

Stitched Voices: Knowing conflict through textiles

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Photos from Dr. Fisher's archive unless noted differently

Workshop and Launch – 17 November 2017

Stitched Voices: Knowing conflict through textiles was launched at the Birmingham Voluntary Service Council (BVSC) in Birmingham on the evening of 17 November 2017 after two days of setting-up by Jonathan Fisher, Roberta Bacic, Berit Bliesemann de Guevara and Christine Andrä.



Over wine and nibbles, visitors to the exhibition were treated to a guided tour of the exhibits by curator Roberta Bacic, who focused particularly on the two Zimbabwean pieces *The day we will never forget* and *Waiting for food*. Made particularly prominent by the Zimbabwean *coup d'état* launched days earlier (14 November), *The day we will never forget* – the title work of the exhibition – depicts *Operation Murambatsvina*, or *Operation Move the Rubbish*, when c.50.000 Zimbabweans (including the young women from Killarney informal settlement who produced the textile) were forcibly evicted and displaced by the army and police, their homes and possessions destroyed. The textile represents an *homage* to the Chilean arpilleras produced years previously by those resisting dictatorship and injustice and is stitched onto a sofa cover, in the absence of the bags of flour available to Chilean stitchers.



Prior to the launch, a workshop was held exploring the use and value of textiles in the production of knowledge in conflict and post-conflict settings. This was the sixth seminar of the ESRC Seminar Series on “From data to knowledge: Understanding peace and conflict from afar” and podcasts of the workshop presentations are available via the Series website (www.birmingham.ac.uk/from-data-to-knowledge).

Dr Berit Bliesemann de Guevara opened the discussion by reflecting on the experience of hosting *Stitched Voices* in Aberystwyth, proposing three ways in which textiles can be incorporated into conflict research:

1. As a different means of, and medium for, understanding reality compared to talking to the ‘usual suspects’ approached by researchers. **Danielle House**, in this regard, outlined the role of the embroidery of Mexican handkerchiefs in the memorialisation of those killed in War on Drugs since 2006.
2. As a primary source – a testament to an experience rarely recorded through traditional means. **Christine Andrä** then explained how textiles can represent a ‘textile photograph’ of a person’s town or village and encourage us to ask questions about particular contexts and experiences.
3. As a research methodology. **Dr Lydia Cole** then reflected on the manner in which textiles present a less bounded, more continuous mechanism to understand experiences of conflict and injustice than written texts.

Ximena Pardo of London Mexico Solidarity then presented on her textile-based activism and *impromptu* protests at the British Museum, after the latter accepted sponsorship from oil company BP

<http://www.londonmexicosolidarity.org/content/history-bp-ten-objects-lms-arpillera-resistance>



Arpillera by London Mexico Solidarity, from 'A History of BP in 10 Objects' at the British Museum 2016

This piece was part of Stitched Voices in Wales and was documented as <http://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflicttextiles/search-quilts/fulltextiles/?id=374>

Ximena also spoke to two textiles created by her mother while in prison. She spoke movingly of how these textiles became a testimony not only to that experience but also to her mother's sense of hope for her future after being released. She also emphasised the significance of arpilleras as an attempt to *disrupt* the narrative of closure associated with truth commissions in post-conflict peacebuilding processes such as that of Chile in 1990-1991. They are a challenge to temporally-bounded depictions of injustice and experience.



Bordado by Cristina Zamora, 1976 Tres Alamos, original design by Helen Zarur