

# Stitching & UNSTITCHING THE TROUBLES

Curated by Roberta Bacic, assisted by Breege Doherty

Exhibition, workshops and events exploring  
responses to conflict through textile art.

## Foreword

Stitching and Unstitching The Troubles is part of the North East PEACE III Cultural Fusions project, being delivered by Causeway Museum Service (CMS) and its partner Mid Antrim Museums Service (MAMS). The project which is funded under the European Union's Peace III Programme is managed on behalf of the Special EU Programmes Body by the North East Peace III Partnership. A key part of this project is the Remembering the Troubles programme – exploring and recording local community memories of The Troubles.

During this Decade of Anniversaries<sup>^</sup> it will be 40 years since the outbreak of The Troubles. Up until recently, attempts by our museum services to develop our collections on The Troubles had encountered some reluctance to share. Yet the legacy of this conflict in our communities lies just below the surface. As part of the peace building process within our communities there was an acknowledged need to provide an appropriate programme to support dialogue around experiences of the Troubles

During the first phase of Cultural Fusions 2009 -2011 a very successful and powerful pilot project was held that used the international experiences of conflict, as expressed through textile collections, to enable and support dialogue in our local communities. The potential for these quilts and arpilleras\* underpinned our planning process for this next phase of work.

These textiles, usually stitched by women, embody the stories that people around the world choose to share about their experiences of conflicts. A reflection by the internationally renowned curator of these textiles Roberta Bacic, supports the value of this sensitive process: *“when you are stitching you don't have to look at the eyes of the person you are telling the story to.”*

We were delighted that Roberta Bacic and Breege Doherty have been able to work with us on this project. CMS and MAMS hope that the opportunity to consider the international experiences of conflict as shared through this extraordinary collection of textiles will result in similar narratives of The Troubles being revealed across the North East cluster (Coleraine, Ballymena, Limavady, Larne, Ballymoney and Moyle local authorities). We will showcase the results in a second exhibition being held in Mid-Antrim Museum at the Braid in April 2013.

Further information can be found on [www.niarchive.org](http://www.niarchive.org)  
[www.cain.ulst.ac.uk/quilts](http://www.cain.ulst.ac.uk/quilts)  
[www.northeastpeace.com](http://www.northeastpeace.com)

<sup>^</sup> Decade of Anniversaries (CRC (Community Relation Council) & HLF (Heritage Lottery Fund)) marks a number of particularly important anniversaries which have shaped the sense of British and Irish identity in Northern Ireland in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

\* pronounced ah – pee- air - ahs

# Introduction

This exhibition ***Stitching and Unstitching The Troubles*** explores the multi-layered impact of conflict and its aftermath with a central emphasis on The Troubles in Northern Ireland. Through portraying current and historical conflicts in different parts of the world, over different decades, this collection of textiles, from Northern Ireland, England, Spain, Chile, Peru and Colombia, invites reflection on a range of issues: violence, death, denial, loss, disappearances, hunger strikes, displacement, resistance, the role of the church and transition to democracy.

Stitched by women, living in or on the margins of conflict, we are given an insight, through the medium of quilts, wall hangings and arpilleras, (three dimensional textiles from Latin America, which originated in Chile), into the struggles they, their families and their communities endured. Their resilience and courage in surviving and taking risks for peace and democracy is strikingly portrayed through the traditional domestic activity of sewing. As International Peace Day, on September 21, falls during the exhibition, it is being marked by a special program that focuses on narratives and testimonies of efforts for peace during The Troubles in Northern Ireland and beyond.

In the foreword to ***Tapestries of Hope, Threads of Love: The Arpillera Movement in Chile***, Isabel Allende, describes the context which gave birth to the arpilleras: *“With leftovers of fabric and simple stitches, the women embroidered what could not be told in words, and thus the arpilleras became a powerful form of political resistance”* (2008, Agosín, M., second edition).

In viewing these textiles and the memorabilia on display as part of this exhibition, we invite you to connect and react to the stories narrated by these women. Through the programme of workshops, you may perhaps, similar to the Chilean women, *“embroider what could not be told in words”* and thus deepen the process of ***Stitching and Unstitching The Troubles***.

Roberta Bacic & Breege Doherty, August 2012

**Textiles on front cover - clockwise from top left.**

**Where are the ‘disappeared’?**

Chilean arpillera, anon., late 1980s  
Photo Martin Melaugh

**Executed at dawn**

Wall hanging by Irene MacWilliam, 2009  
Photo Martin Melaugh

**Displacement**

Colombian arpillera, 2010  
Photo Martin Melaugh

**Events of 1992**

Northern Ireland quilt by Irene MacWilliam, 1993  
Photo Irene MacWilliam

María Herrera, Mujeres Creativas workshop, Peru, 1985  
Photo Martin Melaugh

**No going back**

Arpillera by Sonia Copeland, 2009  
Photo Martin Melaugh

**Return of the exiles**

Chilean arpillera, anon., 1992  
Photo Martin Melaugh

**Threads of Life**

English arpillera by Janet Wilkinson and Susan Beck, 2009  
Photo Susan Beck

**March of the miners’ wives, daughters and sisters**

María Herrera, Mujeres Creativas workshop, Peru, 1985

## NORTHERN IRELAND TEXTILES, QUILTS & ARPILLERAS

The following five pieces by Northern Ireland artist Irene MacWilliam were created over a 12 year period. Using a variety of textile techniques, Irene brings us poignant images of the impact of The Troubles in Northern Ireland while also focusing on the international dimension.

### Common loss: 3000+ dead between 1969 and 1994

Northern Ireland four panel quilt by Irene MacWilliam, 1996

Photo Colin Peck

In this quilt, Irene MacWilliam expresses her deep concern for the loss of lives during The Troubles which impacted on every county and community in her native Northern Ireland. More than 3000 people died as a result of the conflict between 1969 and 1994, many of whom were civilians. Each piece of red fabric, deliberately torn to convey a sense of destruction,



represents a dead person, some of whom lived their lives in this area. There is a tiny teddy bear in some, symbolising a dead child.

Although Irene did not suffer any personal tragedy during The Troubles, her sensitivity to the loss of others in all conflicts is boundless and has touched a chord in many people. As the work began to take shape, people from around the world as well as Northern Ireland sent pieces of red fabric to Irene for inclusion.

The contributions came from Japan, the USA and England, among other far flung countries.

Whilst the legacy of this 30 year conflict still remains for individuals and society as a whole, grass roots community and cross community projects across Northern Ireland and the North East cluster area (Coleraine, Ballymena, Limavady, Larne, Ballymoney and Moyle local authorities) are working tirelessly to address the legacy of the conflict and build a peaceful society for the present and future generations.

Further information on the work of Irene MacWilliam is available from her website

<http://www.macwilliam.f9.co.uk>

Courtesy of the artist



# COLERAINE'S AGONY



Aftermath of Coleraine bomb, 1992  
Courtesy of Coleraine Museum



## Peace Dove

Northern Ireland wall hanging by Irene MacWilliam, 1987

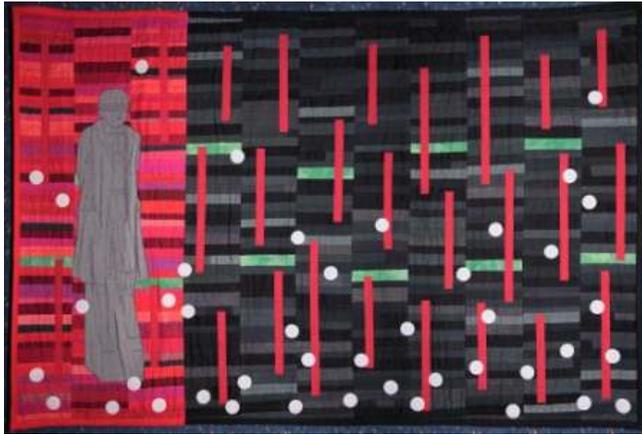
Photo Gustavo Neves

Made in her very early days of working with fabric, this stunningly beautiful and colourful quilt was inspired, in Irene's words, by: *"the conflicts throughout the world which have been recurring."* Here, through her superb textile technique crafted at such a painful period of time in Northern Ireland, we see the traditional image of the peace dove upended.

Mirroring the obstacles to be overcome in campaigning for a peaceful non-violent world, the dove is shown hurtling towards rocks as it flies over turbulent waters, with part of the olive branch missing from its beak. The dazzling patchwork used in this piece demands our attention and conveys a sense of resilience and a refusal to be silenced. Perhaps the dove will regain the fallen branch and fly above the rocks?

Irene's unorthodox depiction of the peace dove is a creative imagery for the conflict in Northern Ireland in 1987. In that year, there were 88 deaths as a direct result of the conflict, with 11 civilians killed during the annual Remembrance Day ceremony in Enniskillen, County Fermanagh, when a bomb planted by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) exploded at the [War Memorial](#). With entrenched views in evidence amongst the main political parties, a peaceful solution seemed remote at this time.

Courtesy of the curator



## Executed at dawn

Northern Ireland wall hanging by Irene MacWilliam, 2009

Photo Martin Melaugh

Irene made this quilt as a personal tribute to a group of soldiers who, in 1916, during the First World War, were shot at dawn for alleged cowardice. They were pardoned and exonerated many decades later, after much effort by their families and friends.

Irene said: *"When I first read about the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas, I was shocked... Many were so very young; some had lied about their age so they could join up. They had no idea what war would be like."* Her sense of shock and her need to bear witness to this atrocity inspired her to create this powerful textile; a piece which she never envisaged as part of an exhibition.

A campaign for justice was run for decades on behalf of the 306 soldiers shot at dawn, during the battle of the Somme in 1916. Relatives have long argued that many soldiers were suffering from post traumatic stress disorder, or shell-shock, as it was known in 1916. When initiating the process of granting a group pardon in 2006, 90 years after the event, the then Defense secretary, Des Brown explained: *"... The circumstances [of the war] were terrible, and I believe it is better to acknowledge that injustices were clearly done in some cases ...and to acknowledge that all these men were victims of war"* ([The Telegraph](#), 16 Aug 2006).

Janet Booth, granddaughter of Private Harry Farr, one of the men shot at dawn, at 23 years of age, speaks of the impact this had on her grandmother: *"My grandmother had to live with the shame and stigma of how her husband died, keeping the secret to herself for 80 years..."* She describes her own involvement in the campaign: *"With the help of the Shot at Dawn organisation (SAD), MPs, historians and eventually the Farr family taking the Ministry Of Defence to the High Court we were able to secure a pardon. It had taken 14 years of campaigning but in 2006 all 306 executed soldiers were granted a Conditional Pardon."*

For Janet, whose family lived with the burden of war for 90 years, Irene's wall hanging captures the horror and futility of war: *"I personally found Irene's wall hanging to be very moving ... [it] represented not only the needless killing of men but also the horrors of subsequent wars that have followed since World War 1."*

Janet's sentiments on the horror of war are an apt description for The Troubles in Northern Ireland, a period during which the British government's involvement was and remains a contested and unresolved issue.

Courtesy of the artist



## Lost children of war

Northern Ireland arpillera by Irene MacWilliam, 2009

Photo Martin Melaugh

Irene MacWilliam was deeply moved by the posters being circulated at one time to help families find each other after being separated and displaced by war. She was especially concerned about the lost children, some of whom were so young that they could not give people helping them any information to assist the search. She created this piece, her first arpillera, to depict their desperation, making the children almost transparent so as not to show any nationality or race and to express that they are living a half life. They are like “ghost” children. Irene has said: *“I chose to focus on children rather than adults since the image of a distressed child is very emotive.”*

Displacement was a very real feature of The Troubles in Northern Ireland. In the summer months of 1969, following heightened sectarian conflict, violence erupted in various parts of the province. Over 1800 families were forced to flee their homes, with Catholics, who constituted the majority of the refugees, generally fleeing across the border to the Republic of Ireland and Protestants generally moving to East Belfast. By the end of October 1971, up to 12,000 people had passed through the Gormanston refugee camp in the Republic of Ireland. (Darby, J., & Morris G., 1974 *Intimidation in Housing*, Belfast: Northern Ireland Community Relations Commission)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1969\\_Northern\\_Ireland\\_riots](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1969_Northern_Ireland_riots)

<http://www.historyireland.com/volumes/volume9/issue1/news/?id=113530>

Others, feeling they had no choice but to leave, fearing prison, arrest, internment or assassination, fled to England, USA and Canada. The pain of exile is poignantly described by author and publisher James B. Johnston, who immigrated to Canada with his family in 1974, as: *“...a deep hunger for the past, a longing that, at times, is almost too much to bear.”* (Johnston, 2012, Foreword to *Exile Revisited*, Celtic Cat Publishing).

With such levels of displacement, over 3,600 people killed and more than 30,000 people injured, the impact of The Troubles, on families and communities throughout Northern Ireland and further afield, has been substantial and lasting. <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/incorepaper.htm#civil>

Courtesy of the artist

## OTHER POLITICAL PIECES BY NORTHERN IRELAND TEXTILE ARTISTS



### Women's Rights are Human Rights

Committee for the Administration of Justice (CAJ) with participation of women from the whole of Ireland, created for display at the 4th UN World Conference on Women, Beijing, China, 1995

Photo Martin Melaugh

In February 1995, the Committee on the Administration of Justice's gender equality group (CAJ), met to discuss the production of what was to become the **Beijing Quilt**. It was agreed that the quilt, to be displayed at the Beijing World Conference on Women, would focus on the theme of **Women's Rights are Human Rights**.

And so, the final quilt was comprised of 30 panels from a variety of groups (and some individuals) across the island of Ireland: Women's groups, Irish Country Women's Associations, Traveller groups, Women's centres, Youth groups, Resource centres, Prisoner groups, Mother & Toddler groups and Peace groups.

Discrimination and repression of women across many spheres of society, on a global level, coupled with a strong sense of the power of women working in solidarity for a better world, are some of the key themes depicted in the quilt. Two panels, crafted by Coleraine Women's Centre titled **Violence**, focusing on the theme of domestic violence, and the **Many Hats women wear throughout life**, representing the various roles women play ranging from motherhood to teacher, are included.

Courtesy of Liz McAleer from the Committee for the Administration of Justice (CAJ)



## The Bill of Rights

Northern Ireland quilt by Caw/Nelson Drive, Tullyalley Women's Centre & Galliagh Women's group, 2010

Photo Martin Melaugh

This piece was completed for the **Women Building Bridges** art exhibition and programme celebrating International Women's day in Derry/Londonderry, 2010. In this quilt, women demand equality and progress on several issues. Stark messages such as "No to all violence", "Education no boundaries", "Rights of the child to be safe" and "Equality", complement equally strong symbols.

The women from the three groups, the majority of them new to textile work, discussed during a residential which issues to depict in their quilt. On their return, they visited each other's centres to continue the work. This, according to Rosemary Doherty of the Galliagh Women's group, was a very valuable part of the process: *"For some women this was their first time in each other's centres ...it opened us up to other cultures and led to great friendships."* This quilt, on loan for this exhibition, is now on permanent display in the office of the [Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission](#), having been presented to Monica Mc Williams in 2011, in her role of Chief Commissioner.

Courtesy of Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission



## Shared Visions

Northern Ireland quilt, workshops facilitated by Sonia Copeland, 2008

Photo Christopher Keenan

Four Belfast based women's groups participated in making this quilt: Ardmonagh Family Centre, Beechfield Parent Partnership, Women's Group Woodstock Alternatives and Women United Clifton Park Avenue. Here, the handcrafting of Loyalist, Nationalist, Republican and Unionist women, rich in symbolism and colour, demonstrates a tentative coming together to express a vision for a new inclusive society in Northern Ireland.

Quaker House Belfast, who funded and co-ordinated the making of the quilt and to whom it was donated on completion, urge us to absorb the messages of this quilt through viewing it with our senses: *"It has been said; 'Listen till ye hear.' As you stand before this quilt today let me suggest to you that 'You look till ye see'."*

As women from four Belfast based women's groups, drawn from diverse communities gathered to stitch, and at times unstitch this piece together, they created a space for peace-weaving/stitching. Sharing conversation, meals and spaces together allowed them to explore their own vision for a shared future.

The strong, purposeful messages inscribed on the quilt indicate their yearning for and commitment to a peaceful future: *"We CAN make peace together – We CAN make peace forever"* and *"We're all in one boat."*

Courtesy of Frederick Street Quaker Meeting place, Belfast



Aftermath of Ballymena bomb, 1979  
Courtesy of Mid-Antrim Museum Service



## No going back

Northern Ireland arpillera by Sonia Copeland, 2009

Photo Martin Melaugh

This arpillera, the first made by long-time quilter Sonia Copeland, came about when it looked like the hard-won peace in Northern Ireland was threatened by three killings in early 2009.

Sonia explains: *"My piece shows the Belfast City Hall, and in the foreground, a representation of one of the cross-community demonstrations, which followed the murders of Constable Stephen Carroll and Sappers Mark Quinsey and Patrick Asimkar by so called 'Republican terrorists'." This demonstration of support and solidarity for the victims and their families was important to Sonia, who had served in the Royal Ulster Constabulary during the worst years of The Troubles and had suffered as a result of terrorist attacks on four occasions.*

Fear about going back to a time of war strengthened Sonia's unwavering resolve for peace: *"It seemed to me that the peace that was won with so much pain and suffering was once again to be snatched away. I resolved that nothing and no one would steal from my children the right to a peaceful life, which was stolen from me and my generation."*

The theme and sentiments depicted by Sonia illustrate the fragility of peace in present day Northern Ireland. Nonetheless, the proliferation of cross community projects, across the North East cluster and Northern Ireland as a whole, working towards a shared understanding and peaceful co-existence between diverse groups is building a foundation for a more peaceful present, thus a peaceful future for the next generation.

Courtesy of the artist



## **Sew and Sew's quilt**

Northern Ireland quilt by Castlerock, **Sew and Sew's** quilting group, 2009

Photo Martin Melaugh

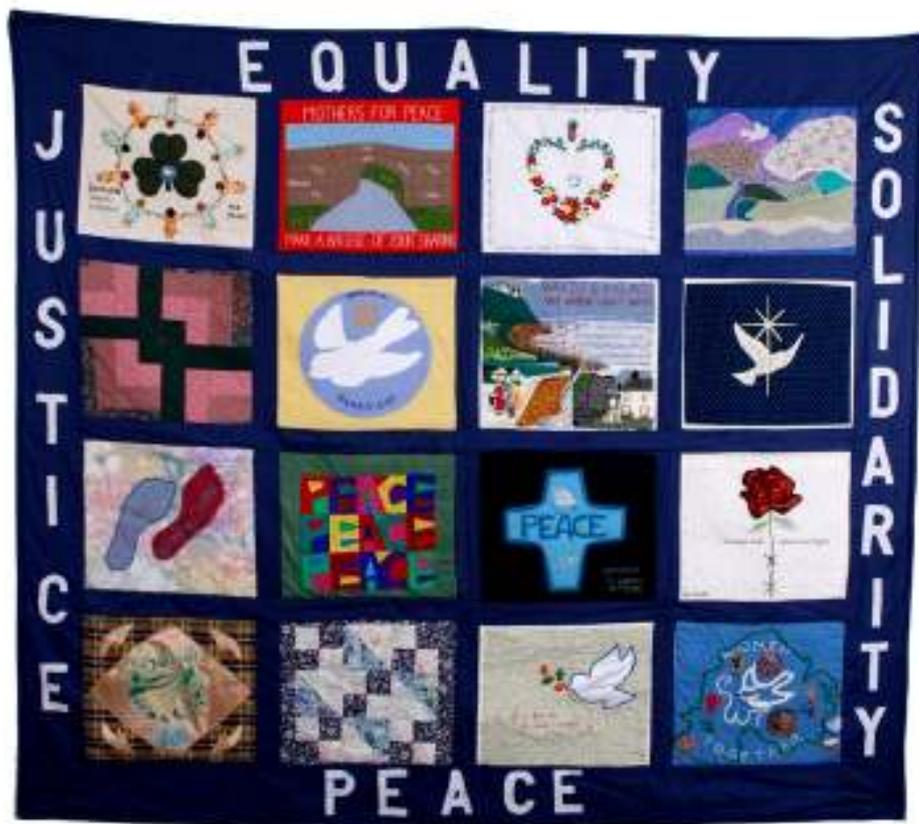
While visiting a quilt exhibition in Cultra, Castlerock Sew & Sew quilting group were approached by the curator, Valerie Wilson, who inspired them to make a quilt on shirt making. The quilt, comprised of individual blocks, is made from shirt and pyjama fabrics, embellished with cuffs, collars, tie pins, cuff links, buttons and ties.

The back of the quilt is made from squares of stack and whack, inscribed with the names of the shirt factories that were based in the North West and the names of all who made the quilt. Working on the quilt evoked many memories of work, now virtually gone, which was the backbone of the local economy, mainly done by women, where their earnings supplemented or in some cases were the only family income. One woman, reflecting on the deep tradition of shirt making in this area, reminisces: *"My great grandfather came over from Scotland to manage one of these factories – there's a bit of all our families in this quilt."*

The women enjoyed the communal experience of making the quilt: *"...especially when we were together as a traditional quilting bee for the quilting and binding of the quilt..."* commented one participant.

For this group, similar to many groups in Northern Ireland during The Troubles, through their sewing they stitched their heritage and identities, bearing witness to a past long gone, at a time when the strife and realities of the present may have seemed unbearable.

Courtesy of Castlerock quilting group



## Northern Ireland Peace quilt

Northern Ireland quilt by Women Together, 1994

Photo Colin Peck

Founded in 1970, at a time when violence and civil unrest from The Troubles were at their height, **Women Together** united protestant and catholic women in working for peace and a better life in Northern Ireland. Over the years it has tirelessly worked to end sectarian violence in Northern Ireland, give support to victims of violence, allow women a voice in society and create a society rooted in mutual understanding and respect for diversity.

Pat Campbell, Women Together's Life Vice-President, who has been involved with the group for over 30 years recalls the early days: *"Women Together really was 'Women Together' It was a great melting pot, where you could be protestant, catholic or no religion."* She comments on the positive steps taken towards peace: *"We've come a long way since the riots,"* while cautioning against complacency: *"... there are still terrible things happening and still a certain amount of bigotry."*

Over the years, Women Together made three quilts. This sixteen panel quilt on display, with the words **justice**, **equality**, **solidarity** and **peace** around the edges, is the product of the work of women and women's organisations all over Ireland, with one panel from Scotland.

Pat Campbell, who coordinated the quilt making process, comments on its significance: *"The patches on the quilt reflect the key elements of what is required for peace. We, as women directly affected, many of us bereaved, wish to have contributed to the peace process and stop the violence."*

Courtesy of Pat Campbell

## COMMUNITY PIECES FROM ENGLAND AND BEYOND



### **Sant Roc, a Diverse Neighbourhood (Badalona, Spain)**

Spanish arpillera by Fundacion Ateneu Sant Roc, 2011

Photo Roser Corbera

These arpilleras are the outcome of the community experience: *Arpilleras, Women Sewing Stories*, which took place in the neighbourhood of Fundació Sant Roc, Badalona on the outskirts of the city of Barcelona in Spain.

In 2008 a Fundació Ateneu volunteer, on discovering the power of arpilleras when attending an arpilleras exhibition in Barcelona, enthused women from Ateneu and Sant Roc parish to begin their journey into the arpillera world. This culminated in an exhibition that travelled all around Catalonia.

In November 2010, three women from Sant Roc travelled to Derry/Londonderry for the launch of the exhibition *The Human Cost of War*. There they met exhibition curator, Roberta Bacic who suggested that they exhibit at the Verbal Arts Centre (VAC), Derry/Londonderry, a centre which since 2008 has exhibited 26 textile installations, from various communities around the world. **Sant Roc, a Diverse Neighbourhood**, exhibited in the VAC in 2011, is the result of this commitment.

The three pieces on display here: *Las manos de Henna / Henna Hands*; *La paella para mis nietos / The Paella for my Grandchildren* and; *La Mujer Árbol / The Tree Woman*, capture the personal views of the world inhabited by these women, diverse in age, origin and cultural background. Amid such diversity, arpillera making has acted as a communicational bridge.

For these arpillera makers their arpilleras are: *"the stories of memories, dreams and personal experiences."* Roser Corbera, of the Fundació Ateneu Sant Roc, tells us that through the arpilleras *"...women have found a way to express themselves, the voice of the voiceless...they feel valued."*

Courtesy of Fundació Sant Roc, Badalona

## Threads of Life

English arpillera by Janet Wilkinson and Susan Beck, 2009

Photo Susan Beck

In 2009, as part of the Liverpool Irish Festival, the **Threads of Life** exhibition took place at the Liverpool World Museum. This featured arpilleras and quilts from grassroots groups and women in Chile, Peru and Northern Ireland, who felt compelled to share their experiences, to reach out so as to be heard and also to hear what others had to say.

A series of twenty textile workshops on the theme of heritage also took place to enable people to create personal arpilleras that told their own stories. For some, this was a profoundly moving experience, re-awakening old memories and emotions. Some participants were newly arrived to the UK with little or no English and some had no sewing experience.

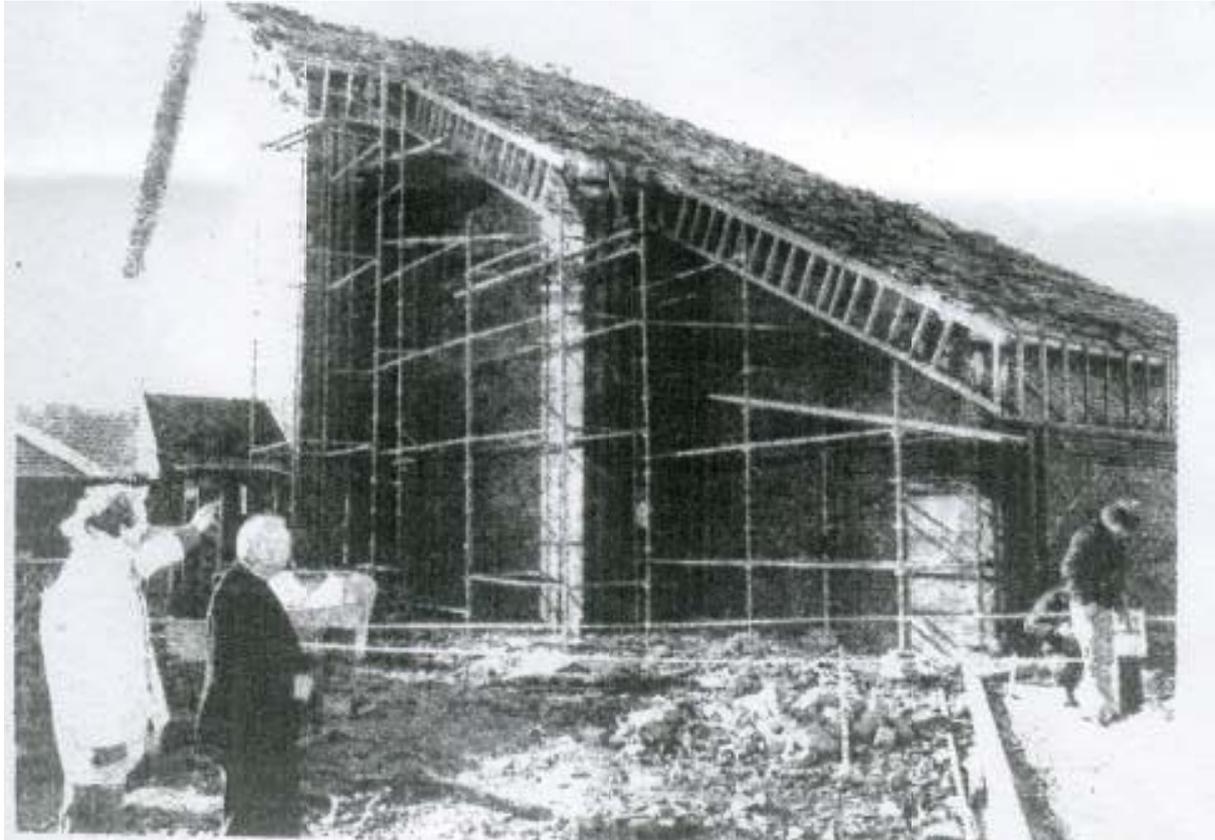


At the half hour drop in sessions for children and their families, participants were invited to make an arpillera figure of someone special in their life. The child then placed this figure, with an accompanying tag explaining its significance, on a large piece of blue fabric with a bright centre sun. The figures were then secured in place, and the quilt completed, by the workshop facilitators.

Clearly moved by the process, workshop facilitators Susan Beck and Janet Wilkinson reflect: *"Everyone was totally absorbed in the making of their figure. The figures are amazing in their variety. Some are very touching to look at and many have heartfelt sentiments on their tags."*

For Susan, arpilleras communicate on an emotional level: *"when arpilleras are made from real personal experience there is a real emotional connection with the work and this is stitched into the piece and communicates eloquently with the viewer."* She reiterates the power of arpilleras: *"Whatever the amount of time taken or the degree of skill applied, the arpillera figures make an instant personal connection with their maker. They are truly little people made of cloth, and are very powerful indeed."*

Courtesy of Susan Beck & Janet Wilkinson



Aftermath of Limavady bomb blast, 1981—This photograph shows the damage to the Roman Catholic Church—Church of Christ the King on Scroggy Road.



## **The People make the city**

English arpillera by Janet Wilkinson and Susan Beck, 2011

Photo Susan Beck

In 2009/2010 as part of the *Threads of Life* exhibition hosted by the Liverpool World museum, a series of well attended community textile workshops on the theme of heritage were hosted. These workshops, where children and adults shared their life stories through making arpilleras, resulted in the creation of several textile pieces.

*The People make the city* is a reflective piece by Janet Wilkinson and Susan Beck on the workshop process and subsequent exhibitions. *"It was their story [workshop facilitators] we were telling with our arpillera."* comments Susan.

In this piece the iconic buildings of Liverpool, a seafaring port on the river Mersey, are depicted. However, as Susan and Janet both acknowledge: *"it is the people who live in it that make the city and are at its heart"*. In this case, based on the diverse origins of those who attended the workshops, the "heart" of Liverpool, is made up of people who had settled in this port, throughout the ages, from all over the world including Africa, Albania, Algeria, Angola, Bangladesh, China, Egypt, England, Eritrea, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Scotland, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Yemen. Only some were originally from Liverpool.

The value of fostering shared understanding between diverse groups is emphasised by Susan: *"In any city when the people meet together to talk and share their lives then we move closer to understanding, compassion and peace in the community."*

Courtesy of Susan Beck & Janet Wilkinson



## **Our allotments, The Pride of New Barns**

English arpillera by Linda Adams, 2009

Photo Colin Peck

This arpillera, made for the Guinness Liverpool Irish Festival 2009, portrays the energy and sense of community cohesion within an urban allotment. Linda shares her motivation for creating this arpillera, made from clothes donated by a mother whose daughter had just left home to go to college: *“This arpillera is my tribute to those who come together and turn parts of the concrete jungle into places where people can experience growing and harvesting healthy vegetables.”*

For her, being involved in an allotment has benefits for the individual and community on a number of levels: *“Working on an allotment is a great way to make friends and share ideas. Everyone is welcome. We have many immigrant families in the area. When a shed is built everyone brings what they can and we have a party, which is a good chance to enjoy food from other countries.”*

A further benefit of this community space is the provision of a place of restfulness and escape from the noise and bustle of city life. Surely such spaces and projects, inducing harmony, community cohesion and improved quality of life, in a hands-on practical way, are a key ingredient in building sustainable peaceful communities.

Courtesy of Linda Adams, Ely, Cambridgeshire

## DEPICTING OTHER CONFLICTS

### Spanish Civil War, by women from and living in Badalona, Spain

The following four arpilleras on the Spanish Civil War were first exhibited in *The Human Cost of War* exhibition, in London, 2009 and have since formed a core part of several exhibitions curated in various corners of the world. Their recent inclusion in the University of Hamburg exhibition: *The Art of Survival – the way societies deal with political violence, Textile narratives from Spain, Northern Ireland and Chile* prompted the women involved to create two new arpilleras. In addition, two of these women were resource people at an in depth workshop on the Spanish Civil War, 27 to 30 July 2012, at Hamburg University.

### Mis memorias de la Guerra /My memories of the war

Spanish arpillera by Rosalía Rodríguez Hernández,  
Women Sewing History Workshop, Badalona, Spain, 2009  
Photo Roser Corbera

For Rosalía Rodríguez Hernández, stitching this arpillera was akin to writing the words of her story and sharing her sorrow with the rest of the group in the Women Sewing History Workshop.

This arpillera depicts the arrest of her mother during the Spanish Civil War when women were imprisoned and tortured for no other reason than being an anarchist's wife. Rosalía had been beaten by the police, who came to drag her mother away, and had to watch as they cut off her hair and forced her to drink castor oil. Her saddest memories arose from knowing that her mother had suffered torture and, before her arrest, had had an exhausting struggle to maintain and care for her family.



By keeping the stories alive, relatives and civil society pressure groups have played an important role in pressuring the government to recognize, extend rights and establish reparation measures for those who suffered persecution and violence during the civil war and dictatorship.

Today the struggle continues. The recent 11 year suspension of Judge Juez Baltasar Garzón by the Spanish Supreme Court represents a setback. Judge Garzón, who has earned a global reputation for his application of international human rights law against former military regimes in South America, was charged with having knowingly overstepped his judicial competence when investigating the disappearances of people during the Franco dictatorship. His suspension has been strongly condemned by the Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica/ Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory, (ARMH) which represents victims of the Franco regime.

Courtesy Fundació Ateneu Sant Roc, Spain



### **El recuerdo de esta historia / The memory of this story**

Spanish arpillera by Ángela Matamoros Vázquez and Ángela Vázquez González  
Women Sewing History Workshop, Badalona, Spain, 2009

Photo Roser Corbera

This arpillera, made by a mother and her daughter, represents the stories told by Angela Matamoros Vázquez's parents. In this way, 72 year old Angela can share with her daughter the things that happened in her hometown during the Spanish Civil War.

*She remembers: "The truck travelling along the road is carrying men on their way to be executed. The crosses show the graves where they were buried. When the men were rounded up and put on trucks, the women would come against the odds to say goodbye to sons and husbands. They would be in tears because they knew they would never see them again."*

The Spanish Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica (ARMH) / Association for the Historical Memory Recovery estimates that there are 113,000 people who are still in unidentified mass graves.

With this arpillera the makers were able to contribute to the retrieval of these untold stories from a female perspective, allowing future generations to better understand what happened during this violent period of Spanish history.

Courtesy Fundació Ateneu Sant Roc, Spain



## **Recuerdos de trabajo y Guerra / Memories of work and war**

Spanish arpillera by Rosa Cortés García

Women Sewing History Workshop, Badalona, Spain, 2009

Photo Roser Corbera

Inspired by her father's memories of the terrible hardship he suffered during the Spanish Civil War, Rosa's arpillera, in the lower section, depicts his imprisonment in a concentration camp in the Andalusia city of Seville.

In the upper part of the arpillera, Rosa portrays her personal experiences from the post-war period. Like many poor and illiterate women, she endured very harsh working conditions: *"I worked wrapping oranges in paper for export. When we weren't doing that, they made us peel the bitter ones and put the skins out in the sun to dry. They were used to make gunpowder. I was paid hardly anything."*

Through these stories and personal experiences we see the human cost of war. On the one hand, via stories passed down from one generation to another, there is the violation of human rights of those who resisted; and, on the other, via the experiences of the maker, the consequences suffered by women in their daily lives in an oppressive state. The struggle for justice, especially for families who lost loved ones during this time, still continues.

Courtesy Fundació Ateneu Sant Roc, Spain



### **La mano que les cuidó / The hand that cared for them**

Spanish arpillera by María Bonilla Armada

Women Sewing History Workshop, Badalona, Spain, 2009

Photo Roser Corbera

María grew up during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), which claimed the lives of many of her family. She describes returning to her home village after the war: *"We found that we had no home; we had nowhere to sleep or eat; we had absolutely nothing until we found it ourselves."*

Despite the difficulties of the Franco era, María and her husband built a home in Córdoba and raised their family. The effort and sacrifice required is reflected in her arpillera which shows her home and three children. Her own hand -- the hand that cared for them -- is dominant.

In the economic crisis of the 1950s and 1960s, the family moved from Córdoba to Barcelona in search of a better life. Here María has remained ever since. The rural house, depicted in the arpillera, reflects a nostalgic memory of her previous home in Córdoba.

Making arpilleras has provided María and her companions with the artistic means to recount their experiences. It has also given them the confidence to continue telling their stories.

Courtesy Fundació Ateneu Sant Roc, Spain



Aftermath of Kilrea bomb, 1976  
Courtesy of a local family

## ISSUES THAT ARISE DURING CONFLICT: DISAPPEARANCES

### ¿Dónde están los desaparecidos? / Where are the 'disappeared'?

Chilean arpillera, anon., late 1980s

Photo Martin Melaugh

In this traditional arpillera, a group of women in colourful dresses are protesting in front of the Courts of Justice. They hold a banner reading: "Where are the detained-disappeared?" At the bottom right-hand corner are silhouettes of two armed police, identified by their green clothes and their armoured vehicle. They are faceless to show that the protest is against the dictatorship and not the individual officers. Typically, the sun is in the sky, so the two large clouds are unusual.



The original arpillera was made in the late 1980s in one of the workshops of the Vicaría de Solidaridad, a support and advocacy organisation founded by the Catholic Church, active from 1976 to 1992.

The Chilean Truth Commission of the post-Pinochet regime was mandated to find out what happened to the disappeared and also to determine where their remains had been disposed. According to Chile's second national Truth Commission Report on Torture and Political Imprisonment (Valech II), published in August 2011, there were a total of 3,216 cases of forced disappearance or political execution.

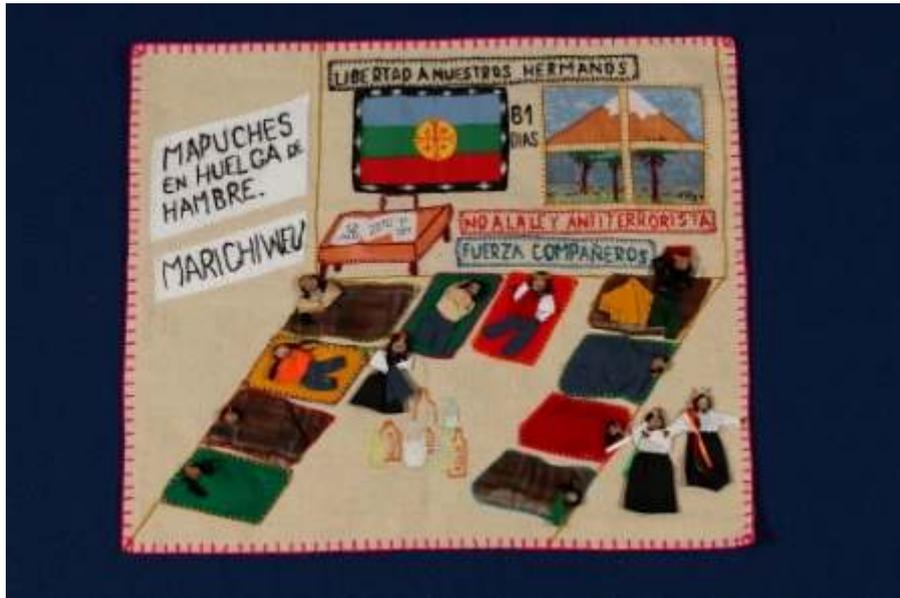
In Northern Ireland, an Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains (ICLVR) was established by an intergovernmental agreement between the Irish and British Governments in 1999, with the purpose of obtaining information on the location of the remains of "The disappeared" those killed and buried in secret by paramilitary organisations during The Troubles.

During this period in Northern Ireland, there were sixteen cases of "disappearance." The Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) admitted responsibility for thirteen of the sixteen, while one was admitted by the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA). No attribution has been given to the remaining two. To date nine bodies have been recovered. <http://www.iclvr.ie/>

Since 1997, the families of the 16 "disappeared" in Northern Ireland have found solidarity through connecting with each other and collectively engaging in various awareness raising activities and events. These families, similar to the families in Chile affected by the issue of "disappearance," continue in their search for justice and closure as well as struggling with the pain of loss and the lack of knowledge of the final resting place of their loved one. <http://thedisappearedni.co.uk/>

Courtesy of the curator

## HUNGER STRIKE



### **Hermanos Mapuche en huelga de hambre / Mapuche people on hunger strike**

Chilean arpillera, Aurora Ortiz, 2011

Photo Martin Melaugh

This poignant arpillera portrays quite recent repression experienced by the Mapuche people, in Southern Chile, a people who have suffered colonisation for over 500 years. Thirty-four peasant Mapuche prisoners went on hunger strike in protest against being imprisoned for defending their land. They were seeking a fair trial and contested the state's argument that they were terrorists. They demanded that in their case, the anti-terrorist law should not be applied.

In this arpillera, we are brought inside one of the prisons where the hunger strike took place. Women supporters in their traditional dress surround the 10 men languishing on the floor covered by blankets provided by their relatives and friends. On one of the tables, a sign informs us that these men have been 81 days on hunger strike. The date it started and ended is also given.

Through the window, memories of their native homes are visible, volcanoes, monkey-puzzle trees and flowers; the land and home they defend to death.

The Mapuche flag is placed in a prominent place to reinforce their identity. The artist has added her support by embroidering a banner that reads: "Strength Compañeros."

In 1981, in the period March to September, 23 Irish Republican prisoners in the Maze prison began a staggered hunger strike demanding a reintroduction of political status for Republican prisoners through a set of five demands. This hunger strike which attracted much international attention, ended on 3 October, 1981, following the death of 10 Republican prisoners. In October 1981 James Prior, then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, announced a series of measures which went a long way to meeting many aspects of the prisoners' five demands.

<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/hstrike/summary.htm>

Courtesy of the curator



## **NO a la ley antirrorista / NO to the antiterrorist law**

Chilean arpillera, Aurora Ortiz, 2011

Photo Martin Melaugh

In this arpillera, the artist depicts one of the many actions that took place in Santiago, the Chilean capital, during the time of the hunger strike by 34 Mapuche prisoners, imprisoned for defending their land. A large number of Mapuche have been forced to leave their land and live in the capital, generally doing menial jobs. Living without land is in itself a denial of their identity, as Mapuche means People of the Land.

The Mapuche who live in Santiago publicly demand that the rights of their people imprisoned and on hunger strike are respected and upheld. They demand that the anti-terrorist law should not be applied.

We can see that everyday people have joined the non violent action taking place in the centre of the capital. Leading the march are Mapuche women, dressed in their indigenous clothes, and men wearing ponchos, carrying their flag. The police have violently disrupted the march. They are dragging one of the Mapuche women by her hair and are also taking away their flag. Some men are also being dragged away and two police cars, guarded by armed police, are ominously visible in the background. There is no sun in the sky but it is in the flag itself. Aurora, the artist, is one of the participants in this action.

Courtesy of the curator

## RAPE AS A WAR WEAPON

### Violar es un crimen / Rape is a crime

Peruvian arpillera from Mujeres Creativas workshop, 1985

Replica by FCH, Mujeres Creativas workshop, Peru, 2008

Photo Martin Melaugh

It is remarkable that, in the midst of the destructive civil war in Peru from 1980 to 2000, a group of women living in Lima dared to publicise the plight of village women who had been raped and forced to resettle in the slums of the capital. This arpillera depicts the protest taken on their behalf.

Maria, who created this piece, said: *"In October 1985 many people were killed in Ayacucho and women were raped, but nobody protested. Two groups of us decided to demonstrate in front of Comando Conjunto (Joint Military Command) in Lima, since the people actually living in Ayacucho felt too vulnerable to do so. We displayed a banner that read 'Rape is a crime' and we placed flowers shaped as a cross to make it known that so many had died. Five of us decided to make an arpillera of our action to show we do not condone such brutality."*



War rape, which has until recently been a hidden element of war, and is seldom prosecuted, has a severe long term psychological impact on victims, in addition to the impact of traumatic injuries, sexually transmitted disease, and pregnancy.

During the civil war in Peru in the 1980s, the National Reparations Council recorded 1,150 women reporting rape and sexually violent incidents. To date, not one of the perpetrators has been sentenced.

Susan McKay, journalist, author and a founder member of the Belfast Rape Crisis Centre in 1982, in her address to the Trauma Recovery Network conference in October 2010, states that in the Northern Ireland conflict, there did not appear to be a systematic use of violence against women on the enemy side. Instead she contests that rape and domestic violence were largely carried out by men whose victims were women from their own communities: *"...the women and children who were the victims of sexual and domestic violence at the hands of men who were soldiers or policemen or self styled freedom fighters are among the most silenced people in the history of this country."*

She further comments that while the conflict is over, there has been no public acknowledgement of the role of gender based violence as part of its history. This denial of access to justice for such victims, she concludes: *"...was and is a denial of human rights. This is part of an unacknowledged legacy of the Troubles..."*

<http://www.nwci.ie/news/2010/10/26/speech-by-susan-mckay-at-the-trauma-recovery-netwo/>

Courtesy of the curator

## DISPLACEMENT

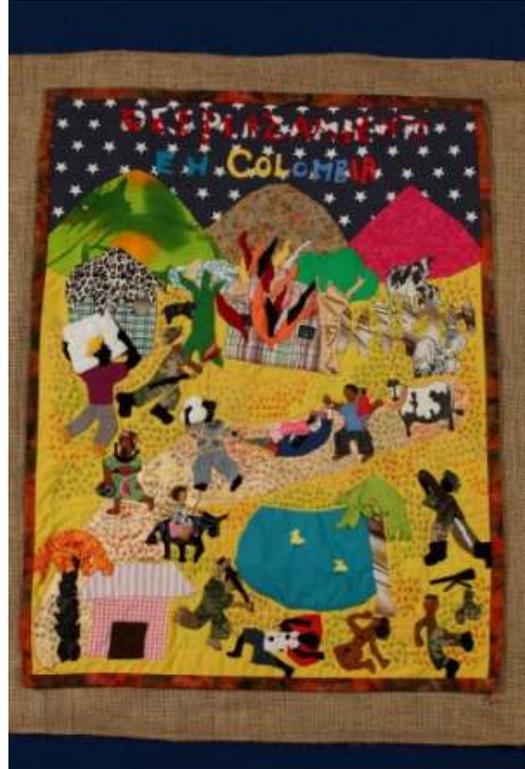
### Desplazamiento / Displacement

Colombian arpillera, Mujeres tejiendo sueños y sabores de paz, Mampuján, 2010

Photo Martin Melaugh

Displacement is the theme of this arpillera, created by a group of 15 women who survived the massacre of Mampuján by the paramilitary coalition, United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC) on 11 March 2000. AUC was a coalition of right-wing counter-insurgency paramilitary groups which was alleged to have links to the military and members of the government and congress, a number of whom were indicted before the courts for collusion. The entire community of Mampuján Viejo, along with families from the nearby community of Las Brisas, more than 1,400 people, was displaced at this time. Villagers fled when the AUC accused them of cooperating with insurgent guerrillas and threatened to kill them if they didn't vacate within 24 hours.

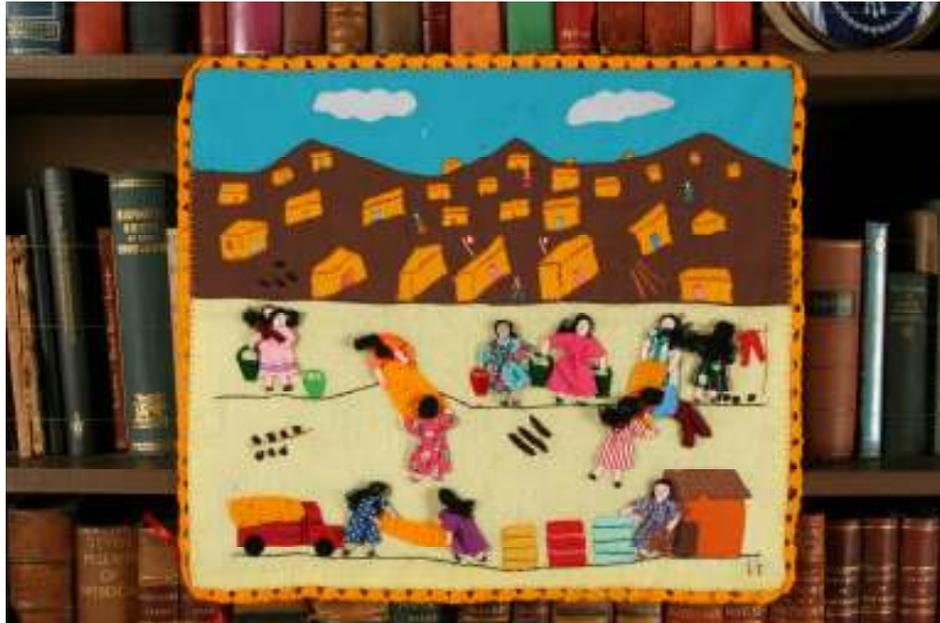
Juana Alicia Ruiz, one of the women who created this arpillera has this to say on the theme of displacement: *"Displacement in Colombia is like any typical displacement as it happens at times during night. It includes violent rape, burning of houses, having to leave behind belongings, houses and animals. The lady who is being carried on a hammock is a sick person, very old and who cannot walk. She is like the soul of the village."*



According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Colombia ranks third on the list of nations with displaced people. Unlike other large displaced populations, however, Colombia's half-million refugees are not technically classed as *refugees*, as the vast majority of them do not cross the border out of Colombia; in the language of international law, they remain *internally displaced persons*, or IDPs.

Displacement issues in Northern Ireland during The Troubles, as in Peru, did not appear to be a priority. *All over the place: People Displaced to and from the Southern Border Counties as a result of the conflict 1969-1994* (Ralaheen Ltd Dublin, Expac Monaghan & Strategem Belfast, 2005), is a research report on displacement to the Southern Border Counties as a result of the Troubles, commissioned by Area Development Management and Combat Poverty Agency within the European Union Peace II Programme. It estimates that approximately 11,000 of the 22,000 people born in Northern Ireland and living in the Border Counties are displaced persons. The authors describe 1972-1974 *"as a period of silence, ... also a period of public or structural forgetfulness in relation to the relocated populations [with] no evidence of policies to address or redress displacement."* It is only in the four year period preceding the 1998 Good Friday Agreement that the authors find belated evidence of a public policy debate on displacement or forced migration as a consequence of the conflict. The study records the considerable pain, hurt, guilt and anguish of displaced persons at separating from their home districts, families of origin and extended families.

Courtesy of the curator



### **Toma de terrenos en los barrios de Lima / Squatters in the shantytowns of Lima**

Peruvian arpillera, Mujeres Creativas Workshop, 1986

Replica, Mujeres Creativas Workshop, 2008

Photo Martin Melaugh

Made by the Mujeres Creativas workshop in Lima, Peru, this piece portrays the arrival of families of displaced people in one of Lima's shantytowns. The poverty of their temporary homes is apparent from the wooden planks they are unloading from trucks. The instability of their lives is evoked by the figures of the women standing guard to resist the police from coming and wrecking the houses. This arpillera depicts the isolation and poverty of those displaced by the war and their tenuous link to a kind of peaceful normality.

Over 600,000 people were displaced within Peru during the 1980s and 1990s as a result of armed conflict between the government, self defence groups and insurgent forces of the Shining Path and the Tupac Amaru Resistance Movement.

Presently, the urban slums on the outskirts of Lima are home to some 200,000 internally displaced peoples (IDPs). Although the majority of them came to Lima over 15 years ago, they live in the same makeshift shacks, constructed upon their arrival, that we see in this arpillera. The majority of IDPs endure constant hardship; they work on average more than 14 hours a day in informal street trade and temporary work to make ends meet.

A 2004 law on internal displacement helped to protect IDP's rights, as it incorporated the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and created a division within the Ministry of Women and Social Development (MIMDES) to coordinate the response to internal displacement. This body has improved the situation of some IDPs by starting to register them for eventual reparations, and implementing some livelihood support programs. However, during 2010 as in 2009, the number of people registered remained at only 5,000.

For references to displacement in Northern Ireland see also the arpilleras **Desplazamiento / Displacement** and **Lost children of war**

Courtesy of the curator

## RESISTANCE AND DENOUNCEMENT

### **Marcha de las mujeres de los mineros / March of the miners' wives, daughters and sisters**

María Herrera, Mujeres Creativas workshop, Peru, 1985

Photo Martin Melaugh

We can clearly see in this piece that the maker, like other arpilleristas from Peru, adopted much from the Chilean tradition. As Cooke, Zeitlin & MacDowell observe in the 2005 *Weavings of War* exhibition catalogue: *"The Peruvian artists borrowed much from the Chilean arpilleristas: the idea of using pictorial patchwork as a vehicle for political activism, the use of church parishes for workshops, and even the use of the same overseas trading relationships with human rights organisations and international arts groups... They made an unfamiliar textile form their own, contributing boldly graphic compositions and new techniques"* (p. 21).

In 2011, Maria Herrera, in the course of a phone call about her work, stated that marching was one of the ways Peruvian men and women protested against appalling working conditions and human rights violations within the mines. With regard to this arpillera, she said: *"Many men, women and children did these sacrifice marches, walking for many days from where they come from and heading to Lima so as to protest against the shameful working conditions in the mining camps. Once in Lima they collected money and organised soup kitchens in order to survive. They also had to face repression. I felt the need to document this."*



Today the struggle continues. Mirian Ramirez, from the Andean community in Peru, has been actively involved in protests against mining. She states: *"People say we are mad to resist mining, that mines will make our lives better. But we know they just want us to work for them as labourers; they will get rid of us when they have finished. The mines come, they extract and then they go, leaving a desert"* (Meet the Defenders - New Internationalist 446 October 2011).

Protest marches, beginning with the civil rights marches in 1969, peace marches and rallies were synonymous with The Troubles. In 1996, within three days of the IRA bombing of Canary Wharf in London which brought the IRAs 18-month ceasefire to an end, Women Together had mobilized 6,000 people on the streets of Belfast, brandishing paper doves of peace.

Courtesy of the curator



## **Encadenamiento / Women Chained to Parliament Gates**

Chilean arpillera, anon., late 1980s

Photo Martin Melaugh

In any war, truth is its first casualty. From 1973 to 1990 Chile lived through a bloody dictatorship, which was brought about by a Junta presided over by General Augusto Pinochet. In the early months of the dictatorship, up to 7,000 people were detained by the junta. And so, women began checking the jails and detention centres, seeking news of their disappeared loved ones, frequently being told that the people in question did not exist.

In this arpillera, women have chained themselves to the gates in front of the congress in public protest at the actions of the Pinochet regime, particularly the disappearance of their loved ones. Here we see women, with their lives in turmoil as a result of the dictatorship, thrust into the public sphere: *“The military dictatorship obligated these women to confront public life, to make their pain and grief visible. They not only created tapestries, but also initiated street protests, obtaining through their own initiative, a power that had been previously denied to women.”* (Agosín, M., 2008. *Tapestries of Hope, Threads of Love: The Arpillera Movement in Chile* second edition).

For this act of civil disobedience, all of the women who took part in the protest were detained for five days.

*Encadenamiento* was made in one of the workshops run by Vicaría de la Solidaridad. Many of the women had never sewn before and found solace in learning the skill and working together. Moreover, supporters encouraged them by selling their work at home and abroad. This gave them badly needed income and made public their plight and actions.

As with other arpilleras, similarities exist between the issues portrayed here and women’s experiences and actions during The Troubles in Northern Ireland. Hands on workshops, which form part of this exhibition and wider project, will afford an opportunity for teasing out those parallels.

Courtesy arpillera collection Kinderhilfe, Chile/Bonn



### **Paz -- Justicia -- Libertad / Peace -- Justice -- Freedom**

Chilean Arpillera, anon., late 1970s

Photo Colin Peck

This is a traditional arpillera depicting a protest by women against the Pinochet dictatorship. Some of the women are boldly defiant as they clash cymbals in front of a police car. Others carry leaflets spreading word of a campaign to find their missing loved ones, who have disappeared without trace at the hands of the armed forces.

The material used makes this piece particularly poignant. The dark grey background material is from the trousers of a disappeared man and the road is made from the checked fabric shirt of another. Marjorie Agosín (2008) informs us that creating arpilleras from the clothing of missing family members was common practice for the early arpilleristas. Moved by the poignancy of this she states: *"They have gathered from the most intimate and private of places a story that is both chilling and beautiful, horrifying and calming."* (ibid).

Working on arpilleras could be therapeutic. As the arpillerista Violeta Morales has said: *"I put all my energy into the arpillera workshop. It was sometimes the only thing that kept me balanced emotionally."*

During The Troubles, much of women's activism took the form of establishing or joining organisations and activities aimed at serving the local community. For some women from predominantly Catholic groups, collective action and protest was a way of life: *"I was never off the road, demonstrating, electioneering, visiting jails."* (2008 Women's Resource and Development Agency *Women and the Conflict – Talking about the "Troubles"*).

**Women Together**, founded in 1970, at a time when violence and civil unrest from The Troubles were at their height, united protestant and catholic women in working for peace and a better life in Northern Ireland. Over the years, through campaigns, rallies, marches and producing three peace quilts, it has tirelessly worked to end sectarian violence in Northern Ireland and create a society rooted in mutual understanding and respect for diversity.

Courtesy Alba Sanfeliú, Spain



## ¿ Dónde están nuestros hijos?/ Where are our children?

Chilean arpillera, anon., 1979

Photo Martin Melaugh

This arpillera, made in 1979, in one of the Vicaria de la Solidaridad workshops in Santiago, depicts the despair of a mother whose children are missing. A handwritten note hidden in a small pocket at the back of the arpillera gives us a glimpse of the depth of this mother's grief. Her message, penned from her personal despair, is on behalf of all Chilean women who endured the repression and human rights violations of the Pinochet regime at that time. In this note, the writing is extremely poignant:

*"This represents our children ...where they are now., under the eye of the 'dina' [political secret police]; while we – the mothers – cry to one day hear about them". 'An anguished mother in pain, Chile, 1979'."*

In this arpillera, the mountains and sun, characteristic features of all arpilleras, are missing. Against a stark, desolate background we see a crying mother kneeling with another woman. Above, the manifold hands as imagined by her are framed in a heart shape, flanked by two police men and watched over by two large interrogating eyes. In keeping with the sense of anguish and hopelessness in this arpillera, the peace doves are not flying up to the sky; they seem to be falling to the ground. Children and young people were also extremely vulnerable during The Troubles in Northern Ireland. An age breakdown of deaths related to The Troubles reveals that the 18-23 age group accounts for 25% (898) of all deaths.

<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/violence/cts/smyth1.htm#chap3>

Courtesy of Jacquie Monty, England



### **Panfleteando en el 1979 en Santiago/Leafletting in Santiago in 1979**

Chilean arpillera, anon., late 1970s

Photo Martin Melaugh

This colourful and somewhat childlike arpillera, from the late 1970s, depicts a scene where campaigners are distributing pamphlets to pedestrians and drivers to raise awareness about the “disappeared.”

According to Chile’s fourth national Truth Commission Report on Torture and Political Imprisonment (Valech II), published in August 2011, there were a total of 3,216 cases of forced disappearance or political execution.

Again, the traditional style of the mountains is represented here, using a myriad of colourful scraps of cloth. The sun, however, is not visible, perhaps symbolising the dangers that still prevailed. The large houses and trees indicate that this is not a shanty town; here the campaigners have been emboldened to bring their campaign into middle-class areas.

Overall, this arpillera illustrates the relentless attempts made to reveal the unsavoury hidden truths which plagued certain groups within the society during the Pinochet era, truths which others often chose to ignore.

For references to disappearances in Northern Ireland see also the arpillera **Dónde están los desaparecidos? / Where are the ‘disappeared’?**

Courtesy of the curator



## **Libertad a los presos politicos/Freedom for the political prisoners**

Chilean arpillera, anon., c1985

Photo Martin Melaugh

In this arpillera we see a group of women defiantly protesting in front of a prison, demanding better conditions and the release of the prisoners within. For the women living within the repressive Pinochet military regime, coping with imprisonment of their loved ones, using their textile skills to craft this type of arpillera was a means of enabling them to live with conflict and its memory on a daily basis. As Marjorie Agosín (2008) comments: *“For the arpillera makers the political events of their country and their daily lives became inseparable”* (ibid).

The struggle portrayed here for better conditions for political prisoners became extremely relevant and was a catalyst for bringing international pressure on the Junta. This, together with internal disagreements within the Junta, resulted in General Pinochet signing the convention against Torture in 1988. In turn, this allowed Spain to indict General Pinochet on charges alleging human rights violations during his regime from 1973 to 1990.

The powerful effect of this type of political expression went unrecognised at first by the military. As Cooke, Zeitlin, & MacDowell explain: *“Ironically, war textiles are largely disregarded by modern military authorities because of their feminine connotations and can therefore be a relatively safe forum for dangerous or provocative ideas”* (2005 *Weavings of War* catalogue). When the Chilean military finally recognised the power of the arpilleras, they condemned these works as subversive materials and if found they would have been destroyed and prevented from leaving the country.

We invite you in viewing this piece to ponder the links with the Northern Ireland conflict.

Courtesy of arpillera collection Kinderhilfe, Chile/Bonn



Ballymoney Car bomb, 1976  
Courtesy of Coleraine Chronicle



Ballycastle Golf Club bomb, 1985  
Courtesy of Coleraine Chronicle



## **No a la impunidad/No to impunity**

Chilean arpillera, anon., 1980s

Photo Tony Boyle

This arpillera dates from the latter years of the Pinochet regime in Chile. It is a classical arpillera, framed by the sun and mountains. It was made for export to highlight the reality worldwide of the struggle that saw women in public protests chanting “we want democracy” and demanding “Truth, Justice and Reconciliation.”

For these women, already very engaged with the struggle for democracy, saying “No to impunity” was a core element of this struggle. In their opinion, law 2191, known as the Amnesty law (Amnesty to the perpetrators), written in 1977 by the then minister of Justice, Mónica Madariaga, was a retrograde step.

This law, written five years after the start of the military coup that took power from the democratically elected President, Salvador Allende, was enacted in 1978 in order to avoid legal action in all the cases of human rights violation from 1973-1978.

Despite this amnesty law, described by many academic and human rights experts as a “self-pardon” by the military regime, the Chilean courts prosecuted five senior officers in 1999 for their role in the disappearance and probable death of 75 political prisoners. In 2000, Pinochet was indicted. In these cases, the court bypassed the 1978 Amnesty law, judging that the crime of “disappearance” constituted an ongoing crime which could not be amnestied and was therefore not subject to a statute of limitation (Supreme Court Decision dated 20 July 1999).

<http://www.trial-ch.org/en/resources/truth-commissions/america/chile.html>

While these resolutions represented a major step forward in the fight against impunity in Chile, and despite the people always demanding “No to impunity” as a way to progress the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation process, it was only in 2010 that a bill to rule out amnesty was brought to parliament.

Courtesy of Lala & Austin Winkley, London, England



**No al plebiscito, No podemos ni opinar/  
No to the plebiscite, we are not allowed our opinion**

Chilean arpillera, anon., 1980

Photo Martin Melaugh

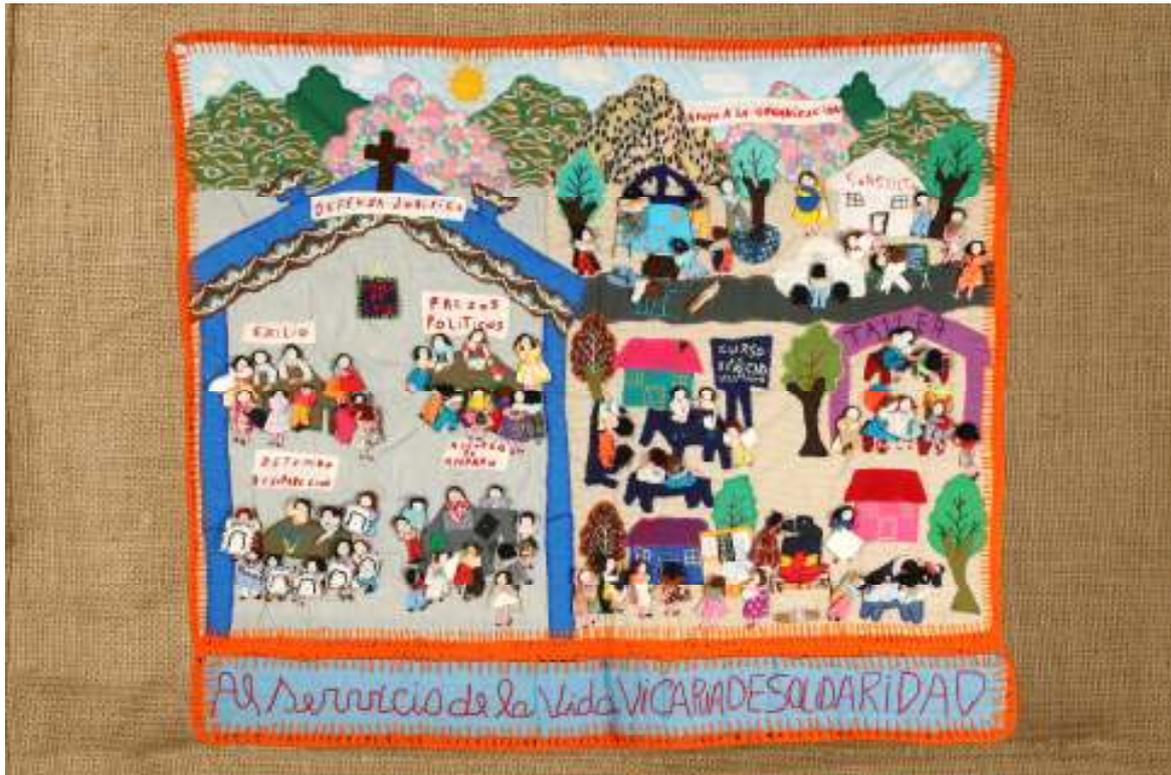
This arpillera was acquired by curator Roberta Bacic in Germany, 2009, from a retired crafts teacher who had received it as a present 27 years earlier. For Roberta this arpillera is unique: *"It is a very striking image that recalls a political momentum which I have not seen recorded before in the arpilleras literature."*

In 1973, when the military dictatorship, headed by General Pinochet, deposed the democratically elected President, Salvador Allende, Chile was ushered into a state of emergency. In 1980, General Pinochet ordered a new Constitution which was to be ratified by a referendum, known as the National Plebiscite. Government propaganda urged that a yes vote would bring about full democracy. While many people were not fooled by this propaganda, a significant number of influential people often argued that having a constitution was preferable to continuing under the state of emergency, which had already lasted seven years.

The scene in the arpillera vividly describes what happened to people who opposed the plebiscite. They were confronted with violence by the police, arrested and cruelly beaten. Nonetheless, almost a third of the Chilean electorate still voted NO in this referendum held on 11 September, 1980. Although defeated, grassroots people continued to publicly oppose the repressive regime. Facing great personal risk, they persevered in their collective struggle for democracy, a struggle which bore fruit in 1998, when General Pinochet renounced office, marking the end of his 16½ year military rule.

Courtesy of the curator

## THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH DURING CONFLICT AND WAR



### Al servicio de la vida / Servicing life

Chilean arpillera, anon., c1978

Photo Martin Melaugh

This arpillera depicts the areas of support and activities the Catholic Church undertook to assist a substantial part of the population persecuted and abandoned by the Pinochet dictatorship. Here we see the headquarters of the church where problems such as legal defence, exile, political imprisonment, the detained-disappeared, and the presentation of habeas corpus to the courts are being dealt with, on behalf of local people.

This arpillera was made in one of the handicraft workshops in the Santiago suburbs run by the Vicaría de la Solidaridad, founded by the Chilean Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez. Marjorie Agosín, describes these first workshops in her book, *Tapestries of hope, threads of love: The Arpillera movement in Chile* (second edition, 2008): "At the height of despair, approximately fourteen women arrived at the Vicariate...they met as a group, fearfully ...away from the dark corridors of death...they began to tell their stories on pieces of cloth...."

The Vicaría also provided support through its regional offices by offering legal aid, health care, work opportunities and training in human rights. It was active from 1976 to 1992, continuing its work for two years after Pinochet was deposed in 1990.

During The Troubles, both Catholic and Protestant churches were active at community level in supporting their parishioners effected by The Troubles. While both denominations have been outspoken in their condemnation of the violence and loss of lives, the same level of leadership on and criticism of human rights abuses, evident in Chile, was not apparent in the Northern Ireland situation.

Courtesy of arpillera collection Kinderhilfe, Chile/Bonn



### **Olla común en una población/ Soup kitchen in a barrio**

Chilean arpillera, Taller Fundación Missio, Santiago, 1982

Photo Martin Melaugh

This arpillera depicts the hunger and poverty that is wrought by conflict and social injustice. Created during the Pinochet dictatorship, it depicts both the desperation of hunger among the poor, forced to seek food from church charities, and also the resilience of those who find ways to ensure that the worst affected are not left hungry.

Soup kitchens, similar to the one portrayed in this arpillera, were a life line for the impoverished during the Pinochet regime. Church charities such as the Vicaría de la Solidaridad and later, the Fundación Solidaridad, were in the forefront in setting them up. María Madariaga, whose husband was unemployed and who wondered how she could provide food for her children, recalls what the soup kitchen meant for her family, even though not all of them could benefit from it: *“There was an age limit to abide by...of my three children at the time, only one was able to eat...We thought it was better that one eats than none...”* (Agosín, *ibid*). The need was so great that difficult choices had to be made, both within the family and in the organization, which meant that for Maria and her husband: *“the days were especially long...because there was nothing to eat.”*

Many women in Northern Ireland, especially those who found themselves in the position of sole breadwinner, faced similar hardships during The Troubles and spoke of: *“wondering where the next meal was coming from.”* (2008, *Women and the Conflict – Talking about the “Troubles” Women’s Resource and Development Agency*, P.19).

Courtesy arpillera collection Kinderhilfe, Chile/Bonn



### ¿Caín, dónde esta tu hermano?/Cain, where is your brother?

Chilean arpillera, anon., c1983

Photo Martin Melaugh

This unique arpillera gives us a window into the way church groups in Chile worked around issues of human rights violations such as killings, disappearances, torture, exile or others.

In this vivid scene, we are almost invited to join the group around the table where we can see the candles, burning brightly next to the Bible. A woman is reading aloud; it could well be information relating to the detained disappeared people they are searching for and of whom they have photos on one of the walls. A second woman has lifted her hand, signalling that she wants to speak. Other men and women are actively listening. The meeting has challenged the participants to respond to a well-known quote from the Bible: “Cain, where is your brother?” The scene evokes a deep sense of solidarity and community.

In the catalogue to the *Weavings of War* exhibition (2005), James Young, curator of *The art of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History*, says: “This needlework expresses such memories outwardly and it gives the storyteller an inward time and space to work through such memory” (Cooke, Zeitlin A., & MacDowell M., eds. 2005, *Weavings of War: Fabrics of Memory*, Michigan State University, p21).

Courtesy of arpillera collection Kinderhilfe, Chile/Bonn

## POST CONFLICT TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE PIECES



### **Queremos Democracia / We want democracy**

Chilean arpillera, Vicaría de la Solidaridad, 1988

Photo Martin Melaugh

This arpillera, from a Chilean church community workshop, depicts the “people’s power” in insisting on their rights to a peaceful, non violent society. The bright colours of the houses and the women’s clothes convey hope. However, the presence of the police car reminds us that overcoming the barriers to poverty and peace are not easy. In this difficult context they carry a banner that reads “democracy” hoping that if this is achieved, things will change. They want to be part of the process.

However, Agosin (2008) maintains that women were not given due recognition in the new democracy: “...democracy has not acknowledged the significance of the arpillera and other women’s groups...who had a fundamental role to play in the return of democracy.”

Globally, the meaningful inclusion of women in peace talks and post conflict democracies is never a given. In 1996, the newly formed Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition (NIWC) succeeded, in the face of much opposition, in getting elected to the multi-party talks that led to the Belfast Agreement in 1998. Cross community and cross party in structure, it modeled a new inclusive approach to politics. At the conclusion of the peace negotiations, Senator Mitchell, chairperson of the talks, stated that “the emergence of women as a political force was a significant factor in achieving the Agreement.” <http://www.thesolutionsjournal.com/node/893>

Courtesy of Seán Carroll, USA



## Ganó la gente/People have won

Chilean arpillera, anon., early 1990s

Photo Martin Melaugh

There is a sense of jubilation in this arpillera which depicts the outcome of the Chilean national plebiscite (referendum) held on October 5, 1988, to determine whether or not dictator Augusto Pinochet would extend his rule for another eight-year term. "La democracia ya veine (democracy is coming)" and "Ganara la gente (the people will win)," was the slogan from the No campaign. Pinochet renounced office after the No vote was carried by 55.99%, putting an end to the 16½ year military dictatorship. This arpillera, clearly made in the aftermath of the referendum announces that: "The people have won" and "Democracy has arrived."

Instead of seeing police cars as in many arpilleras, one can see the name of the newly elected president Patricio **AYLWIN** on the black cars. People are cheering and waving their handkerchiefs, expressing their excitement at this new phase in Chilean politics, brought about in no small way through the political participation of grassroots people in the poor neighbourhoods of Santiago and elsewhere in Chile. One can almost hear the deafening noise of car horns loudly proclaiming this new era.

Exercising one's right to vote has always been of paramount importance in Chilean culture, with at least 90% of the electorate voting in elections. Socialism came to power by the way of elections and, as depicted in this arpillera; Pinochet was defeated through the mechanism of elections.

Courtesy of arpillera collection Kinderhilfe, Chile/Bonn

## Retorno de los exiliados / Return of the exiles

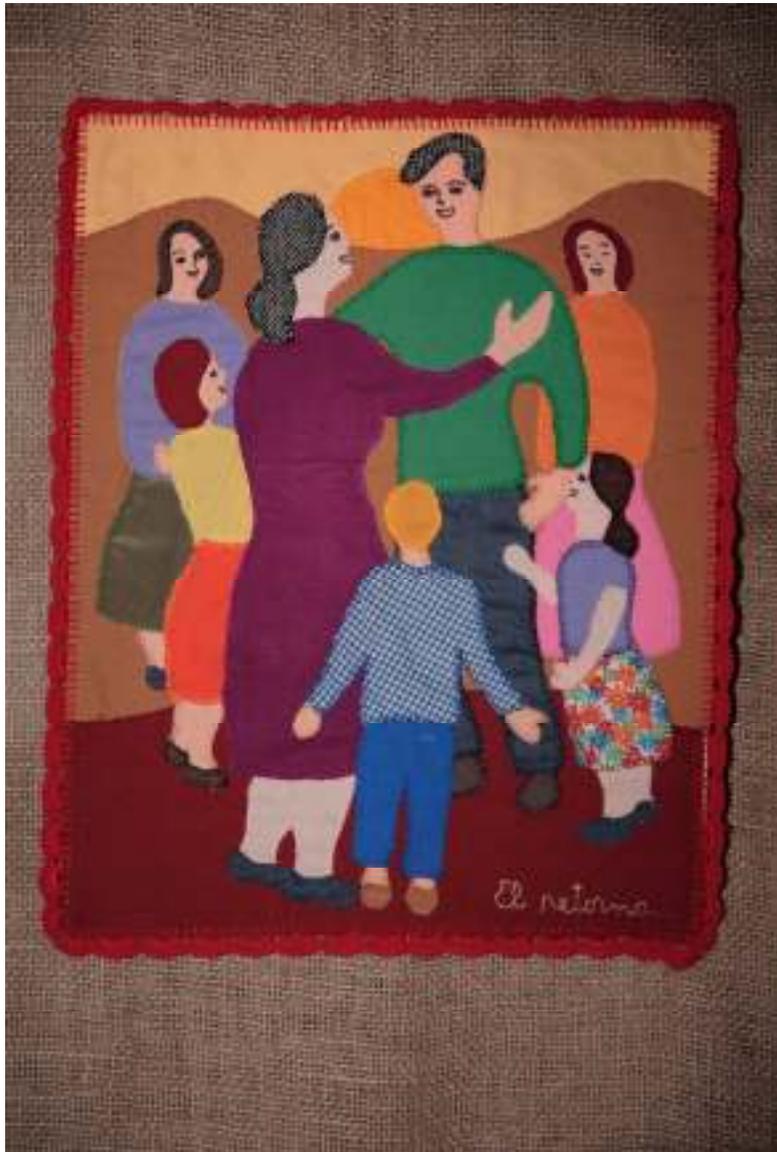
Chilean arpillera, anon., 1992

Photo Martin Melaugh

This arpillera shows a joyful reunion of family members who were forced into exile during the Pinochet dictatorship. It was made immediately after the regime ended.

Exile took many different forms. When the military coup toppled Salvador Allende in 1973, many government workers and supporters took refuge in embassies and some managed to leave the country. Others, after imprisonment and often torture, were deported and went to countries that accepted them. A third group were forced to take "economic exile" as they had been dismissed from their jobs and had no income. Some were even deprived of their Chilean nationality.

For the returned exiles, finding the country much changed, resettling in their native country was not always the joy they had anticipated. Furthermore, their children who grew up outside Chile were at a loss to understand their parents' longing to return to a country that had violated their human rights.



To deal with the new problems created by the mass return of exiles, the Oficina Nacional del Retorno (National Office for the Returnees) was created in 1990. It operated until 1994 and considered 52,557 cases. It was revealed that most of the exiles had been taken in by Sweden, Argentina, Canada, France and Germany.

In Northern Ireland, as in Chile, many felt they had no choice but to leave during The Troubles. In the face of increasing violence, a future in Northern Ireland seemed untenable. For those exiled or displaced, considering a future in Northern Ireland for themselves or the next generation may now seem a more realistic prospect, following the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 in tandem with ongoing peace building work at grassroots level.

Courtesy arpillera collection Kinderhilfe, Chile/Bonn



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