

**Text read for the arpilleras exhibition opening/welcome of the Third
International Visual Methods Conference**

Tuesday 3 Sept 2013, St Andrews on the Terrace
Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand

E ngaiwi, e ngakarangatanga

Te iti me te rahi

Tenakoutou, tenatatou

Buenas noches, good evening,

It is our pleasure to be here tonight to welcome and celebrate the arpilleras on exhibition around you. In particular, a warm welcome to Roberta Bacic, who brought the arpilleras to Wellington, Sara Kindon and Geoff Hume-Cook, conveners of the Third International Visual Methods Conference, as well as the conference delegates who have joined this evening.

Also a special welcome to the Chilean Ambassador, Isauro Torres for his involvement and support in this event, to St Andrews on the Terrace for their wonderful generosity and openness, to MIA - Mujeres in Aotearoa for their amazing contribution, and to all the members of the Latin American community who in one way or another have made this event and the exhibition possible.

In particular thanks to Katia Guiloff and Marcela Palomino for their hard work putting this together so tenderly, beautifully and respectfully.

Tonight is a special night. We are formally opening the arpilleras exhibition and welcoming the conference delegates. We are also creating a space to come together as a community to acknowledge the convergence of past and present, and the coming together of

Chile and Aotearoa New Zealand (as well as other places around the world) in a history of solidarity, resistance, pain and love.

What is happening tonight has many layers of meaning.

First we have the opportunity to appreciate and celebrate the work of women who in times of difficulties and strong repression, worked together to find creative ways to create support networks, maintain hope, and bravely challenged injustice and violence with the visual work of their hands and hearts.

Doing this today is particularly important as we approach the mark of four decades since Pinochet's coup d'état. Next week, on the 11th of September, will be the 40th anniversary of the beginnings of one of the most violent and painful 16 years in the history of Chile. Since the return of the democratic rule in 1990 we have come a long way as a society, but the legacies of the dictatorships are still felt by many.

Having this exhibition and event in this church is also not a minor coincidence. During the dictatorship, when the arpilleras were created and also banned, churches played an important part. They not only played a key role in the defense of human rights and supporting the victims of the dictatorship. Churches were also instrumental in "smuggling" the arpilleras overseas, where they were cared for and used to raise funds to send back to the women "arpilleristas". Churches also helped many Chileans going into exile by giving them support, setting them up with a home and transitioning refugees into their new country. So again it is no minor coincidence that this church has so openly let us and our arpilleras have a home while they are in Wellington.

And finally, it is also about the people who are participating in this event.

There are still many families who live with the consequences of the coup 40 years on. Families here in Nz; like mine.

There are big communities of Chileans all over the world that were exiled during the 1970s. Here today I know of two families: Carla and Adrian our musicians and me but I am sure there are more here tonight. Chileans who are involved in our community, making great contributions, living happily, participating and enjoying everything a wonderful country like Nz has to offer. The scenery, love for sports, sausage rolls and pavlovas.

But there also is a niggles of sadness plugging up the stories of oppression, death and heartbreak this niggles comes out every now and again. Missing family events, the smells and sounds of the cobblestone streets, and the majesty of the Andes mountain range which somehow seem directly connected to the morrow in your bones.

I once heard that Chilean women cry the most compared to others worldwide. I can vouch for that, and I am sure there will be a few tears tonight and I can assure you many tears have been shed with the arpilleras.

Those living in exile shed many tears; a new language to learn, a new country, culture, customs and values. All this while setting up from scratch a new home for their beloved family, shoulders tired from burdens and soaked with tears having mourned the loss of many family, friends and country.

There are never really many opportunities for Chilean-Kiwis or as I like to say “Chiwi’s” to have both feet firmly planted in NZ and feel so Chilean. This exhibition allows us that.

We want to make this event an occasion to acknowledge this history, the people present here tonight, and the work of the women arpilleristas to connect with their message of love for life, the importance to nurture hope, and the deep desire for justice and peace. We will have some music, poems, dance and a couple of speeches, but first, we would like to start screening a short 10 min film about the arpilleras entitled “Como alas de chincol” or “Like the wings little birds”. (FILM SCREENED)

Now I would like to leave with you Roberta Bacic to give a few words. Roberta is a Chilean curator of arpilleras based in Belfast since 2004. She has curated more than 30 international exhibitions of arpilleras, and as many of you know, just gave a keynote at the Third International Visual Methods Conference. We are very happy to have Roberta with us, and the fact that she was kind enough to bring the arpilleras to make this exhibition possible.

(ROBERTA’S WORDS)

Thank you very much Roberta.

Now I would like to invite to the stage the group Raíces. Raíces meaning Roots is a group of friends from Chile, Argentina and Uruguay. It’s an honour to have them play for us

tonight as their performances are few and far between. While they get ready, I would like to share with you the following poem by Marjorie Agosin dedicated to the women arpilleristas in Chile.

The Arpillerista

*The arpillerista,
Artisan of remains
Burns with rage and cold
As she tenderly
Picks through the remnants of her dead,
Salvages the shroud of her husband
The trousers left after the absences
Submerges herself in cloth of foaming, silent blood
And though she is fragile she grows large,
Sovereign over her adobe hut,
Her ragged scraps
And determined to tell her story
Truer than the tale woven by her
Sister Philomena.*

*Disruptive and beautiful she
Puts together her flayed remnants
Like a greenish and forgotten skin
And with her disguised thimble
Hidden in the pocket of her modest apron
And her harmless needle
She conjures up victorious armies
Embroiders humble people smiling, become triumphant
Brings the dead back to life
Fabricates water, bell towers, schools, dining rooms
Giang suns
And the Cordillera of the Andes
Peaks opening like portals
Of this splendid city.*

(Spanish translation on screen)

La arpillerista

*La arpillerista,
Artesana de restos
Arde con rabia y frío
Mientras tiernamente
Recolecta entre los restos de sus muertos,
Rescata la mortaja de su esposo
Los pantalones dejados luego de las ausencias
Se sumerge entre ropas de sangre borboteante y silenciosa
Y aunque ella es frágil se hace grande,
Soberana sobre su choza de adobe,
Sus retazos harapientos
Y decidida a contar su historia
Más verdadera que la historia tejida por su
Hermana Filomena.*

*Hermosa y perturbadora ella
Junta sus restos pelados
Como una piel verdosa y olvidada
Y con su dedal bien disimulado
Escondido en el bolsillo de su modesto delantal
Y su aguja inofensiva
Conjura ejércitos victoriosos
Borda gente humilde sonriendo, triunfando
Trae a los muertos de regreso a la vida
Fabrica agua, campanarios, colegios, comedores
Soles gigantes
Y los picos de la Cordillera de los Andes
Abriéndose como portales*

The first song Raíces will sing, *Vientos del Pueblo* or *Winds of the people*, is a song composed by Víctor Jara, an outstanding Chilean artist, musician and activist killed by the military in 1973, but whose music remains very much alive. (SONG)

Women play crucial roles in society shaped by the contexts they live in.

The following song, “Vino del mar” or “She came from the sea”, is based in a poem written by Patricio Manns. It is dedicated to Marta Ugarte, one of the victims of the dictatorship. After being killed, her body was thrown to the sea. But unlike many other victims, her body was swept up on the beach where was found by locals. Marta became thus a testimony. (SONG)

During times of social and economic difficulties, women are often one of the most affected groups, and Chile was no exception.

In Chile, like the arpilleristas, many anonymous women were crucial in the struggle to feed their families and care for those in need, and many others also endured the hardships of losing husbands, fathers, daughters and sons.

Some stayed in Chile, others had to go on exile. Some lost their lives, others remain with us. From different circumstances and positions, women have played a key role until today in the search for truth and justice.

Jaime Huenún, a renowned Mapuche poet, the largest Indigenous people in Chile, wrote the following poem inspired by these women.

Las mujeres salieron a la noche

*Las mujeres salieron a la noche
y buscaron el hilo del rocío,
pero sólo hallaron las pisadas
de sus insomnes, amados muertos.
El hilo de la papa hallaron y
más tarde
el hilo de las hojas del maizal,
el hilo de la piedra de moler
y el zumbido de unas grises mariposas
que aletearon en la pobre luz
de sus viejas, nubladas pupilas.
Las ovejas huyeron quizás dónde,
los zorzales quizás en qué silencio,
los niños habitaban los disparos*

*en quién sabe qué escondrijo
de las blancas montañas distantes.
¿Dónde hallar el hilo de la luna,
el hilo de las aguas prometidas?
Sólo harapos de nombres y de voces,
pedazos de camisas enterradas,
botones de plástico y de níquel,
retazos de chalecos y bufandas.
Las ropas encharcadas de la muerte,
uniéndose a la tierra, a la neblina,
soltando los tintes, las costuras,
el tibio algodón de la sabana.
El amor de las mujeres era oscuro,
un susurro chocando contra piedras,
un arroyo regresando a su origen
y a las fibras de árboles remotos.
Esto es todo lo que hay en nuestra casa:
una aguja, una lámpara, un telar,
una mesa de madera bruta
y unos platos de aluminio rotos.
Las mujeres se agotaron en el sueño
cosiendo y descosiendo sus visiones,
tejiendo punto a punto un frágil sol
para el yerto corazón del universo.*

(English translation on screen)

The women came out at night

*The women came out at night
and searched for the thread of dew
but only found the footsteps
of their sleepless, beloved deceased.
The thread of potatoes they found and
later
the thread of leaves in the cornfield,
the thread of the grinding stone
and the buzz of gray butterflies
that fluttered in the dim light*

*of their old, foggy eyes.
The sheep ran away who knows where,
the Thrushes who knows in which silence,
the children inhabited the gunshots
who knows in which hideout
in the distant white mountains.
Where to find the thread of the moon,
the thread of the promised waters?
Only rags of names and voices,
pieces of buried shirts,
plastic and nickel buttons,
fragments of vests and scarves.
The puddled garments of death,
joining the earth, the mist,
releasing the pigments, the seams,
the warm cotton of sheets.
The love of the women was dark,
a whisper crashing into stones,
a stream coming back to its source
and to the fibber of far away trees.
This is all you can find in our house:
a needle, a lamp, a loom,
a raw wooden table
and some broken aluminium plates.
The women were worn out in the dream
sewing and unsewing their visions,
knitting stitch by stitch a fragile sun
for the stark heart of the universe.*

One of the arpilleras we have in this exhibition is called "La cueca sola" "Dancing cueca alone". Cueca is a traditional Chilean dance danced in couples. The arpillera represents women who have lost loved ones dancing cueca on their own, with photographs of their disappeared pinned to their shirts.

The Cueca Sola has been a form of performance that women have consistently used in Chile to communicate their situation and feelings.

Raíces will perform this cueca now. Inés and Katia, mothers of people performing tonight and who had to move to NZ in exile, will dance for us.

Please join me to welcome Inés and Katia to the stage. (MUSIC AND DANCE).

Today has turned out to be a tribute to women, who in different ways have been a pillar of hope and strength. We would like to finish with a song of joy, of gratefulness, of deep value and love for life despite the circumstances. Raíces would like to close their performance with the song “Gracias a la vida” “Grateful for life” written by the famous Chilean composer Violeta Parra. (SONG)

Thank you very much to the musicians: Carla, Hada, Adrián, Cristian and Rafael, and to our dancers Inés and Katia.

Before moving to our last speaker for tonight, I would like to point to your attention the koha box located at the back.

The people of St Andrews on the Terrace have been extremely generous and welcoming in letting us use this space for free, and have been amazingly supportive in organizing this event and the exhibition during the rest of the week.

We would like to demonstrate our gratitude to them by being able to give back as much as possible, so please feel free to make your contribution at the end of this event. No contributions too big or small.

Also I would like to mention that to commemorate 40 years since the coup in Chile there will be other event's put on by the Chilean community. The 13th of September at 5.30 pm at Crossways there will be a showing of the documentary 'City of Photographers' (a film by Sebastian Moreno) this is a documentary about a motley crew of photojournalists who shot and framed Chile's people and turmoil from many perspectives during the long dictatorship of Pinochet in Chile. In the streets, in the middle of bloody riots and protests, these fearless photographers learned their craft and created their own language. For them, taking pictures was a way to be free, an alternative to keep on living, a way of being more than mere spectators but vital actors. There will be an opportunity to listen to first-hand accounts from Chilean refugees and their families. Light refreshments will be provided.

So now I would like to leave with you Isauro Torres, the Chilean ambassador in New Zealand, who has also been instrumental in having this event tonight, and who will give the closing words.