



“DOCUMENTING STATE TERROR AS A FORM OF RESISTANCE: a genealogy of human rights archive”

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In Chile, the seventeen years of military rule (1973-1990) and the gross human rights violations of thousands of citizens were continually confronted and resisted by some factions of civil society. Under the umbrella of different churches, a number of organizations provided assistance to the victims, produced first-hand information on the atrocities committed and denounced them nationally and internationally as they unfolded. Once the dictatorship was democratically defeated, this way of accounting for victims along with its material vestige—the human rights archives—proved key both to the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions and to judicial processes.

Recently, works in oral history (Portelli, 1991, Trace 2002), historical anthropology (Comaroff & Comaroff 1992), performance studies (Taylor 2003) and social studies of science (Shankar 2002, 2004), among others, have challenged archival authority and conventional understanding of archives as unquestionable sources of truth. The “archival turn” (Stoler 2002, 2009; Geiger, Moore and Savage 2010; Zeitlyn 2012) has called for a shift of attention from the archive as a source of data to the archive as the subject of research itself. Accordingly, this paper offers a history of the practices of an archive and, particularly, of the processes of ‘archival records production’. To this end, ‘records’ will be understood here as complex social, political, moral and technical entities.

The paper follows the formation, development and transformations of the archive of the major human rights advocacy organizations during this dictatorship: the Vicariate of Solidarity (*Vicaría de la Solidaridad*) 1976-1992 and the institution that preceded it, the Committee for Cooperation for Peace in Chile 1973-1975 (*Comité de Cooperación para la Paz en Chile*).

But rather than viewing the archive as a project of governmental control, as is commonly addressed in the literature (Foucault 1970, 1979, Derrida 1995, Stoler 2002), the paper will show this archive’s role in resisting a systematic policy of human rights violations perpetrated by the State. This archive testifies to this resistance not only through the records



of thousands of affected victims's stories and the many documents that are indicative of the range and scope of the assistance offered. The archive also houses different research products (ie. reports, handmade spreadsheets) in which the active work of collection and production of information on the logics and actors of the repression is inscribed, revealing that these organizations played a key counterintelligence role during the regime.

More than 25 years after the end of the military regime, this paper is based on one year of archival research at the Foundation and Documentation Center of the Vicariate of Solidarity (*Fundación y Centro de Documentación de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad - FUNVISOL*) which preserves and protects the documents of The Committee and the Vicariate and on 20 interviews with former officials of both organizations.

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