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Crossing Borders in Cloth, from Collectivizing to Commemorating: A Study of the Development of Chilean Arpilleras, their Impact, and Legacy

The trauma of experiencing extreme repression has manifested itself in creative forms across nations and over time. The cunning female weaver trope is used again and again in mythology, from Philomena to Athena, from Helen of Troy to Penelope. The female and the stitch are intrinsically linked. In the case of Chile, the brightly stitched scenes which are synonymous with Chilean *arpilleras* (appliqué tapestries) are deeply associated with the fall of Salvador Allende's government, Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship, and the repression that followed. The precise origin of arpilleras is contested and unclear. The most common theory predates the coup and connects arpilleras to Isla Negra, a coastal town around 100 km from Santiago de Chile. It was a small fishing village where local women made embroidered wall hangings to sell to tourists to supplement their income. These wall hangings have been cited by the *arpilleristas* (women who make arpilleras) as one of their sources of inspiration.

Arpilleras developed in the capital city, particularly in the areas of extreme deprivation such as the shanty towns, but they were also produced by families of the detained and disappeared. Many of the women from the poorer areas of Santiago were illiterate and so creating arpilleras provided them with an opportunity to voice their concerns, traumas and experiences in a medium that could easily be transported and understood abroad. The arpillera art form was understood to be a threat to the Junta, ultimately resulting in them being outlawed in 1980.

It is this connection between the feminine and sewing, stitching and weaving that has been analyzed by Rozsika Parker who traces the development and division of the categories of "arts" and "crafts" and the social system which separates artist from artisan. The Renaissance is identified as the turning point in the seventeenth century when embroidery and stitching moved from a male profession to an acceptable form of education and activity for women.[1] The rise of the individualistic and predominantly masculine painterly school of art contrasts with the feminine one of embroidery which was frequently a collective act. This collective

1 Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 73.

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aspect has naturally leant the form to political or revolutionary causes, with examples ranging from its use following the October Revolution to banners made by suffragettes and to Chilean arpilleras. Arpilleras grew out of the historical circumstances of military governed Chile.

The main objectives of this chapter are to investigate the role arpilleras played in providing a voice for the women who made them and their lasting legacy in contemporary society. The following pages question the extent to which Arpilleras can be considered depositories of memories and examine their legacy.

Contextualization

In the 150 years following independence from Spain, Chile prided itself in being one of the most stable and democratic countries in South America. Perhaps this long-standing tradition of democracy is what accounted for the disbelief that the country was about to enter a 16-year-long dictatorship.[2] Steve Stern talks of the "cultural shock" experienced in Chile, which had seen itself as a civilized nation, one which produced Nobel prizing winning laureates, academics, and was a hub of thought and culture. The reality of the cruel acts that followed the establishment of the dictatorship meant that a large part of the population used denial as a coping mechanism. On September 11, 1973, following the storming of La Moneda Palace, the seat of government, General Augusto Pinochet addressed the nation via the radio and declared, "this is not a coup d'état, but a military movement." His reassurances that there would be "no victors or vanquished" would ring hollow almost immediately as a 24-hour curfew was imposed and all political parties were systematically outlawed. Neo-liberalism is intrinsically tied up with Chilean society to the extent that even today it is impossible to reflect on the history of the country without considering the implications of the system. Under Pinochet Chile became the first example of a neoliberal state and the so-called "Chicago Boys" reconstructed the economy by creating free trade, opening up natural resources to competition, and privatizing social security.[3] The consequences of neoliberal policy resonated throughout the entire country but one of the places where it had the most profound and immediate implications were in the *poblaciones* (shanty towns) on the periphery of Santiago.

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2 Pamela Constable and Arturo Valenzuela, *A Nation of Enemies: Chile Under Pinochet* (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991), 30.

3 David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 7.

The development of poblaciones in Santiago has been traced back to the early twentieth century when the nitrate economy went into recession. Following WWII Chile, like many Latin American countries, industrialized rapidly and many travelled to the capital in search of employment. The elevation of folk culture in the late 1960s and early 1970s saw the población as home to theater, music, and puppetry performances. The poblaciones became creative centers and the nucleus of political discussion. The strong political identity of members of the shanty towns and their development as a seat of folk culture resulted in them facing particularly harsh treatment throughout the dictatorship. An environment of fear was intentionally created; poblaciones were used as temporary dumping grounds for corpses left there until military trucks eventually arrived to remove them. There were random raids on homes where anything that aroused suspicion was destroyed and families feared interrogations.[4]

The anthropologist Paley sought to understand the historical development of La Bandera, a población situated to the south of Santiago. The study reveals the conflicting histories of the area, particularly its foundation myth. The general assumption tended to be that La Bandera was established following the infamous land seizure of January 26, 1969, facilitated by Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria, and it was frequently cited as an exemplary case of the success of the land seizures. However, local memory contradicted this version of events; the locals remember the role of community groups and individuals in establishing the población rather than the state.[5] This exemplifies the lack of control of these marginalized communities when their version of the past had been erased by government rhetoric.

Trauma, Memory, and Collective Cultural Responses

The significance of vernacular culture, folk art or low culture, whichever definition is attached to it, comes not from the distinction between high and low but rather from the connections and meanings created by culture itself, those that bind and differentiate members of society.[6]

4 Julia Paley, *Marketing Democracy: Power and Social Movements in Post-Dictatorship Chile* (London: University of California Press, 2001), 56–62.
5 Paley, *Marketing Democracy*, 32–33.
6 Ted Cohen, "High and Low Thinking About High and Low Art," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51, no. 2 (1993): 156, DOI: 10.2307/431380.

The twentieth century was marked as an era of trauma as societies grappled with the atrocities of the atomic bomb, WWI and WWII, genocide, conflict and dictatorship, and as a result trauma theories proliferated. The memory of trauma impacts on collective identity, as a defining marker of a group whose members do not consciously choose to identify as victims but choose to transform loss and incorporate it into cultural narratives.[7] We can consider arpilleras as one such cultural narrative. Aprilleras were subversive and identified a potential threat to the dictatorship; as an art form they straddle the collective and individual. Individually, they provided arpilleristas with an income and a space to talk. Collectively, arpilleras formed part of the cultural resistance against the regime. Created in collective workshops and moved across the world, arpilleras allowed their makers to recount their stories, not through words but images.

Arpilleras can be read like any other documentary source due to their close connection to the daily reality of the women who made them. The importance of this aspect of truth and reality is highlighted by a member of Association of Families of the Detained-Disappeared (AFDD): "We don't make the arpilleras just to be making something, to show little nothings or a field of flowers. The arpillera was born to show our real lives, disappeared children, hunger, common soup kitchens, our lack of light and water."[8] The idea of a collective memory is stitched out in the collaborative nature of arpilleras. Take, for example, the arpillera referred to as Hardship in Our Community, made in 1979 by a group of women under FASIC (Fundación de Ayuda Social de las Iglesias Cristianos). It consists of nine arpilleras, each a vignette of the community's problems and how the community confronted and challenged them (Figure 1). The top right-hand arpillera shows a textile factory whose workers are on strike, with the *Carabineros* (Chilean police force) with their unmistakable green uniform surrounding two male protestors and a group of women. Many of the women spoke of the dangers of men participating in protests and the tendency for husbands to avoid protests either through fear of danger or lack of belief in the difference it would make. Men were frequently discouraged from public denunciations of the government by their wives, mothers, and sisters, as men were more likely to face arrest. The women knew that they were seen as insignificant and as not constituting a real threat, so they were able to contest the military government in both subversive and public ways.[9] Other scenes in this collection of arpilleras include collective kitchens and gardens that were community-

7 Shoshana Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century* (London: Harvard University Press, 2002), 23.
8 Marjorie Agosín, *Scraps of Life: Chilean Arpilleras: Chilean Women and the Pinochet Dictatorship*, trans. Cola Franzen (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1987), 79 – 81.
9 Agosín, *Scraps of Life*, 50.

led initiatives to help fight hunger. Throughout the stitching of these scenes a group discussion must have occurred. The collaborative effort involved in creating a set of arpilleras must have formed ties and connections among the group to enforce an "imagined community" which counteracted the state sanctioned one which did not acknowledge these women, their pain or problems.

Fig. 1: Penurias en nuestra población/ Hardship in our community
Fundación de Ayuda Social de las Iglesias Cristianas (FASIC) workshop, 1979
Photo Tony Boyle, © Conflict Textiles

Facilitating Arpilleras: Vicaría de la Solidaridad and CEMA

In the 1970s, one of the first organizations to start collecting testimonies from torture victims and family members of the detained and disappeared in Chile was the religious organization Comité Pro Paz (CPP). In addition to their work on human rights they were also a pivotal force behind the development and distribution of arpilleras. Mainly because of Pinochet's unwavering belief in the standing of the

Church as part of "the moral cleansing of the nation," it was one of the few organizations which could critique the dictatorship and simultaneously be under its protection. This is not to say that the Church and the Vicaría did not on occasion face arrest and interrogation as a result of their critical stance. Startled by the frequent disappearances and torture cases the CPP was formed a month after the coup by the cross-religious community.[10] The CPP's assistance expanded to support work in the poblaciones, particularly the groups that had already been set up by women. The CPP and later the Vicaría's work documenting human rights abuses in Chile was crucial for gaining world recognition of the vast human rights violations. Under mounting pressure the committee was forced to close down by December 1975. And it was following this that the Cardinal set up the Vicaría de la Solidaridad in January 1975, which would run until 1992.

In many ways the Vicaría was established to continue the work started by the CPP, particularly the process of documenting human rights violations and providing aid for political prisoners and their families, as well as carrying on the relief work that had been started in the poblaciones. It also worked to support a growing network of international human rights organizations which had been developing in Chile since 1973, despite the continued threat of repatriations. Following the disbanding of the CPP it became apparent that in order for the Vicaría to remain operational it was essential that they appeared non-partisan: the way for them to achieve this was to campaign for human rights but not specifically for a return to democracy or to challenge the status quo.[11] Through their fight for human rights the Vicaría was able to protect their organization and to offer help clandestinely to other groups, for example those in the poblaciones.

The safety offered by association with the Church was crucial. It encouraged women to become involved in arpillera groups because they felt safe in the knowledge that the Church was looked upon favorably by the government.[12] The importance of the Church as an organization and as a focal point of the community can be seen through its recurrence as a theme in many arpilleras. The Church may be represented as a simple cross in a room where a group of children are being fed, or a chapel might be depicted. Although there were other human rights organizations in Chile, and equally although the creation and distribution of arpilleras did occur to some extent without the assistance of the Vicaría, that organization was critical in establishing the process of many women's arpillera workshops.

10 Jacqueline Adams, *Art Against Dictatorship: Making and Exporting Arpilleras Under Pinochet* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 40.

11 Pamela Lowden, *Moral Opposition to Authoritarian Rule in Chile, 1973–90* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996).

12 Adams, *Art Against Dictatorship*, 89.

The Vicaría's arpillera workshops were to become such a cultural institution that they formed the basis of the critically acclaimed play *Tres Marías y Una Rosa* which rekindled international interest in Chilean culture. It was a social commentary on the unspoken consequences of the so-called "Miracle of Chile": unemployment, poverty, people forced to emigrate, and the reliance on income generated by groups of women making arpilleras. The venture was a collaborative effort between the independent theatre company Taller de Investigación Teatral and a group of women from an arpillera workshop. The play demonstrated how the workshops were run and the collaborative approach taken by the women. The play toured internationally and it proved so successful that the government announced it was of "cultural and artistic value" and lifted the 22 per cent VAT on ticket sales that cultural performances were typically subjected to.[13]

CEMA Chile, like the Vicaría, sponsored arpillera workshops, however, with Pinochet's spouse Lucía Hiriart in charge, the arpilleras produced were explicitly pro-regime. CEMA Chile's focus was to reinforce the nuclear family and traditional gender roles. Women were incentivized to join the organization which granted them access to discounted stores or classes such as hairdressing, baking, and arpillera making. Unlike the Vicaría workshops where women tended to speak freely, CEMA's general committee imposed topics of conversation and determined the scenes depicted.[14] CEMA was a production line for producing standardized artisanal works which removed any freedom of choice or expression from the women who created the arpilleras. The adoption of arpilleras by CEMA as a counteractive movement against the Vicaría demonstrates the powerful role they played in society.

Arpilleras, Human Rights, and Making the Private Public

"Chile's Needled Junta" was the title given to the newspaper article appearing in the national British newspaper, The Guardian, announcing that images of arpilleras would be used on charity Christmas cards.[15] From Santiago's poblaciones to homes on the other side of the world, arpilleras were carrying their human rights message. To unpick arpilleras and their movement across the world is to explore

13 Martin Wood, "Other Side of the 'Miracle'," *The Guardian*, May 3, 1981, 36.

14 Norberto Lechner and Susana Levy, *Notas Sobre la Cotidana III: el Disciplinamiento de la Mujer* (Santiago de Chile: Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, 1984), 22–32.

15 Enzo Cossi and Guy Brett, "Chile's Needled Junta," *The Guardian*, December 10, 1979, 20.

the various networks that assisted in their creation and distribution. One of the key forces behind these networks was their shared sense of human rights. For the arpillera movement to successfully achieve its goals of providing an income whilst simultaneously raising awareness abroad, the entire process had to rely on the assistance of groups and organizations at both national and international levels.

At first, arpilleras were sold locally to known supporters of the cause. This was partly due to limitations of selling an unknown art form abroad without first establishing the necessary “solidarity chains.”[16] The first public exhibition of arpilleras was in 1975 and was soon followed by a larger exhibition in the San Franciscan Church. The church is located in downtown Santiago and is hauntingly close to Londres 38, an infamous detention and torture center. An example of the risk posed by publicly exhibiting arpilleras is the bombing of the Paulina Waugh Gallery in the central neighborhood of Bella Vista in early January 1977. The exhibition Navidad Siglo XX exhibited arpilleras from nearby poblaciones and works by established artists. The story of the bombing was widely reported in the press where it was said that the financial company which occupied the first floor of the building had been burning reports by throwing firebombs in through the window, although the bombs had targeted the gallery rather than their offices.[17] It was later revealed that the secret police were the perpetrators who perceived the arpillera display as a “memory knot” which could incite conflicting memories so they were impelled to annihilate them.[18] The risks posed at home were equalled by those associated with the exportation of arpilleras. By 1976 sufficient links had developed with external organizations for the sale of arpilleras abroad. The making of arpilleras was seen as a subversive act, and thus carrying and distributing them came at considerable risk, a risk which was shared by those in the solidarity chain.

In general, arpilleras were made anonymously, free of text except for the occasional slips of paper attached to a pocket at the back of the work, explaining what the arpillera depicted. Arpilleras provided women with the authority and agency to choose their own images, to select the fabric, to contemplate and disentangle which moment from their past or present reality they wanted to represent. Arpilleras functioned as a form of testimony where the creator of the piece had the authority over what is represented and, crucially, had certainty that it would remain

16 Adams, *Art Against Dictatorship*, 163.
17 Steve J. Stern, *Battling for Hearts and Minds: Memory Struggles in Pinochet’s Chile, 1973 – 1978* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 81 – 83.
18 Steve J. Stern, *Remembering Pinochet’s Chile: On the Eve of London 1998* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 120.

unchanged and unaltered. It is impossible to unpick an element from an arpillera without unravelling the entire work. As such the arpilleristas could be confident that their work would remain unadulterated. Although some arpilleras were made by trained seamstresses they were always seen as a handicraft, with all its feminine connotations. As a result of this characterization, arpilleras were initially considered to be of limited threat to the dictatorship because they were produced by low-status women.[19] What would the response have been had the women chosen to use a more traditional form of protest like posters or print media?

Beyond Chile, arpilleras were exhibited in different locations, including the high art spaces of galleries and exhibition venues. In 1987 the exhibition Chile Vive toured Madrid and Barcelona. It was billed as an exhibition of "exilio interior," formed with works from those who had remained in Chile. The exhibition included a painting by the revered Chilean Roberto Matta and among all this high art were the "famosas y deliciosas arpilleras."[20] Arpilleras attracted the attention of various members of the international community, those who revered them for their subversive messages and those with a continued interest in the nation from prior to the coup. As they were made by impoverished women they also attracted the interest of feminists and socialists.[21] The admiration resulted in an exhibition of arpilleras held in London's AIR Gallery in 1979 which was billed as, "the London show that this year most successfully and movingly integrated social concerns and traditional art."[22] The inclusion of arpilleras as part of "high art" exhibitions demonstrates how they began to transcend their "folk art" label.

The transition of women from the private to the public sphere was a crucial consequence of the arpillera movement. The importance of the home was apparent in the sheer volume represented in arpilleras, whether in a positive light, reflecting aspects of the community and hope for the future, or how society failed, ignored and marginalized the poor. Some arpilleras show an entire community tapping into the electric supply as they could not afford to pay for it. They may include scenes that represent the inadequate sanitary conditions of the población. Homes may merely be a backdrop for the unemployed men with no hope of finding work to while away their day. In the poblaciones in particular, it was uncom-

19 Alba Pérez and María Viñolo, "Las Arpilleras, una Alternativa Textil Femenina de Participación y Resistencia Social," in *¿Por Qué Tenen que decir Que Somos Diferentes? Las Mujeres Inmigrantes, sujetos de Acción Politica*, ed. Carmen Gregorio Gil (Stanford: Creative Commons, 2010), 49.

20 O.S., "Se exhibe en Barcelona "Chile Vive", una muestra de la actividad cultural producida bajo Pinochet," *La Vanguardia*, March 12, 1987, 46.

21 John A. Walker, *Left Shift: Radical Art in 1970s Britain* (London: Tauris, 2002), 218.

22 Lucy R. Lippard, *Get the Message?: A Decade of Art for Social Change* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1984), 58–59.

mon for women to work outside the home. However, with the arpillera movement these women began to move themselves into the public realm. One arpillerista explained how important the process was for her in her own identity formation: "it's a great joy that people consider that we are making art [and] that we are artists in this. For us, as housewives, we've never been, or dreamt of being, artists or working in that sort of thing. In this there's some compensation for what's happened. It gives us more strength to go on, to go on struggling to live. God willing, we'll be able to make them better one day."[23]

The development of a sense of community and belonging among these women was crucial, with some social scientists suggesting that the dictatorship provided them with an opportunity for a distinct form of political power. The majority of those who disappeared or were detained were men. As the women organized themselves they took public stances against the dictatorship. Women chained themselves to the gates in front of the Congress building, demanding to know what had happened to the disappeared. One arpillera dating from the late 1980s illustrates this moment. It shares the story that each woman who participated in the protest was detained for five days. In similar displays of civil disobedience women took part in regular Thursday marches pinning photos of the disappeared to their chests, photos which can also be seen in this arpillera. These women began to organize themselves and through the work they did in the arpillera workshops they were able to see themselves as more than just wives and mothers. They realized the political potential of their experiences and as such their private grief was expressed publicly.[24] There was also a shift in the way the women were perceived by their husbands. Many reported spouses who were resistant to the idea of their wives becoming the breadwinner but gradually the financial benefits of women providing an income began to be more widely accepted. There are even reports of women enlisting family members to help complete arpilleras at particularly busy periods – including husbands and sons.[25]

The Global and Local Dimensions of Arpilleras

President Michele Bachelet's inauguration speech at the Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos was interrupted for several minutes by two women climbing onto the stage to critique the country's contemporary human rights record. One

23 Guy Brett, *Through Our Own Eyes: Popular Art and Modern History* (London: GMP Publishers, 1986), 50.

24 Agosín, *Tapestries of Hope, Threads of Love: the Arpillera Movement in Chile*, 44.

25 Adams, *Art Against Dictatorship*, 122.

of the women was identified as the sister of the Mapuche activist Matías Catrileo who had died at the hands of the Carabineros in January 2008.[26] Bachelet's speech was laden with references to a space for multiple memories and interpretations of the past. She directly expressed the idea of plurality, "no hay una sola memoria sobre el pasado. Las personas recuerdan de manera diferente, individual y colectivamente."[27] She drew attention to former presidents Patricio Aylwin, Eduardo Frei, and Ricardo Lagos sitting in the audience, "que representan 20 años de libertad y de respeto por los derechos humanos."[28] This concept of a democratic past and platform for memories was tested twice that day. The other incident came with the arrival of the Peruvian writer, Mario Vargas Llosa who was greeted by cries of "que se vaya," heard coming from members of the group AFDD who were angered by his presence because of his support of the presidential candidate Sebastian Piñera. Responding to the incident, the vice president of AFDD, Mireya García, declared that his presence "fue una ofensa a la dignidad y a la memoria de las víctimas."[29] It was apparent that the site was laden with meaning and contention where injustices of the past, and the more recent past, that had not been laid to rest were made visible. The inauguration was also an emotional experience for the President whose father had died at the hands of the military in 1974. The speech suggested that the Museo de la Memoria's intention was to incorporate those who were exiled, tortured, detained, and disappeared under the military government, as well as a space for all types of personal connections and responses, some of which were visible at the inauguration. The President's speech also paid homage to Cardinal Silva Henríquez and the work of the Vicaría. Although not outlined in the speech itself, arpilleras do find a home in the museum both as part of the museum's permanent collection and frequently as part of temporary exhibitions. The permanent collection consists of a wide range of Chilean arpilleras dating from the early 1970s to the early 1990s and it is one of the few places in Santiago where arpilleras are on permanent display. The controversy surrounding the opening of the Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos gives some indica-

26 Karina Morales, "Incidentes empañan inauguración del Museo de la Memoria," *EMOL*, January 11, 2010, https://www.emol.com/noticias/nacional/2010/01/11/393405/incidentes-empanan-inauguracion-del-museo-de-la-memoria.html.

27 Michelle Bachelet, "Discurso Inauguración del Museo de la Memoria y Los Derechos Humanos," 4 (speech, Santiago de Chile, January 11, 2010), Museo de la Memoria, http://www.museodelamemoria.cl/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/discurso-presidenta.pdf.

28 Bachelet, "Discurso Inauguración del Museo de la Memoria y Los Derechos Humanos," 1.

29 4 "AFDD Criticó Presencia de Vargas Llosa en Inauguración de Museo de la Memoria," EMOL (Spanish Language Site), January 12, 2010, http://www.emol.com/noticias/nacional/2010/01/12/393493/afdd- critico-presencia-de-vargas-llosa-en-inauguracion-de-museo-de-la-memoria.html.

tion of how sites of commemoration can be catalysts for contentious and opposing memories.

Commemoration

Michelle Bachelet's first term in office coincided with the country's bicentenary celebrations and as such it was a heavily commemorative period. Events and funding were arranged to mark the anniversary which included several monuments and sites of memory dedicated to the detained and disappeared. This latest period of commemoration may have been a means of leaving behind a governmental legacy and continued a fraught relationship between memory and commemoration. Forms of commemoration, either state sanctioned or grassroots, require a public display that encourages reflection and response. History is selective and what is remembered officially by the state always represents an omission. State-sanctioned monuments have a tendency to commemorate a more heroic past, one that encourages its citizens to re-remember a sanitized version of events where the dominant agenda is represented.[30]

La Alameda is a vast street that stretches east to west across most of Santiago; it passes in front of La Moneda palace, home to statues dedicated to national heroes, and notably not home to a recent monument, Women in the Memory. Women in the Memory is dedicated to not just the Chilean women who were killed or made to disappear but to all disappeared women across Latin America. This monument was deemed too political to be placed in the central thoroughfare of La Alameda. Instead it was relegated to the forgotten and hidden location on the roof of a metro station, unbeknown to the many commuters who pass by.

Over time monuments have been erected to the "big" names of Chilean history, to Allende and Pinochet. Monuments commemorating the detained and disappeared like the wall of names in the General Cemetery or the Villa Grimaldi Peace Park among others have also left their mark on public space. Arpilleras were never made as a monument to the past; they were subversive works which challenged the present reality. The intention is not to detract from these monuments made of stone, iron, and concrete but it is hard not to view arpilleras as unintentional counter-monuments, made from humbling threads and fabric. Arpilleras share many qualities with counter-monuments. They provide a counter-narrative to the dominant one; they move away from political theory and show the lived real-

30 Katherine Hite, *Politics and the Art of Commemoration: Memorials to Struggle in Latin America and Spain* (London: Routledge, 2012), 4.

ity. The materials used stand in opposition to traditional monuments, made of fabric and hand-sewn they have a delicacy to them. Arpilleras have been described as "ambassadors" and much like the ambassador they "represent history and pass on culture."[31] They were made to travel and pass through many hands. If an arpillera is displayed in an art gallery in Madrid, in a community Library in Derry, or in an individual's home the meaning and potency of the message is not altered. Their meaning is not dependent on their location because of their universality. Arpilleras stood testimony to crimes and injustices of the past and continue to do so now.

Memory Struggles and the Medium of Cloth

Cloth and its different applications tend to lend itself to this form of memory work because of two striking aspects. The first of these is the importance of the visual when recounting stories, aside from the fact that it is difficult to express with words the experience; this tendency of the oral or visual over the written form is the very essence of "folk."[32] The importance of their "folksiness" stylistically is significant because of the shock and impact aprilleras have: at first they may appear naïve and childlike which is juxtaposed to the scenes of violence and cruelty they depict. Secondly, war textiles, including arpilleras, demonstrate a need to tell stories and to share experience, for the production of folk art relies on "communication in small groups,"[33] and in this way we can see arpillera workshops as a continuation of the collective movement that had been outlawed during the dictatorship.

As well as identity formation, memory is significant because it involves an active process: remembering serves as a form of discovery and engagement.[34] For Arendt, memory propels us forward as opposed to holding us back; memory in the present is a crucial part of dealing with trauma.[35] Arpilleras with their representations of a moment in time but with the lack of any clear time markers are a

31 Roberta Bacic, in discussion with the author, Benone, June 24, 2016.

32 Marsha Macdowell, "A Document of Cloth: Interpreting History in a Traditional Textile," in *Weavings of War: Fabric of Memory, an Exhibition Catalogue*, ed. Ariel Zeitlin Cooke and Marsha MacDowell (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2005), 42.

33 Ariel Zeitlin Cooke, "Common Threads: The Creation of War Textiles Around the World," in *Weavings of War: Fabric of Memory, an Exhibition Catalogue*, ed. Ariel Zeitlin Cooke and Marsha MacDowell (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2005), 12.

34 Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 56.

35 Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), 10–11.

clear cultural act of memory. According to Bell cultural acts of memory must be understood as a political action and as an attempt to place the past.[36]

The use of textiles as testimony was highlighted in Selimović's comparative study of memory quilts of the Bosnian genocide and of arpilleras from the Southern Cone. Textiles as testimony mean that the women are witnesses twice, once first-hand and then again through the creation of quilts or embroidery.[37] The importance of arpilleras and other fibre arts, where the creator portrays their memories and experiences of a particular moment or event, is their position always outside the official historical narrative.

Conclusion

The women who participated in the workshops found themselves discussing and questioning the government which led to greater politicization of those women. This can be seen as a paradox of the regime. The Junta had wanted to enforce patriarchal ideals but women consequently had a greater impact on the public sphere than ever before. Through state-sanctioned repressions and enforced economic hardships women moved from the home and onto the streets to protest. It would reduce the arpilleristas and other women to suggest that a direct consequence of creating an arpillera was the breaking down of the public and private dichotomy. However, what does seem apparent is that the greater participation in the public sphere of women came from the collective movements that developed, arpilleras being one of them. Arpilleras were not the insignificant craft that they had initially been dismissed as by the regime. Arpilleras are a distinct version of memory and can be read as historical sources. They are examples of "history from below" and in their own way subvert some of the neo-liberal ideals that were beginning to take effect. They are made from scraps of mass-produced clothes. These scraps go from being a generic item and are transformed into something original, a unique piece of art which is a product of its place and a form of commemoration from a troubled time.

This chapter argues that arpilleras can be considered depositories of memories because of the way they documented daily realities, and how consequently they came to be relied upon by exiles as a means of gaining a snapshot of the sit-

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36 Vikki Bell, "Afterword: The Politics of "Memory" in the Long Present of the Southern Cone," in *The Memory of State Terrorism in the Southern Cone: Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay*, ed. Francesca Lessa and Vincent Druliolle (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 211.

37 Inela Selimović, "Seeing Voices: Srebrenica's Filaments of Memory," in *Stitching Resistance: Women, Creativity, and Fiber Arts*, ed. Marjorie Agosín (Tunbridge Wells: Solis Press, 2014), 74.

uation back home. They continue to be depositories of the memories of those who made them. The collaborative and collective nature of arpillera workshops provided women with a space to create testimonies of their lives and played a role in the way the women saw themselves. Very few of Santiago's original arpilleristas are alive today, however, through the scenes they depicted using deeply personal scraps of cloth or locks of hair we continue to be offered an insight into what they experienced and felt. The vast majority of the arpillera workshops faced closure due to the reduced interest from overseas purchasers with the return to democracy and stability. Over time the workshops were forced to close and the Vicaría was disbanded in 1992. The legacy has been their implementation of post-conflict strategies that allow a space for those to remember in opposition to the often encouraged stance of forgetting. When asked why arpilleras have travelled so widely and continue to be a point of inspiration, the director of Guernica's Peace Museum reflected that, *"el lenguaje textil y el arte tienen una gran potencialidad para hablar de cosas, de momentos tan terribles que son casi inenarrables, por eso su importancia."*[38] The continuing legacy of arpilleras is their ability to remember, remind, and challenge injustices.

38 Iratxe Momoitio, email to author, April 29, 2016.