learned for the social workers themselves: “Basically, you learn from others. As you kept listening deeply, you realised what you had to do.” Psychological orientation was also important, providing emotional support for “people who were suffering,” who arrived at the Vicaría’s offices “very damaged.” Cofré adds, “You observed how relatives of the disappeared would move from sorrow to fear and then rage,” and they needed a safe repository for that pain to help them heal: “[i]t was extremely complex.” Without that prior step of counselling-style attention, it was unlikely that families would be able to make a commitment to public mobilisation or denunciation.

This leads us to posit that individual attention and organising work were not just consecutive steps, but rather, complementary, mutually reinforcing tasks. Victoria Baeza’s experience supports the point, according to what she said at interview:

... we always understood – and here is another social work tool - that people themselves drive change and transformation, and, therefore, we never supplanted families or their friends who did things. Quite the contrary, we helped organise them, and we gave them a protagonism that you still see today in their organisations. They have become fundamental pillars in the search for truth and justice in Chile. But when family members first came, throughout all the years we offered assistance, they were incapable of reacting. They mistrusted this basically unknown institution, and the rupture in their daily existence made them feel as if they were coming apart. So empowering them, initiating the process that led to them to effectively take charge of their own situation, was very significant.

In short, professional action by Vicaría social workers was organised around two poles: assistance, and advocacy. Direct social assistance



was understood to be a necessary response to the pressing situation unleashed by the dictatorship. The sense of urgency justified what appeared to be a regression to traditional social work concepts, in theory superseded by the “reconceptualisation” paradigm. From a Christian standpoint, the change implied a return to direct charity, seeking an immediate, efficient, and institutional solution to social problems. The return to assistance-oriented services presupposed assigning new value to aspects of the profession that had fallen by the wayside, and had even been strongly criticised, in the period immediately prior to the coup. The Vicaría’s social workers also understood that these renewed acts of assistance had to go hand-in-hand with advocacy work on behalf of those who were helped by the Church. This would allow people to remain active participants, rather than passive beneficiaries. The Vicaría’s work with organised groups was therefore vital. Social workers from the Legal Department, just like their counterparts from the Zone Department, recognise as perhaps their major professional contribution to the Vicaría’s mission, having helped generate autonomous and empowered groups, whether of victims’ relatives, or working class neighbourhood residents.

In this respect, social workers shared with the Church a working ethos that was centred on empowerment of the poorest members of society and those who suffered most as a result of repression. In a pastoral letter entitled “Solidarity: I was Hungry and You Gave me Food,” Cardinal Silva Henríquez himself maintained that, while the simple act of helping an individual ought never to be discounted, the Vicaría’s concern was to support directly affected people in shouldering responsibility for denunciation. It was not the Vicaría, its professionals and church leaders; but rather victims and their families, who were called upon to be the protagonists of denunciation and solidarity.<sup>10</sup> From that perspective, social work professionals saw themselves as necessary in an essentially secondary, supporting role, given that people themselves were also capable of organising mutual solidarity in the face of emergencies created by the regime. In fact, once the dictatorship ended and the Vicaría closed its doors, it was precisely these organisations of victims’ relatives that continued to exist, working to find their missing relatives, cherish their memory, and struggle against impunity for perpetrators. In that sense, the social workers’ strategy of transmitting autonomy and empowerment to victims and families and victims was vindicated.<sup>11</sup>

The trajectories of the social workers of the Comité and Vicaría after the dictatorship were diverse. Some of them continue to work in human

rights through to the present day. As mentioned in Chapter 3, former Vicaría social worker María Luisa Sepúlveda became the first woman to be appointed as the organisation's Executive Secretary, a post she held between 1990 and 1992, involving overseeing the closure of the Vicaría per se, its transformation into a Foundation (FUNVISOL) and the transfer of its archive to new Church premises, the Archbishop Palace in Santiago's Erasmo Escala Street. Sepúlveda went on to serve as a Commissioner in Chile's second official truth commission, the *Comisión Nacional sobre Prisión Política y Tortura* (2004), after its chairman, Mgr. Sergio Valech, himself another former key Vicaría hand. Sepúlveda subsequently presided over a second iteration of that same commission, carried out in 2011, and popularly known as Valech II.<sup>12</sup> Other ex-Vicaría social workers went on to work in other Church pastoral roles, or in NGOs, government institutions, or universities: once again adapting their knowledge and experience, this time, to the new democratic context.

#### THE LAWYERS' LABOUR: AN UNANTICIPATED ENCOUNTER IN DEFENCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The lawyers of the Comité Pro Paz and the Vicaría de la Solidaridad performed the institutions' most publicly visible task: the filing of legal actions in court. Their work was subsequently acknowledged, in democracy, when the resulting legal archives were validated as a source of documentation for Chile's two official truth commissions, as well as for later judicial investigations of dictatorship-era crimes against humanity (see Chapters 5 and 6). At the time, however, not a single member of the legal staff had studied human rights. Most were young and had worked with the deposed Allende government, but none had human rights litigation experience. According to José Zalaquett, they made the conscious decision to invoke existing national law in their efforts to defend those who were being persecuted (Hidalgo and Toro 2017, 62).

Against this backdrop, the Comité and Vicaría were not so much places where lawyers consciously practised some pre-existing knowledge of human rights law, as places where they trained in human rights, on the job. Experience was gained by the everyday tasks of writing motions, interviewing detainee's families, taking part in court hearings, or producing statistics and reports on repression for international agencies. Day-to-day practice was their major source of learning, and the resulting

knowledge was passed on to the new lawyers who joined the team over the years.

Jesuit priest Fernando Salas initially tasked José Zalaquett with organising the Comité's Legal Department, once Zalaquett returned to Santiago from the southern city of Puerto Montt, where he had been defending a person charged by a summary Court Martial. At the time, Zalaquett was 31 years old (Ahumada et al. 1989, 383). Some lawyers were already at work at the Comité, under the supervision of a retired Court of Appeals judge, Antonio Raveau, who coordinated the first defence actions. With the arrival of Zalaquett, teams were formed under his coordination. By late 1973, there was one team dedicated to defending civilians before Courts Martial, and another specialising in presenting *habeas corpus* writs. Raveau was the only member of the new legal staff with actual litigation experience. Most of the rest were available because they had been fired from their previous jobs for political motives, after the coup. Zalaquett had been dismissed as legal director of the Agrarian Reform Corporation; Marcos Duffau, from the Diplomatic Academy, and Roberto Garretón, from the public water company. In 1976 some of these lawyers went on to work in the Vicaría's newly formed legal department, sharing their experience defending persecuted people in court with new team members. By now, the department could also draw on the legal documentation archive that the Comité had built.

The Vicaría's Legal Department was originally coordinated by lawyer and nun Blanca Rengifo. She was succeeded by Alejandro González, who maintained the existing structure of the legal teams. New members were recruited only by personal recommendation or invitation from an existing associate, to assure the person was a known quantity, i.e. trustworthy. Lawyer Carmen Hertz was invited by Gustavo Villalobos. In her memoirs, Hertz said: "I didn't think twice... It was a Friday in late April. I remember that because a few days later was May 1st Day, and that was the first time since the coup International Workers' Day was commemorated at the Cathedral, with a huge congregation in attendance. I was there, and it was really moving. So, after I met Gustavo a few days later, I began working at the Vicaría right away" (2017, 142). Lawyer Héctor Contreras was recruited at the Vicaría by Álvaro Varela, who he had known during their time at the prestigious University of Chile Law School. The new Vicaría team went ahead with the filing of *habeas corpus* writs that had become the main litigation work. The team also proposed actions to foster respect for, and compliance with, the principles

of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: they wrote articles for publication, becoming jurists and researchers as well as solely litigators. The more analytical type of knowledge they produced this way, complemented the learning that came from everyday casework practice.

The lawyers' work was not immune to the dictatorship's repressive tactics. In fact, as explained in the previous chapter, the Comité's demise came about as a consequence of the DINA's arrest of lawyer Marcos Duffeau, (then) paralegal Alvaro Varela, and team coordinator José Zalaquett, who ended up expelled from the country. Later, in 1976, external collaborating lawyer Hernán Montealegre was arrested, as also happened in 1986 to Vicaría lawyer Gustavo Villalobos. Villalobos, who was arrested under orders from the Military Prosecutor, was kept in irregular detention for months.

As described earlier, by late 1973, the Comité had divided its legal work into two teams. Antonio Raveau and Nibaldo Galleguillos coordinated the team that acted as defence lawyers for Courts Martial. They could also call on associate (external) lawyers Roberto Garretón and Hernán Montealegre for this work. Marcos Duffeau meanwhile led the *habeas corpus* team, which was made up of lawyers Fernando Guzmán, Sergio Concha, and Antonio Cancino, assisted by young paralegals Verónica Matus, Gloria Torres, Álvaro Varela, and Fernando Zegers. The legal team met regularly to agree on criteria and arguments to be used in defence. They worked out of a spacious room on the second floor of the large, rambling, building in Santiago's Santa Mónica Street building where family members of detained people were also received.

Defence work before Courts Martial was undertaken in response to charges the dictatorship chose to bring against some political prisoners. In one submission before the president of the country's regular (civilian) Supreme Court, on 28 February 1976, Vicaría lawyers included an appendix enumerating the many irregularities committed by Courts Martial. The appendix described all of the numerous ways in which their proceedings infringed due process regulations, and listed their erroneous application of law, and/or unjustified prolongation of court proceedings. In 2004, the official report of Valech I, the truth commission that dealt with political imprisonment and torture, acknowledged the huge disadvantages lawyers had faced in attempting to defend people charged before Courts Martial. The report stated: “[g]enerally, lawyers’ interventions in a range of investigative stages were restricted, and they were only

able to appear briefly. They were routinely denied access to the defendants, obliging lawyers to search for [their clients] at the different prison facilities” (Comisión Nacional Sobre Prisión Política y Tortura 2004, 167).

According to José Zalaquett, the filing of habeas corpus petitions had four objectives. The first was to compel the dictatorship to recognise that the person was being held in custody, and to state where. If the government would not acknowledge the detention, the lawyers’ action had at least placed the authorities on notice that the prisoner was being searched for. A second objective was to accompany families, so that “they would feel comforted by the lawyers,” who received them and listened to them despite the courts’ rejection of legal actions. The third goal was to document the facts, and, consequently, demonstrate the capacity to denounce the existence of a situation that was being actively denied by the authorities. The fourth objective was to create a paper trail or archive of repression (Hidalgo and Toro 2017, 62).

The filing of *habeas corpus* petitions frequently came under fire from the judiciary. Varela recalled one time when a great many such writs were filed: “[w]e had petitions being heard simultaneously in all seven chambers of the [Santiago] Appeal Courts. It wasn’t uncommon for us to have 25 or 30 *habeas corpus* on the court docket at the same time. I coordinated that operation: I did the follow-up, filled in the reports, and spent at least three hours a day in the Court headquarters” (Gallardo 2003, 219). The Supreme Court judges did not welcome such a copious number of motions. They referred to the lawyers involved as “communists,” who they considered undeserving of their attention, and generated a highly hostile climate (ibid., 220). Between 1973 and 1975 the Comité’s Legal Department filed 2342 habeas corpus writs across the length and breadth of the country. They also filed around another 7000 legal actions requesting authorities to confirm a person’s whereabouts, or in defence of prisoners (Comité de Cooperación para la Paz en Chile 1975, 7).

Lawyers continued to file *habeas corpus* writs throughout the dictatorship period, despite their apparent futility. In his memoirs, Zalaquett used the metaphor of a drop of water that incessantly falls upon a rock, until the rock finally splits (Hidalgo and Toro 2017, 62). Already, in those early days of the lifetime of the Comité, there was awareness that inscribing violence, through legal actions and other instruments, would

slowly build up a body of facts that, someday, would come to constitute an archive capable of exposing the brutal reality of repression in its entirety. The archive constituted undeniable corroboration of the dictatorship's crimes against humanity, and would become the prime source of information for the truth commissions that were convened after the restoration of democracy. Time proved these visionary men and women to be right.

The Vicaría's Legal Department began its work as soon as the organisation came into being, in 1976. A text written by its long-time director, lawyer Alejandro González, describes its objectives: to provide legal assistance for people and their families affected by the state of exception that held Chile in its grip as of 11 September 1973; to foster respect for and full compliance with the principles proclaimed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and to coordinate actions with other institutions (González 1981). The text also described the legal team's seven working programmes mentioned in the previous section, staffed initially by eight in-house lawyers, one paralegal, four social workers, three secretaries, and the group of collaborating external lawyers. Finally, the Legal Department oversaw the production of documentation for the lodging of international denunciations (Vicaría de la Solidaridad 1981).

The pace of work was arduous (see Fig. 4.3). According to volume 5 of the Vicaría's in-house publication magazine *Solidaridad*, between 15 January and 31 August 1976, the legal department had attended to 11,242 cases and filed 515 *habeas corpus* petitions.<sup>13</sup> By the time the Vicaría closed its doors in 1992, the legal departments of the Comité and Vicaría had between them logged 44,413 cases of politically motivated detentions, and had filed 8904 *habeas corpus* petitions. Some 21,128 people had been named in *habeas corpus* petitions between 1978 and 1990. During a total of 19 years in operation, the combined work of both organisations registered 682 separate cases of forcibly disappeared detainees (Vicaría de la Solidaridad 1988).

The sheer scale of the need for *habeas corpus* petitions on behalf of people detained by the dictatorship's agents, and their reiterated filing, made the Vicaría legal team's most public and best-known activity. One indicator is that it was referred to on the record by none other than dictator Augusto Pinochet himself, in conversation with a group of foreign correspondents on 16 October 1984. The magazine *Solidaridad* quoted paragraphs of Pinochet's comments, as later conveyed to the domestic media by a government press release:



**Fig. 4.3** Lawyer Andrés Cifuentes interviewing affected people, Vicaría de la Solidaridad (dated between 1975 and 1979) (*Source* Photographic Archive, Fundación de Documentación y Archivo de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad)

... when we detect a [subversive or criminal] and arrest him, the Vicaría de la Solidaridad - which is more commie than the communists, from its head man downwards - immediately jumps [to their defence]. (...) We pick up a communist and by the next day we have 20 habeas corpus petitions filed against us. Because nearly all the lawyers at the Vicaría are communists, nearly everyone is a communist. (Vicaría de la Solidaridad 1984)

The human rights expertise acquired by Vicaría lawyers lived on after the institution closed. Lawyer Alejandro González became director of truth commission follow-up body *Corporación Nacional de Verdad y Reparación* (National Corporation for Truth and Reparations). Roberto Garretón went on to become, inter alia, UN Special Rapporteur for Zaire, then for the Democratic Republic of Congo. Héctor Contreras, Rosemarie Bornand, and Carmen Hertz were part of ONUSAL,

the United Nations mission to El Salvador, in the 1990s. José Zalaquett worked with Amnesty International, including a spell as its Director, served as a Commissioner on the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and subsequently became a law school professor, teaching in the area of human rights.

Prior to the dictatorship, the focus of legal training in Chilean law schools was the teaching of domestic doctrinal law. Knowledge of international law was quite limited, and its role in national judicial debate was peripheral. Lawyers who worked at the *Comité* and *Vicaría* therefore became standard bearers for the understanding and application of the norms that make up the corpus of international human rights law. In fact, they were the first lawyers in Chile who viewed the international community's postwar human rights milestones, from the UN Universal Declaration onward, with any real measure of seriousness.

The obstacles they faced in performing their role as lawyers for victims obliged them to learn and build from hands-on experience, developing innovative criminal law litigation strategies. These strategies were designed not only amidst a hostile adverse legal-political climate but also within a constantly changing legal order. This limited the room for manoeuvre in providing legal defence in cases of human rights violations. One example is the huge new obstacle created by the 1978 enactment of the self-amnesty decree. However, the lessons learned by practising law in such an adverse judicial climate paid off much later, after Pinochet's 1998 arrest in London. From that time, on, a fresh range of strategies were deployed by Chile's human rights lawyers to corroborate facts about the criminal responsibilities of individuals convicted of human rights violations.

Probatory elements are of course vital for the work of litigators. Another indispensable habit that *Comité* and *Vicaría* lawyers acquired was the building up of a legal archive they could turn to for empirical support and substantiation. The lawyers had to learn how to work with vast volumes of potential evidence or proof: systematising, organising, selecting, and incorporating different elements in each case. This required handling information and evidence to a level and degree that was unprecedented in national litigation history, to prepare for legal actions and subsequent follow-up.

The accumulation of this innovative strategising for defence of human rights in adverse judicial settings, the acquisition of ever more specialised knowledge of international human rights law, and the development



of new argumentation and pleading techniques in regard to the rules of evidence, was something that human rights lawyers in a range of Latin American countries acquired around this same time. Undoubtedly it has been a decisive contributor, in recent years, to the Latin American post-dictatorship justice phenomenon that Kathryn Sikkink (2011) has called “the justice cascade.”

### COLLABORATIVE WORK BETWEEN SOCIAL WORKERS AND LAWYERS: COOPERATION, TENSIONS, AND DILEMMAS

Collaborative work between social workers and lawyers was broadly cooperative. Nonetheless, dilemmas and misunderstandings did arise, stemming from the different worldview proper to each discipline. One significant difference was to be found in the area of communications, both in terms of ways of listening, and the ways in which specialist know-how was acquired and fostered. Another difference speaks to the tension between concern for the individual, and more associative practices, in the sphere of action. Here, we discuss three dimensions or axes of collaboration and tension: advice and assistance services and listening; associativity between and among victims, and the sharing of knowledge.

The daily routine of the legal department has been described in broadly similar terms by various former staff members.<sup>14</sup> The public was received and attended to in the mornings. Once past the initial “filter system” operated by the Vicaría’s security guard at reception, victims’ relatives and directly affected people would be directed to the social workers’ offices. They sat in a waiting area, each assigned a number, waiting to be called by order of arrival. Social workers individually interviewed each person, and wrote a detailed description of the case on a standardised form. An individual file was opened for each case, to which information was added as more details came to light. Folders usually expanded over time, as people commonly returned more than once to add new information. Social workers would take case folders to the lawyers, and after explaining the case, would have the affected person join them to discuss any possible legal actions. If necessary, the case was also referred for specialised medical care. In the afternoons, social workers and lawyers would meet to evaluate the day’s work. These meetings were vital for exchanging and corroborating information received. They also served as a space for emotional self-care and peer support, allowing staff to express their impressions and feelings before ending their workday.

In addition to these daily meetings, the whole legal team met every week. Planning, evaluation, and analysis retreats or awaydays were held each semester. None of the Vicaría's professional staff had prior experience working in human rights, not to mention in the context of a military dictatorship. Consequently, meeting on a regular basis to assess their work became a very important habit.<sup>15</sup> Finally, social workers and lawyers wrote reports about the cases they had attended to, contributing in this way to a diagnostic overview of the nature of repression in Chile.

Attentive listening was a skill that spoke to the ethical-human dimension of denunciation, and differed according to each person's epistemic community of origin. Daniela Sánchez clarified this point to us:

There was a difference between those of us who were social workers, pastoral personnel, and lawyers. [...] When the lawyers heard a person's story, they would challenge it ... they would compare information... 'so what happened next?', 'and the perpetrators?', 'and this?', 'so what did he say?', 'and what did you tell him?', 'how was that?' Trying to understand, to corroborate. Meanwhile, we would ask: 'how did you feel?', 'how did you experience it?', looking for meaning ... We tried to empathise with the deepest meaning conveyed in the narrative.

The lawyers we interviewed agree with this assessment. On this point Varela told us:

[...] although our behaviour and the way we handled the individuals was very kind, because we understood that they were victims, it wasn't contemplative. I mean, there were things that suddenly would be [said that were] unbelievable, and there were things that went so far beyond the norm.

Additionally, in the group interview we held with lawyers, they acknowledged that the emotional support social workers provided could have relevance for the subsequent legal aspects of a case:

... the social workers opened a case and sometimes they'd spend the whole day with that person, which delayed our work. But, my God, when that person came back to speak with us, it was not the same person who had come in crying; it was a much more stabilised individual. We lawyers did not bear the brunt of the drama: the social workers did.

Based on these examples, we distinguish different types of listening, according to who received the narrative, and necessarily shaped by that listener's epistemic community of origin. These elements came together in a virtuous cycle, in the Comité setting where the approach was pioneered, and later in the Vicaría. One person listened for information, that the lawyers could cross-check in order to compose well-founded habeas corpus petitions and other legal actions. This had to be balanced with another kind of listening, one that was oriented towards comprehension. This presupposed the ability to empathise with the other person's experience, as practised by social workers in their assistance work, which included emotional and moral support.

This division of labour around the act of listening was not, however, without its episodes of friction. Every so often, problems would erupt between lawyers and social workers. Angela Cofré remembers those daily conflicts with humour: "We argued. The '*silly insistentes sociales*' they would call us, '*insistentes sociales*.'<sup>16</sup> One of the lawyers would leave [an interview] to go to the bathroom and we would bang on the bathroom door: 'hey, the lady [client] is waiting for you,' recalls Cofré 'we *insistentes* could get on their nerves.'" Lawyer Rosemarie Bornand also told us anecdotes about the relation between the two groups of professionals:

We got along well, with some small arguments, small fights not over [who should have the limelight or] protagonism, but (...) about the people we were helping (...) I liked to hear the story for myself, not just read the social worker's notes.

Confusion over professional roles and excessive workload also sometimes generated conflict: "especially during the [peak] period of [social] protest. Because (...) the social worker would insist: '*habeas corpus*'. But it was for me to decide whether or not a *habeas corpus* was merited!" This anecdote reveals how the social workers sometimes appropriated the lawyer's legal language, while some lawyers, for their part, had or acquired some of the attributes of empathetic and attentive listening to the victims' narratives. Thus while there were some conflicts, there was virtuous collaboration between the two groups.

As stated in one internal Comité document, the work of the Legal Department betrays a constant tension between the need to balance "personal, case by case, attention with the development of more general

policies that addressed problems at their root, differentiating between structural factors and those ones related to specific juncture” (Comité de Cooperación para la Paz 1974, 1). With this in mind, as we mentioned above, one aspiration that social workers expressed early on was to move beyond the individual case, so as to offer collective solutions addressing the root causes of the problems.

An initial way of approaching problems that attempted to tackle the structural causes was public denunciation of episodes of repression and violence. The first action of this kind in the legal sphere was a mass *habeas corpus* petition, filed by bishops and other religious officials on 22 March 1974 on behalf of 131 forcibly disappeared detainees. From that time on, clergy, lawyers and victims’ relatives tended to be the most visible protagonists of the more public acts of defence of human rights. Social workers perceived their role to be one of support, rather than personal protagonism.

A second way of collectively confronting repression was to encourage victims and their families to come together and organise. Social workers, clergy, and nuns who supported or worked in the legal department became aware of the importance, for victims, of generating ties of solidarity with others experiencing similar situations. With this in mind, they encouraged “common organisation and action of family members as the best way of handling problems that were also common to all.” (Vicaría de la Solidaridad 1980, 46). In addition, they sought to connect nascent relatives organisations with local Christian base communities, and/or to draw them in to the children’s soup kitchens, job banks, workshops for the unemployed, and the whole array of groups and activities that the Vicaría’s Zone Department was fostering and supporting in the poorest neighbourhoods of Santiago.

The social workers’ goal was to organise groups in a more efficient manner, and allocate resources allowing them to operate. As mentioned earlier, these collective endeavours gave rise to various organisations of family members, including the AFDD, founded in late 1974. Cofré explained:

Our work had a social component, that also has psychological and legal dimensions. We explained that ‘your problem is the same problem faced by that person over there, and you will only be strong if you unite’. Besides, the passage of time showed that although the judicial aspect was really important for legal avenues, it was ineffectual [in the immediate term]. Habeas corpus petitions were all rejected and, basically, the only way was

to make your voice heard, and be capable of denouncing this outside [the country], where more people will listen, and then inside, to raising consciousness, and little by little, expand the work of creating conscientisation.

However, Maria Luisa Sepúlveda recalls:

the idea that as social workers we knew that the best way for people to handle their problems was by organising them in groups, brought us certain problems with other professionals. Especially the lawyers, who believed it was an inefficient and risky method.<sup>17</sup>

According to what Sepúlveda told us at the interview, the introduction of the social action dimension into the Vicaría's work, and into the organisations, was branded "political activism" by colleagues from other professions:

The lawyers opposed it, claiming we were just frustrated activists, and that we were endangering the Comité's mission and their work. They firmly believed that. And we firmly believed it to be the only way to advance a bit so that people would not feel so powerless ... to defend the lives of their children. So the reasoning that prevailed among [the lawyers] was that we should discourage [relatives], and refrain from bringing them together so they would have more strength. Finally, we came to an agreement with the lawyers and our position in favour of fostering organisation prevailed.

The legal avenue often failed to achieve the results it aimed for, mainly due to the complicity of the judicial branch with the military dictatorship. The social work of accompanying families and strengthening their self-organisation accordingly gained relatively greater importance and legitimacy among the different professional communities. The complementarity proved effective: the AFDD's sphere of action increasingly focused on public denunciation. Beyond the legal tasks, a support network of family members was operating. These relatives, in no uncertain terms, undertook denunciation actions, enabling other families to overcome fear and dare to speak out in public. This situation in turn gave renewed visibility to legal actions.

A fundamental task undertaken jointly by lawyers and social workers was the transference of knowledge, particularly legal knowledge, from professionals to affected family members. This was a natural direction of travel for social workers, who had a grassroots advocacy orientation

because of their professional training. As Cofré described it at the interview, it was a matter of “invoking our deepest-held principles about advocacy-focused social work, and adapting them to the framework of dictatorship.” It was more difficult, she said, for the lawyers to accept this dimension of their work: they “had to start giving talks about what a *habeas corpus* writ is, what human rights are, and begin training people. At first they would just sit down at the typewriter to write. And I would tell them: ‘hey, you have to explain to that lady what you’re doing, its scope, the repercussions, ask if she is willing to face the risks, etc.’” The social workers’ challenges affected the lawyers’ exercise of their profession, teaching them how to share their specialised knowledge with victims and families. Under the imperative of catastrophe, they had to learn to share the power that endowed them with specialised knowledge. “Basically, you had to transfer and share your power, which is knowledge, with people so they too would have power,” Cofré emphasised.

The transfer of information, and of professional knowledge, was vital to enable victims and their relatives to take on tasks essential to their own defence responsibly and with autonomy. Teaching and training from the lawyers and social workers therefore endowed organisations of victims and relatives with greater solidity, leaving them better positioned to take on an active, rather than secondary, role in the protection of their own rights. This had particular resonance for the social workers, who sought to avoid paternalistic solutions that generated dependency on the institution. The fact that the AFDD continue functioning in the present day, long after the closure in 1992 of the Vicaría de la Solidaridad, is an eloquent testimony to the outcome of this professional vision.

## CONCLUSIONS

We have underlined in this chapter how the professional staff associated with the Comité and Vicaría came aboard in response to emerging needs regenerated by the repressive context. Each one brought to their professional worldview a variety of resources, built from their life histories and past work experiences. Consequently, different practical ways of understanding and intervening in the world converged in the workspace of the Comité Pro Paz and the Vicaría, embodied in the women and men who brought with them their formative trajectories and professional practices. We have chosen to regard this as a process by which different *epistemes*

that met, recognised each other, and complemented the other—not without friction—as their work unfolded.

The Comité and Vicaría were humanitarian organisations, but were also entities specialised in human rights protection. The multidisciplinary work of their professional staff teams was placed at the service of victims and their relatives, who received legal, medical, and socio-economic assistance. Professionals from different disciplines had to learn how to work cooperatively, handling tensions that arose from divergent priorities, methodologies, and cultures. From an institutional point of view, the case of the Comité and Vicaría is a vivid example of virtuous coexistence, in a civil society organisation, of assistance-based work and advocacy. Both emphases were harnessed in the service of the defence of human rights, and peaceful resistance to state terrorism. It was a combination that not only connected myriad know-hows and mechanisms for practical action, but also mobilised ethical-political convictions and commitments. The individuals involved felt called to go way above and beyond what strict adherence to legal defence tasks would have required of them.

The legal departments of the Comité and Vicaría successfully achieved convergence around their epistemic differences, for the sake of the common task of protecting victims of state repression and their families. The legal work carried out by the lawyers' team was complemented by the social workers' advocacy-oriented work, each one nurturing the other. The shared professional identity that resulted was expressed in the practice of a working ecumenism and militant commitment towards persecuted people. This was interpreted reflectively as sharing, which incarnates the prophetic style of denunciation of injustice. This act of sharing deserves additional emphasis: it was not an abstract theoretical value but an entirely practical one. The exercise of active solidarity, as a source of cohesion for different identities, religious denominations, professions, and sets of belief, managed to unite atheists, agnostics, political party activists, and supporters of different parties and ideas. Thus, from their very earliest origins, first the Comité Pro Paz and then the Vicaría arose more as communities of practice than as communities of shared interest (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger-Trayner et al. 2014).

It is important to note that even though the actions piloted during the dictatorship did not yield immediate legal results, they did have social and political impact. The work carried out by social workers and lawyers

made repression visible. It also provided an ethical-political framework, centred around human rights, from which it was possible to articulate criticism of the dictatorship's repressive tactics. Both the suffering and the dignity of the victims and their relatives became more visible. Denunciation work did not propel social workers into the spotlight, but their support behind the scenes was vital for strengthening the organisations which continue even today to fight against impunity. Members of the Comité's and the Vicaría's professional staff were personally challenged and affected by repression, yet they were able to redirect their expertise to act with effectiveness and solidarity on behalf of victims of the dictatorial regime.

What remains today of that experience? Certainly, we can point to the legacy of the FUNVISOL archive and its associated, predominantly legally framed, knowledge. This has been indispensable for the broader field of human rights, as the subsequent participation of ex-Vicaría lawyers in various arenas of international protection and promotion of human rights demonstrate. The persistent, and more recent, judicialisation of cases for past human rights violations in today's national courts also offer evidence that this is so, as does the continuing presence of relatives' and survivors' associations, still mobilising for truth and justice.

## NOTES

1. One of these theses has recently been published as María Soledad Del Villar, *Las Asistentes Sociales de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad: una Historia Profesional, 1973–1983* (Santiago de Chile: Ediciones Universidad Alberto Hurtado, 2018).
2. Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez and fellow bishops developed these two concepts in a pastoral letter issued in late 1975. The Pastoral Letter of Solidarity, '*Tuve hambre y me diste de comer*' (I was hungry and you fed me), is considered to be the Vicaría's foundational document. It can be found in its entirety in Cristián Precht. *En la Huella del Buen Samaritano. Breve Historia de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad* (Santiago: Editorial Tiberíades, 1998).
3. In an interview given in 1978, Precht referred to this issue in the following terms: "when we hire a person to work at the Vicaría, we first ask whether or not s/he agrees with the principles of the Catholic Church of Santiago, and whether or not s/he subscribes to what in part is the underlying recovery of human rights, if you will (...) to find a common ground (...) We have had a very watchful attitude regarding any attitude



that might lead to proselytising misappropriation of the Vicaría's work. Some people have had to leave the Vicaría - even the Comité, but also the Vicaría - for this reason, summarily, without the chance for appeal or reconsideration. And our concerns are not only to avoid proselytism in a political sense, but also in the Catholic sense. Because sometimes someone might think they are obliged to promote the catechism (...) and that just cannot happen (...) or they may act in ways that are hurtful or harmful, by transmitting a moralising Church attitude" (*Revista Qué Pasa* 1978, 14).

4. Some legal support programmes were added temporarily, such as a Labour Law unit that existed in 1978. Its responsibilities were however later transferred to a separate Vicaría, the Workers Apostolate (Vicaría de la Solidaridad 1983, 27). There was also the case of the Working Class Residents Assistance programme, operating between 1980 and 1984, which offered legal assistance to organisations of working class families in need of housing. See Vicaría de la Solidaridad from *Quinto año de labor* (1981) to *Noveno año de Labor* (1985).
5. The concept, difficult to convey with precision in English, was developed in the 1960s by legendary Brazilian popular educator Paulo Freire. It describes a process of becoming aware of political and social conditions, viewed as a necessary precursor to challenging structural injustice. (Language Editor's Note.)
6. A detailed description of the relationship between the social work profession and the Chilean state can be found in Patricia Castañeda and Ana María Salamé, "Trabajo Social chileno y dictadura militar. Memoria profesional pre-dictatorial período 1960–1973. Agentes de cambio y trauma profesional," *Rumbos TS* 9, n° 9 (2014): 11–18.
7. Social worker Ana Maria Mediogli commented at interview: "I enrolled in the Catholic University at a very interesting time, when everything was opening up. I got very involved with the reform movement, and it ended up changing the school. Then I was given the opportunity to stay on as a professor. I managed to work for about three years before the coup. The School [of Social Work] was an interesting part of the Catholic University of those years, because we built and brought about radical change in what had been practically akin to a school run by nuns. We worked hard with students, and we divided them into teams to work with *campesinos*, with urban residents, or in the industrial sector. I was in the industrial team, where working with unions was central. All our interns, coordinated by me, were first year university students who took on internships as workers so they could experience the situation. It was a completely wild idea in those years. Later, we looked for ways to understand the worker's movement and began internships with the CUT [*Central Única*

- de Trabajadores*, Chile's main federation of labour unions]. It explains why we ended up where we ended up. It was only logical that they would fire practically all of us.”
8. It is important to note that other relevant organisations and associations in the Chilean human rights movement—such as the *Agrupación de Familiares de Ejecutados Políticos*, AFPP—emerged independently of the Vicaría, and/or in later times.
  9. After the Vicaría closed, the AFDD moved to FASIC, where the organisation remained until the year 2000, when it was given its own building.
  10. “The Vicaría is not the only protagonist behind these denunciations. Other noble institutions played a part in this task. What is exclusive to the Vicaría is their evangelising way of working, and their special concern that ultimately the people directly affected must take responsibility with the Church” (Silva Henríquez, n.d., 58).
  11. For more on the role of Vicaría's social workers, see María Teresa Johansson and Loreto López, “Del repertorio al archivo: performatividad testimonial y alianzas colectivas en la labor de las asistentes sociales de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad,” *Universum* (forthcoming).
  12. Monsignor Valech himself had died in 2010, shortly before the second commission began operations.
  13. The magazine also contained a story about a detainee's wife. After her husband's arrest, “the first step she took was to go to the offices of the Vicaría, at 444 Plaza de Armas,” where the woman was received by social workers who listened to her and assessed her case; before referring it to the lawyers, who filed a *habeas corpus* petition. During these procedures, the story reports, the woman “discovered her case was not unique. There were many others like her” (Vicaría de la Solidaridad 1976b, 2). Moreover, as a result of actions by the Vicaría staff, the woman learned that her husband was alive and being held in the Cuatro Alamos detention centre.
  14. Interviews with four social workers and a lawyer of the Legal Department coincide in their description of this routine, which began to take shape in Comité Pro Paz, and was preserved as a working method by the Vicaría: Angela Cofre, Vicky Baeza, Norma Muñoz, María Luisa Sepúlveda, and Rosemarie Bornand. One scene depicting the routine can be found in Patricio Guzman's documentary film (1987), *En el Nombre de Dios: la Vicaría de la Solidaridad* (at 7.22–7.46 minutes).
  15. Interview with Norma Muñoz: “We had lots of co-ordination meetings (...) We continuously assessed our work, because the work was new for all of us. (...) The meetings were very important for everyone because they helped us gauge what could be done, and measure the progress achieved (...) which was usually not very much.”

16. The term is a play on words: “social worker,” in Spanish, is usually rendered as “asistente social.” With a single change of syllable, the term becomes “insistente” social, acquiring a connotation of insistence, persistence, or nuisance. (Language Editor’s Note.)
17. Testimony in Mónica González, “Trabajo Social y derechos humanos. Las huellas de un compromiso,” in *Trabajo Social y Derechos Humanos, Compromiso con la Dignidad*, ed. Colectivo de Trabajo Social (Buenos Aires: Editorial Humanitas, 1990).

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