

CONFLICT TEXTILES



My name is Esther Vital and I am from a very small village from the Basque region, North of Spain and I moved to Brazil in 2010.

I would firstly like to thank Roberta for the opportunity of being here today and for all the support I have received from her since we met in 2008, during the opening of the exhibition “The Art of Survival: International and Irish Quilts”, while I was studying my masters. Professor Carlos Martin Beristain connected us. This exhibition took place in 9 venues across Derry, and included a selection of Chilean Arpilleras “The Politics of Chilean Arpilleras” that changed my mind set, touched my soul and gave meaning to my life. At that time, I was looking for a case study wanting to find evidence that would support my idea that arts could be a powerful tool in order to overcome conflict.

What I found was much more than a tool or even a case study. Arpilleras are much more than a tool; they are a language that has the power to question, to provoke, to inspire and to encourage. I was touched by arpilleras, and that was a no return point, I had to come out of my own comfort zone. Once I had concluded to write my thesis, I had a very inner will to practice what I had witnessed as an observer. This is the very first arpillera that I made. It was exhibited at the Verbal Arts Centre as a part of the exhibition **Women's Real Lives** – to mark International Women's Day, 2009.

<https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflicttextiles/search-quilts/fulltextiles/?id=73>

Since that time I have been working in different contexts and with different groups of people that organize themselves to struggle to overcome injustice, oppressive and violent contexts. I have experienced as an arpillera workshop facilitator, the power of this multidimensional language to weave connections. Arpilleras connect time, space, issues, emotions, people...

Once in Brazil, I had the opportunity to participate with Roberta, in the design and facilitation of workshops and other associated activities of the exhibition “Arpilleras of Chilean political resistance” (2011 -2012). That was a three months exhibition project commissioned by Memorial da Resistência de São Paulo, and that later toured 5 states of Brazil,

occupying important locations in the major capitals of the country
<https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflicttextiles/search-quilts/fullevent/?id=78>

It was at one of these workshops that the arpillera on display “**My Memories of the Dictatorship**” was created by Fátima da Costa, then in her sixties. This arpillera is a testimony of a turbulent event in her home city of Recife, following the 1964 Brazilian Coup.

She was able to remember and register what she witnessed as a nine year old:

“Suddenly, around 9 AM, my parents closed... their little shop. Lorries loaded with military... ordered people to lock themselves and be silent. They surrounded the house of Mr. Popô, a neighbour who talked a lot with people in his home... Mr Popô disappeared...”

Fátima was fascinated with the power of arpilleras, and again, she stressed the power of arpilleras to connect her with her own past and to create spaces in which individual stories and experiences could be connected. We can also witness how arpilleras minimize the victimization process of retelling a traumatic memory. This happens by relocating survivors of these violent and oppressive experiences as the protagonists of the process of registering their own story. It gives them the chance to express their narratives in a safe way. In this way it allows society to gain awareness and concern of relevant events that have been silenced for a long time. This is key to understand our recent history.

Esther Vital Garcia
April 2021