ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have been exceedingly fortunate for all the support from faculty, friends and family. I would like to thank my committee members Dr. Maya Stanfield-Mazzi, Dr. Victoria Rovine, and Dr. Florence Babb for their guidance, contribution, and participation. I would also like to thank my family for their constant love and unwavering support. Finally, I also thank my friends and fellow colleagues at the University of Florida’s School of Art and Art History.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship on Arpilleras</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Divided Chile</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Struggles in Pinochet’s Chile</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Vicariate of Solidarity and the Arpillera Workshops</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 ARPILLERAS</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origins of Arpilleras</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops and Techniques</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 TRAUMA’S TRANSFORMATION TO MEMORY AND REPRESENTATION</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trauma</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representation</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 INDIVIDUAL MEMORY</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Woman Dreaming and Wondering About Her Missing Son While Sleeping</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Empty Seat for Their Disappeared Son</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 COLLECTIVE MEMORY</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salvador Allende</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Cueca Sola</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 DISREMEMBERING</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did You Forget? If You Have No Memory You Will Vote Again for Pinochet</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where Are the Detained-Disappeared?</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 CONCLUSION</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF REFERENCES</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHILEAN ARPILLERAS 1975-1990: AN ART OF TRAUMA AND MEMORY

By

Maria Cristina Trujillo

August 2011

Chair: Maya Stanfield-Mazzi
Major: Art History

After the military coup of September 11, 1973, that overthrew Salvador Allende, General Augusto Pinochet installed detention camps for political dissidents throughout Chile. In the detention centers mass executions were staged, and tortures were committed. The prisoners, whose whereabouts were not reported, became known as the disappeared. Chilean women banded together to search for their lost loved ones, console each other, and protest the military regime. An outlet for them to deal with the trauma and protest the violence they experienced materialized in arpillera workshops. Arpillera workshops were begun to open in 1975 by the catholic organization the vicariate of solidarity and were dismantled with the transition to democracy in 1990. Arpilleras are appliqué panels with cotton or burlap bases composed of scraps of fabric that are arranged to create visual narratives. Through the medium of the arpillera women were able to reflect upon and recreate their traumatic experiences and memories. The arpilleras demonstrate the visual transformation of memories into art objects with a convergence of lines, shapes, colors, textures, mass, and composition that expresses content and meaning. The arpilleras’ various compositions, styles, and techniques help represent the memories of the arpilleras (women artists who created
arpilleras) and question the collective memory of Chilean people. Through close analysis of scholarship and observation, three particular themes stand out consistently in arpilleria subject matter: disremembering (intentionally ignoring and forgetting traumas by the state and supporters of Pinochet), individual memory, and collective memory. These elements along with the social context of the artists provide proof that the arpilleras functioned as a potent mechanism for coping with loss.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

At the time of the military junta coup d’état on September 11, 1973, that overthrew Salvador Allende’s government, Violeta Morales lived alone with her five children in Santiago, the country’s capital.¹ After her husband abandoned the family, her brother Newton stepped in to support them. Newton also provided for his other sister and mother with his military pension and meager factory worker’s salary. As a retired navy officer and president of the factory labor union, many saw Newton as a prime candidate for the military persecution that began after the coup.² Military officials soon began to question the Morales family and their friends about Newton’s political activities. He had become increasingly active in underground movements, working against the new military regime to protect the oppressed. He moved from house to house and used several fake identities to avoid detection and persecution. Despite these precautions, three officials and an accomplice captured Newton when he went back to visit his mother, who had just fallen ill.³

Like other relatives of missing persons, Violeta desperately began to search for her brother in prisons, hospitals, and morgues. She immediately began to participate in a pro-peace committee that sought out the disappeared and aided in the report of human rights violations⁴. Like Violeta, many other mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters fell into economic and emotional despair when the family members they

¹ Emma Sepúlveda-Pulvirenti, We, Chile: Personal Testimonies of the Chilean Arpilleristas (Falls Church: Azul, 1991), 41.
² Sepúlveda-Pulvirenti, We, 41.
³ Sepúlveda-Pulvirenti, We, 42.
⁴ Sepúlveda-Pulvirenti, We, 43.
relied on went missing. In the quest for financial and emotional stability, affected women
began to create works of art known as arpilleras. Violeta entitled one of her first
arpilleras *Truth and Justice for All Those Detained and Disappeared.*\(^5\) It illustrates her
search for Newton and serves as a representation of her memory of him. She sets a
black and white photograph of her brother against a foreground of figures who represent
the protestors active against the injustice and denial of abductions, commonly known as
“disappearances.” This single textile panel from the Santiago Arpillera workshops
represents the grief and trauma communicated through other arpilleras.

Collectives of women in Chile created arpilleras by stitching fabric scraps onto
appliqué panels with cotton or burlap bases. Formal analysis of these collages from an
art historical perspective demonstrates the visual transformation of trauma and
memories into art objects. This analysis investigates how the convergence of lines,
shapes, colors, textures, mass, and composition expresses content and meaning. This
thesis will also illustrate how the arpilleras’ symbols, style, and techniques help
represent the memories of the arpilleras (women artists who created arpilleras). In
addition, I will also discuss the arpilleras’ use of their art to question the collective
memory of Chilean peoples through visual narratives. To demonstrate the connection
between memory and formal elements, I will deconstruct three different themes
common in arpillera narratives: individual memory, collective memory and
disremembering (intentionally ignoring and forgetting traumas that linger unresolved).

---

Scholarship on Arpilleras

Marjorie Agosín and Jacqueline Adams, the two most recognized scholars on Chilean arpilleras, have published many works that form current understandings of the arpilleras. Agosín’s two major works, *Scraps of Life* from 1987 and *Tapestries of Hope* from 1994, provide poetic, ethnographic accounts of the struggles of the arpilleras. Agosín publicized the diverse experiences of these arpilleras by publishing their testimonies, songs, and poems within a widely-read ethnographic study. Agosín also became one of the first writers to discuss arpilleras in terms of their wider social importance. In her various articles, Jacqueline Adams discusses arpilleras as a product of Chile’s dire economic situation during the junta and in relation to the artists’ social class. Adams develops this discussion in her later articles by focusing on arpilleras as agents of political change. Other contributors regarding artistic techniques and the function of the arpillera workshops include Betty LaDuke and Eliana Moya-Raggio. These authors focus on the political and social circumstances of the arpilleras, but do not explore the formal properties of the works themselves in any depth.

A Divided Chile

From the 1930s to the 1970s, Chilean politics was characterized by a wide spectrum of political parties whose ideologies ranged from conservative to communist.

---


In the years leading up to the presidential election of 1970, tensions had developed across the country’s various socio-economic layers. At that moment of Chile’s history, the country’s population consisted of a large sector of lower-class peasants and urban workers, as well as a middle class of teachers, professionals, white collar workers and bureaucrats. A small upper class of landowners and businessmen filled out the country’s social spectrum.\textsuperscript{10} The different classes fragmented within themselves, each with numerous well-developed, passionately evoked, and sometimes contradictory political loyalties. Social conflict grew between and within classes over issues of land distribution, control of economic resources, and political power.\textsuperscript{11}

In September of 1970, presidential candidate Salvador Allende gained the highest number of votes in the election to replace former president Jorge Alessandri.\textsuperscript{12} The candidates included Popular Unity member and socialist Allende, the Nationalist incumbent Alessandri, and Christian Democrat Radomiro Tomic. \textsuperscript{13} None of the three contending candidates managed to obtain a clear majority; therefore, the Chilean congress approved the appointment of Allende. Since no Marxist candidate had ever acquired a majority before, Allende’s appointment provoked a serious dilemma inside the Christian Democrat-dominated congress. On October 24, 1970, the congress confirmed Allende as president-elect.\textsuperscript{14} After his inauguration, Allende immediately implemented controversial economic and social reforms that constituted his plan for a

\textsuperscript{10} Oppenheim, \textit{Politics in Chile}, 6.

\textsuperscript{11} Oppenheim, \textit{Politics in Chile}, 7.

\textsuperscript{12} Susan Franceschet, \textit{Women and Politics in Chile} (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2005), 60.

\textsuperscript{13} Pablo Policzer, \textit{Rise and Fall of Repression in Chile} (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame, 2009) 42.

\textsuperscript{14} Policzer, \textit{Rise and Fall of Repression in Chile}, 43.
peaceful path to socialism. His plan included land redistribution and the nationalization of privately held companies that owned the Chilean copper and nitrate industry. The Western powers and especially the United States saw this as a clear move towards communism. Doubt and tension began to increase within the other political parties and within the military when inflation rose and the country's most valuable export, copper, began to lose its value on the international market, leading the Chilean economy into a steep decline.  

On September 11, 1973, the Chilean armed forces overthrew the Allende government through massive air and ground attacks on the Chilean presidential palace and forced the country into a strict military dictatorship. The coup was supported and facilitated by the U.S. government and the CIA organization. On September 12, Augusto Pinochet, the commander of the armed forces under Allende's government, was appointed as head of the military junta through the Constitution Act of the Junta Government. Chilean democracy collapsed on September 13 when the military junta disbanded the congress and banned all other independent political organizations. Additionally, they also banned all forms of independent media that did not support the new government including newspapers, television, and radio stations.

---

17 Policzer, *Rise and Fall of Repression in Chile*, 42.
18 Sigmund, *The Overthrow of Allende*, 270.
19 Policzer, *Rise and Fall of Repression in Chile*, 41.
Under Pinochet’s government, the Chilean economy transformed into an economy based on the neo-liberal model of the Chicago School.\(^{20}\) Pinochet set out to reintegrate Chile into the global economy by reversing policies of economic nationalism. He reduced tariffs, lifted price controls, devalued the currency, sold state industries, cut government spending, and courted foreign investment. The lower class immediately felt the effects when formerly fixed prices of foods and other necessities increased, wages froze at very low levels, and unemployment tripled.\(^{21}\)

During the first months of the military dictatorship, all four branches of the armed forces carried out widespread campaigns of repression, including mass arrests and executions. Rampant killings, abductions, tortures, and detentions characterized this period. Victims included people from a wide spectrum of political affiliations, from the far left to the center.\(^{22}\) Although the government held many prisoners in secret, they imprisoned most of them in highly public venues such as Chile’s national stadium.

The visibility of the prisoners became highly problematic for the regime, as pressure on the Pinochet government from international human rights organizations increased. As a result, Pinochet established the clandestine organization known as DINA (Dirección de Comunicaciones de Carabineros) in 1974.\(^{23}\) DINA became a coercive agency dedicated to carrying out systematic abductions of members of key groups on the left. The United States Central Intelligence Agency aided this notorious

\(^{20}\) Rody and Wright, *Flight From Chile*, 6.

\(^{21}\) Sepúlveda-Pulvirenti, *We*, 15.


agency, which reported directly to Pinochet. The United States justified its actions as part of an international fight against the spreading influence of communism. Fear of the DINA grew in Chile as observers noticed members of the new organization, composed of agents in civilian clothing and unmarked cars, rounding up people in well-organized abductions. Under the DINA, fewer victims were taken while communists and other members of the far left were selectively targeted for repression. Concealed detention camps, such as Villa Grimaldi, brutally tortured or executed prisoners, their bodies hidden or destroyed. During the course of its rule, the military junta exiled over one million people and relegated over three thousand to the category of “disappeared.”

Women’s Struggles in Pinochet’s Chile

Beginning in 1973, there were two opposing groups of women: those that were on the political right, anti-Allende, and in favor of a military resolution, and those that were against the military junta on the political left. Several different political organizations formed, and among them two became particularly instrumental: Poder Feminino (Feminine Power) and Mujeres por la Vida (Women for Life). Although opposed in goals and political views, each group flourished under the direction of mobilized women who contributed to political debate via protests and endorsement of their own political

---

25 Oppenheim, Politics in Chile, 69.
27 Lisa Baldez, Non-Partisanship as a Political Strategy: Women Left, Right, and Center in Chile (Pittsburgh, Latin American Studies Association, 1998), 274.
commitments. Members of opposing groups saw each other not as fellow women but as political adversaries.  

The lower class women of Chilean society who had lost husbands, children, and brothers to the military’s campaigns of repression also suffered extreme poverty. To improve their circumstances, they formed and participated in several human rights groups supported by the Catholic Church, such as the Association of Families of Arrested and Disappeared. This organization formed to defend the victims affected by the military’s human rights abuses. Other groups formed to support the victims’ relatives, such as the Association of Relatives of the Executed. Many of the members in these organizations included arpilleristas, who would also protest peacefully in public against crimes committed by the Pinochet government. These groups emerged during the economic and political crisis that followed the coup. The organizations continued based on the solidarity of poor families who shared precarious living conditions. Many sponsored programs included family lunch rooms, housing committees, soup kitchens, and wholesale buying groups. The participation of the arpilleristas outside of their art highlights the nature of their art; political protest and perseverance appears in the colors, stitches, compositions, and overall subjects of their applique works, demonstrating the spirit of their political activism.

---

28 Baldez, Non-Partisanship as a Political Strategy, 275.


30 Sepúlveda-Pulvirenti, We, 24.

31 Aman and Parker, Popular Culture in Chile, 191.
The Vicariate of Solidarity and the Arpillera Workshops

As a response to the cruelties committed by the military junta, various ecumenical groups met at the suggestion and sponsorship of the Archbishop of Santiago, Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez, in order to form an organization centered around the protection of human rights of those targeted and affected.32 A group called the Vicariate of Solidarity formed under the auspices of the Catholic Church. The government had no power to close down this organization because it functioned under the laws of the Vatican and the office of the archbishop.33 The international group CARITAS (Roman Catholic Charity), other foreign aid agencies, catholic congregations, and its sales of artworks and handicrafts supported the group.34

In 1975, the Vicariate initially set up ten arpillera workshops throughout Santiago with a limit of twenty women per taller (workshop).35 These art workshops created work opportunities for financially unstable women whose family members had gone missing. The women met in workshops located in church buildings three afternoons a week. During their meetings, an employee of the Vicariate, most often a middle class professional, taught the women new techniques and assisted with quality control. The Vicariate employees also encouraged discussion of political events and hosted meetings regarding human rights, women’s rights, and the current economic and political situation. Each arpillerista could only make one arpillera per week. The

35 LaDuke, “Chile Embroideries,” 37.
arpilleristas would go to the central office once a month to receive full payment for their work, minus 10% that went to a group emergency fund.\textsuperscript{36} The Vicariate sponsored the embroideries with the end goal of exportation.

At the time, an arpillera cost approximately fifteen U.S dollars. The buyers included nongovernmental and human rights organizations as well as groups of Chilean exiles in Europe and in North America.\textsuperscript{37} In 1988, the transition to democracy in Chile disbanded the Vicariate of Solidarity. However, many groups that originated from the Vicariate sponsorship continued to meet and make arpilleras. The arpillera narratives serve as representations of memory, documents of past human rights violations, seek accountability, and protest against the amnesty of those who had committed crimes.

\begin{footnotesize}

\textsuperscript{37} Adams, “Socialization in Art Workshops,” 38.
\end{footnotesize}
The word arpillera literally means sackcloth or burlap, usually obtained from flour or rice sacks. Arpillera makers use this material for the backing of the embroideries. Arpillera makers used this material because of its sturdy quality and affordability, which makes it symbolic of their struggle to find work, food, and economic support. An average arpillera measures approximately twelve by eighteen inches.\(^1\) The arpilleras are sewn together with scraps of cloth left over from tailors and factories.\(^2\) As a result, each arpillerista uses differently colored and patterned shapes of fabrics juxtaposed in random ways, making each work unique. This personal and therapeutic process is demonstrated in their choice of fabric and other mediums which made their work both individual and symbolic. Often, the artists would use pieces of their lost loved ones’ clothing as well as their own hair for figural representations.\(^3\) This process personalizes the embroideries beyond simply hand stitched needlework.

**Origins of Arpilleras**

Although many scholars feel unclear regarding the origins of the arpillera tradition, it no doubt became popularized by the arpillera workshops of rural Isla de Negra on the west coast of Chile during the 1960s. Philanthropist Leonora Soberino de Vera founded a formal workshop which included seventeen fisherman’s wives in 1969.\(^4\) Though the arpilleristas and their families suffered from poverty and unemployment, they used their

---

1 LaDuke, "Chile Embroideries," 34.
4 LaDuke, "Chile Embroideries," 34.
art as a way to celebrate life and escape into the pastoral landscapes they depicted. The Chilean government supported the Isla de Negra arpilleras, which also received praise from poets such as Pablo Neruda.

The arpilleristas of Santiago reflected the pastoral Isla de Negra arpilleristas in many ways. Artists used both artistic traditions as a medium of emotional coping and expression during times of dire financial circumstances. The work from Isla Negra clearly inspired the arpillera workshops in Santiago which adopted it as a format for their own needlework. While the workshops were similar, they also had their own unique characteristics. For instance, the arpilleristas of the Vicariate of Solidarity substituted farming and fishing scenes with scenes of urban unemployment, poverty, or political repression and urban crime. Also, the organization was not started by an individual, but rather emerged from within the Catholic Church.

Artist Violeta Parra (B. October 4, 1917 – D. February 5, 1967) also contributed to the foundation and style of the Santiago arpillera movement, popularizing the works as an art form. Parra received most of her recognition through her contributions to Chile’s folk music scene as a teacher, composer, singer, musician, and political activist. Along with her brother Nicanor, she became the first artist to investigate and preserve authentic Chilean music in the nation’s different regions. She also taught at several

---

5 LaDuke, "Chile Embroideries," 34.
6 LaDuke, "Chile Embroideries," 33.
7 LaDuke, "Chile Embroideries," 34.
universities and had her own political and folkloric radio station in Santiago.\textsuperscript{10} Similar to the Santiago arpilleristas, Parra’s arpilleras dealt with Chilean identity, but in a more ideal way through portrayal of genre or pastoral scenes. Her life changed in 1960 when, at the age of forty-three, an illness limited her to bed rest.\textsuperscript{11} During that time she began making arpilleras that explored traditional Chilean subject matter such as la cueca (the national dance of Chile) or subjects that were directly related to her poems. In 1964, she had an exhibition at the Louvre in Paris of her arpilleras, oil paintings, and wire sculptures. Parra became the first Latin American artist to have a solo exhibition in this museum.\textsuperscript{12} Like the arpilleristas, Parra lived most of her life in poverty and used her art to escape her economic circumstances, gender, and class. In her art works, Parra externalized the world of her imagination and individual memory for all to experience by tapping into Chilean cultural traditions.\textsuperscript{13} She preserved and contributed to the collective memory of Chile in that she provided a set of ideas, images, and feelings about Chile’s past that became a shared resource for the Chilean people. Violeta Parra’s work demonstrates imaginative and nostalgic interpretations of Chilean culture, promoting a distinct perception of the nation. However, the works of the arpilleristas in the Vicariate workshops dealt with more political and grim subjects while questioning Chilean culture and identity. Parra’s work served as a precursor of the arpillera technique and a stylistic inspiration to the Vicariate arpillera workshops.

\textsuperscript{10} Parra and Alcalde, \textit{Toda Violeta Parra}, 10.

\textsuperscript{11} Parra and Alcalde, \textit{Toda Violeta Parra}, 11.

\textsuperscript{12} Karen Kerschen, \textit{Violeta Parra: By the Whim of the Wind} (Albuquerque: ABQ, 2010), 156.

\textsuperscript{13} Kerschen, \textit{Violeta Parra}, 156.
Workshops and Techniques

The activities in the arpillera workshops from 1975 -1990 transformed the role of Chilean women as they became increasingly active in the resistance against the dictatorship. Instead of caring and working within their households, women searched for their disappeared family members. Women who participated in the arpillera workshops held hunger strikes, chained themselves to the gates of the national congress building, and marched with photographic posters of their disappeared family members. Many suffered persecution, threats, and physical abuse as retaliation to their acts of protest. The lack of monetary support traditionally supplied by men, now imprisoned or disappeared, pushed the women in the arpillera workshops to change their economic role and their relationships to one another. From the inception of the arpillera project, each art work was both an individual and collaborative process. The women in the workshops worked not only to support themselves, but also to help each other.

Each arpillerista dedicated herself to an individual or collective concept concerning an outstanding current event or remembrance of a significant person. After choosing a subject, the women cut the burlap as supporting material for the arpilleras. The arpilleristas then stitched fabric scraps of various colors and shapes onto the burlap, which created unified and complete backgrounds for their designs. Background elements often included the Andes mountains, the sun, clouds, office buildings, and

---

14 Sepúlveda-Pulvirenti, _We_, 26.
15 Sepúlveda-Pulvirenti, _We_, 28.
16 Sepúlveda-Pulvirenti, _We_, 29.
trees. Once they stitched a background setting, handmade dolls and other scraps of fabric were applied to create a colorful surface that covered the burlap support.\textsuperscript{17}

The making of these dolls often challenged the arpilleristas because of the complex techniques involved and the difficult reflections they had to undergo to place the dolls within their arpillera narratives. First, they made the heads by cutting small squares of cloth and filling them with bits of fabric and sewing them closed. Knots were made, but carefully hidden underneath the hair or clothing of the doll.\textsuperscript{18} In an effort to make the dolls’ hair more realistic, the arpilleristas often substituted human hair for yarn. After making the main parts of each doll, they then added facial expressions with small embroidered stitches. They continued on to carefully sew each item of clothing with different techniques and styles. For example, many arpilleristas used a technique in which the skirts were gathered at the top and pulled tight in order to form a flare at the bottom.\textsuperscript{19} Occasionally, they would add other three dimensional objects to the arpilleras such as twigs, matchsticks, tin foil, and sometimes photographs.\textsuperscript{20} As the women created the dolls, they verbally recounted stories associated with their arpilleras to other members of the workshop. According to the arpilleristas, the final step of the construction process had a tendency to provoke the most emotion; it lay bare their intimate memories and brutally personal experiences through the composition of the arpillera narratives.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{17} Agosin, \textit{Tapestries of Hope}, 22.

\textsuperscript{18} Agosin, \textit{Tapestries of Hope}, 23.

\textsuperscript{19} Agosin, \textit{Tapestries of Hope}, 24.

\textsuperscript{20} Agosin, \textit{Tapestries of Hope}, 22.

\textsuperscript{21} Sepúlveda-Pulvirenti, \textit{We}, 29.
The main types of stitches used in arpilleras included the blanket stitch, which appears on the borders of the earlier arpilleras, and the cross stitch, used to secure and blend different scraps of fabric.\textsuperscript{22} The arpilleristas used three different techniques or levels of process in the arpillera workshops. The first is the flat or planar applique method in which they adhere the two dimensional fabric shapes to the surface using a variety of stitches, which also outline the forms.\textsuperscript{23} This same technique is then applied to add detail to the faces of the characters in the compositions. The second technique, called a raised or relief technique, utilizes appliqué figures and other details raised partially off the surface, such as doors and windows that can open and close. The final technique, the glue technique, glues two dimensional shapes of cloth to the compositions and then borders them with wool yarn.\textsuperscript{24}

The arpilleras often employ a traditional one point perspective. However, there was an interest in portraying scenes from multiple angles. This includes a diminution of scale, in that the figures farther away appear smaller. In general, the figures and objects rest flatly on the arpillera with no attempt to indicate depth. The arpilleristas portray their aesthetic preferences in the broad shapes of color and varying outlines that frame the arpillera and the figures within the composition. Due to the lack of time allotted for the completion of the arpilleras (one week per arpillera) and the minimal education of some of the women, the compositions often appear simple and with misspellings. However, I believe that this expresses the nature of the artists’ dire situation because their previous

\textsuperscript{22} Agosin, \textit{Scraps of Life}, 6.

\textsuperscript{23} LaDuke, “Chile Embroideries,” 34.

\textsuperscript{24} LaDuke, “Chile Embroideries,” 34.
role as mothers was coupled with the need to provide financial stability without a job market, work experience, or education.

The ironic use of bright colors and symbolic cloth choices intensely depict the various scenes. The limited and darker palettes communicate a sense of dark, brooding emotions. The direction and kind of stitch also reflect the artists’ messages, especially in the stitches that outline the objects, figures, and details. The brightly colored, long, and thick stitches often contrast starkly against the shapes of fabric that compose the narratives; instead of carefully blending the stitches into the work, the colorful stitches emphasize particular objects in the work. Therefore, the stitch becomes a tool of expression in the composition, just like paint strokes used by contemporary artists.

The bold processes and techniques of creating the arpilleras also connect directly to the sense of touch. The act of touching and sewing the arpilleras threatens the distinction between the subject and the object. Consequently, the arpilleras became linked to their arpilleras, in an attempt to transcend the gap between their memories and absence of their lost loved ones. The dire situations of the arpilleras denied them the traditional mourning process; a ritual of grieving that includes burial. Therefore, through the creation of arpilleras, women tried to build hope or mourn their loved ones at a time when they had no bodies and no real proof of death for family members.

---


CHAPTER 3
TRAUMA’S TRANSFORMATION TO MEMORY AND REPRESENTATION

Before entering long term memory, the effect of a traumatic event undergoes extensive processing by the individual. The event that enters the long term memory can then go through several transformations, including development into a collective or cultural memory. To cope with a traumatic event, an individual or group must represent, share, and express the experience to an audience. As opposed to recording an event exactly as it occurred, representing a memory through narratives recreates the past and renders the experience to a specific audience and for a specific reason.¹ Memory narratives recreate events based on self-reflection and emphasize the active self in shaping the quality of human thought. The power of memory narratives resides in their ability to create, form, and reclaim identity.² The coping process consists of the transition between the traumatic experience and its representation. The history of the arpillera demonstrates the connection between the traumatic experience of losing a loved one and the representation of that experience through the visual narratives.

Trauma

Trauma occurs when an individual or members of a collective persevere through a terrible event that leaves fixed marks upon their consciousness, irrevocably affecting their memories and identity.³ The traumatic moment can be defined as the experience of an event, often an act of violence, or an abrupt and unexpected social

---

¹ Lazzara, *Chile in Transition*, 30.


transformation. While trauma first goes through individual processing with psychological and psychoanalytical frameworks, it can also occur within a collective in times of social crisis. Unlike individual psychological trauma, which encompasses great emotional anguish, collective trauma on a cultural scale refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric.

The trauma victim struggles, after the fact, to find a language with which to articulate the traumatic moment when it lacks understanding because the perception of that moment does not fully match the actual details of the event. The inability to experience the traumatic moment may relate to the sudden or unwelcome nature of the experience. Trauma often does not solely exist in one moment or event, and in its unassimilated nature it returns to haunt the survivor later on. In order to cope with trauma on an individual and collective scale, individuals must participate in a collective discourse with others to reflect upon the experience. Through a coping process, victims aim to regain psychosocial health by lifting societal repression and restoring memory. Public acts of commemoration, cultural re-presentation, and public political struggle all help victims to recover from trauma. Tributes and public displays provide a collective means for relieving pressure and allowing the expression of pent-up emotions and mourning.

---

7 Alexander, *Cultural Trauma*, 5.
8 Alexander, *Cultural Trauma*, 7.
As noted, trauma can occur with sudden social and political shifts. In Chile, two closely related large-scale traumas occurred from 1973-1982: the collapse of the democratic political order and violence at the hands of the new regime. At first, individuals opposed to the regime became its victims and likely faced their trauma individually and as a multitude of private disasters. However, recognition of a truly collective trauma began when people became conscious of their mutual plight and noticed the similarity of their situation to that of others. The arpilleristas experienced the individual trauma of losing their loved ones and searching for them in the lines of morgues, prisons, detention camps, and hospitals. In this process, they began to recognize that other women shared their struggle and started to exchange observations and experiences, which led to representation of their memories through scraps of fabric assembled as narratives. In the arpillera workshops, women experienced the therapeutic effect of creating tributes to their disappeared family members. They collectively coped with their trauma by sharing their stories and memories, and dealt with their trauma on an individual level through the creative and personal process of arpillera making.

Memory

Memory gives individuals and collectives a cognitive map that helps orient who they are, why they are here, and where they are going. Both individual and collective identities revise and represent their recollections according to their experiences. Identity

---


12 Alexander, *Cultural Trauma*, 159.
shifts signify a remembering of the past, for memory is not only social, but deeply connected to the sense of the self. Remembrance involves piecing together the fragments of experience. The arpilleristas literally practice remembrance through piecing together scraps of fabric to recreate their experiences.

The human brain processes experience through three different stages: Information enters the individual memory system through a sensory organ such as the eyes and it holds a vivid record of the image which will decay quickly unless the mind regards it as important and stresses or repeatedly thinks about it, at which point it enters the short-term memory (STM). This memory structure stores incoming information where it can easily maintain, edit, and rehearse it. If successfully rehearsed, it transfers to the long-term memory (LTM), or if not, the brain lets go of the information causing the person to forget the event. Through the creative and representational process of making arpilleras, the artists stress and rehearse their memories. In this way their works act as a gateway from STM to LTM.

Individual memory usually signifies an introspective experience while collective memory has a more outward process, integral to the reproduction of society. Each individual’s memory is socially mediated and relates to several groups, so memories are not isolated but are created in communication with others. Every individual belongs to an assortment of groups, therefore having involvement in numerous self-images and

---

14 Loftus, Memory, 4.
15 Loftus, Memory, 20.
16 Alexander, Cultural Trauma, 22.
memories. These groups include families, neighborhoods, political parties, and nations. These collectives have more than an arbitrary connection; they have unification through a common image of their past.

According to Jeanette Rodriguez, (Professor of Theology and Religious Studies at Seattle University) the term memory culture generally refers to the generative process of a societal memory, which ensures cultural continuity by preserving collective knowledge, traditions, feelings, images, and ideals from one generation to the next, rendering it possible for later generations to reconstruct their cultural identity. In addition, shared outside the paths of formal historical discourse, this kind of memory intertwines with cultural objects saturated with cultural meaning. Memory culture also aids in the survival of marginalized groups of people and facilitates their resistance. To express a memory’s emotional significance, the participant or artist relies on symbolic language and imagery. Symbols or metaphors must be sufficiently moving that they enter into a relationship of solidarity with the emotions projected by memory. The narratives of memory represented by artists and writers help communicate an earnest emotional understanding of the history of a specific conflict or civil war.

In Chile, the debate regarding memory emerged during the transition from the military dictatorship to democracy (from 1989 – 1990). Questions regarding the

---

18 Rodriguez and Fortier, Cultural Memory, 3.
20 Rodriguez and Fortier, Cultural Memory, 2.
remembrance of the social crisis surrounding the coup d’État of 1973 and the response to the consequent violence became the subject of much controversy. Pinochet’s hold on his position of commander and chief of the military forces and self-appointed title as a lifelong senator created a fragile transition to democracy. The principal challenges faced by the new democracy included acknowledgment of those who suffered at the hands of the previous regime and accountability for human rights violations. In 1989, Pinochet revised the constitution to grant amnesty to state perpetrators through the 1978 amnesty law. Instead of providing truth and justice, the new democracy promoted and publicized the positive products of the past regime. The campaign emphasized Chile’s economic success in order to legitimize the dictum that proposed forgetting the errors of the past, reconciling Chile’s citizens to the present, and progressing together. The memories and material struggles of those who endured political violence persisted, despite the transitional government’s attempt to pacify and unite different social sectors. Memorials of political violence such as peace parks and other works of visual art began to appear. Arpilleras also functioned as media of memory, preserving the past and while making it a tangible experience of the present. As representational objects and narratives, arpilleras unveil the various meanings attached to the past in the locus of the present. The narratives presented in the arpillera compositions communicate the struggle against a regime bent on olvido (forgetting).

23 Stern, Battling for Hearts and Minds. 237.
24 Macarena Gómez Barris, Where Memory Dwells: Culture and State Violence in Chile (Berkeley: University of California, 2009), 4.
25 Agosin, Tapestries of Hope, 124.
26 Gomez Barris, Where Memory Dwells, 4.
Representation

Like trauma and memory, representation can encompass both individual and collective identities. Collective memory unifies the group through time and space with narratives that locate the individual and his or her life within the group. Collective memory can have either a textual or visual narrative and maintains its intellectual mobility. Narratives can extend meaning to distant places by isolated individuals (exiles), reuniting them to the collective through representations. The narrative as retold can serve as a counter story for a minority or an oppressed group. Through the creation of memory narratives, the arpilleristas battled against misconceptions and struggle for truth despite their marginalized status within society.

As objects of memory, arpilleras contribute to our picture of Chile’s past. Objects of memory stimulate remembrance by bringing back experiences which otherwise would have remained dormant, repressed, and forgotten. When placed on exhibit, the arpilleras can remind the viewer of some fragment of knowledge or personal experience. In finding a connection with the pieces, the visitor can become an narrator and temporary possessor of the objects. Therefore, the arpillera seeks to directly relate to the stranger in order to communicate the complex truth of the events narrated. The repetitive process of embroidering textiles such as the arpilleras particularly helps form matter and metaphors of memory. In the case of the arpilleras, the artists’ use of their own clothes and hair demonstrates the works’ symbolic power of recreation.

---

28 Gomez Barris, Where Memory Dwells, 4.
29 Gomez Barris, Where Memory Dwells, 4.
30 Gomez Barris, Where Memory Dwells, 12.
Representational images have a key purpose in the survival of emotional expression and in forming group identity and meaning.\textsuperscript{31} The term “site of memory” refers to those material, symbolic, and functional spaces to which societies return and relate their memories of the past. As objects, these sites can be books, films, and works of visual art.\textsuperscript{32} In the following statement, arpillerista Violeta Morales concisely explains the intended purpose of the arpilleras as agents of change: “We didn't want to make something that would function as decoration. We wanted to design a handmade product that would denounce what we and our country were living.” She then highlights the works’ role as visual representations of memory: “We wanted to tell people about our personal experiences through pieces of our worn clothing,” and identifies them with narratives of grief in saying, “We wanted to embroider our story, the harsh and sad story of our ruined country” (italics mine).\textsuperscript{33} Post-traumatic memory narratives as presented in arpilleras attempt to materialize memories of the past.

Arpillerista Anita Rojas also explains the transformation of trauma into memory when she reflects upon her past and highlights the role of her artwork in coping with her emotions: “I reflected about my life, how much I had sacrificed to educate my son. Just when I was going to be happy, just when I no longer had to work, this happened and all the anguish that came to me I showed in the arpilleras” (italics mine).\textsuperscript{34} The following chapters will address individual memory, collective memory, and disremembering (forgetting). An approach to these textile works from a formal perspective reveals

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{31} Rodriguez and Fortier, \textit{Cultural Memory}, 9.
\bibitem{32} Lazzara. \textit{Chile in Transition}, 32.
\bibitem{33} Agosin, \textit{Tapestries of Hope}, 105.
\bibitem{34} Agosin, \textit{Tapestries of Hope}, 106.
\end{thebibliography}
symbolic meanings in the arrangement and aesthetic choices of the artists. The artists’ role in the translation of collective and individual memories also uncovers achievement of an emotional catharsis. The arpilleras serve as objects of material culture that attempt to memorialize the victims of persecution and re-establish the objective reality of brutal past events.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{35} Alexander, \textit{Cultural Trauma}, 159.
Individually, individuals process memory selectively, therefore, when individuals confront difficult and painful realities they often prefer to remember in ways that alleviate cognitive tension. Writing or transforming memory into an object is a flexible and ongoing process of composing and recasting the past in relation to present circumstances.\(^1\) For the arpilleristas, their artworks provided a venue to confront their difficult memories of loss and repression, and to recreate and represent their past in ways that encouraged political change. Arpilleristas and other artists who address traumatic subject matter project themselves onto their works of memory multiple times and also craft their narratives for specific listeners.\(^2\) In narration of their memories, the arpilleristas make specific aesthetic decisions, whether conscious or unconscious, to articulate their experiences via color, stitch, and composition.

**A Woman Dreaming and Wondering About Her Missing Son While Sleeping**

The undated arpiller, *A Woman Dreaming and Wondering About Her Missing Son While Sleeping*, was the last work Irma Muller made and portrays her lying in bed, dreaming and wondering about the whereabouts of her son, Jorge Muller Silva.\(^3\) Her son worked as a cameraman for Popular Unity Party and also contributed to Patricio Guzman’s documentary from 1975, *La Batalla de Chile*. The film records the events that took place during the days leading up to the coup and the takeover of the presidential

---

\(^1\) Lazzara. *Chile in Transition*, 2.

\(^2\) Lazzara. *Chile in Transition*, 3.

\(^3\) For figure, see Agosin, *Tapestries of Hope*, 67.
Jorge and his fiancée, Carmen Cecilia Bueno Cienfuente, were detained together on November 29, 1974. Irma Muller describes the days after his abduction and demonstrates the emotional burden that many arpilleristas bore in the following excerpt:

It took the loss of my son for me to realize that for the struggle there is no age, even if it is true that a woman can’t come out firing a gun. Thank God I have a mind and ideas for doing things, things I have been doing all these years. I never could have stayed home with my arms folded. The greatest homage I can pay my son is to take up his battle flag. In a certain way I have done it. I am an active member of the Association of Families of the Detained and Disappeared. I make arpilleras as a way of denouncing the problem by means of needlework. I have been doing this almost from the moment of the disappearance of my son.

Here, Muller also assigns an important role to her artwork in fighting against the dictatorship. By representing her ideas, experiences, and memories, her works helped preserve the memory of her son Jorge. In a testimony from 1985, she described her emotional pain as a source of inspiration for the arpilleras. Muller found the ability to move from the traumatic moment of losing her son to confrontation of her painful memories, and then represent them through her needlework. Through the narratives of the arpilleras, Muller and other arpilleristas hoped to keep the knowledge of their struggles alive and gain support from international communities abroad.

The arpillera depicts a woman dreaming about a group of women seeking their lost loved ones. In the center of the composition, a sleeping figure lies tucked under a white sheet and a yellow blanket. Her rounded head, hair, and eyes peek out of the

---

4 Chile, Obstinate Memory, dir. by Patricio Guzman, (1998; Films d’ici).
5 Agosín, Tapestries of Hope, 124.
6 Agosín, Tapestries of Hope, 127.
7 Agosín, Tapestries of Hope, 124.
bedding, silhouetted against the white sheets with black stitches. The black and white head, partially obscured by the sheets and juxtaposed with the brightness of the blanket, suggests an irony where the vibrant yellow of the inanimate object overpowers the living being. The lack of color in the face could be a reference to her exhaustion or sickness. On either side of the bed, floral rugs stitched against a dark green color plane ground the composition. In the corners of the foreground also create a type of foundation for the work with two chairs, one on each side in profile view.

A figure with a white head and blue clothing sits in the right chair while the left remains empty. The figure likely represents a man because throughout all arpilleras, the style of dress indicates the gender of the figures, where women wear dresses and men wear pants. The man in this arpillera sits hunched over with his hands covering his face, possibly representing Muller's son Jorge. The melancholic pose reflects many of the arpilleras where the disappeared appear as anonymous silhouettes of solid color that lack any embroidered detail. The use of such a figure in this work could refer to his ambiguous social status as "disappeared." The identities of the disappeared remained in a state of limbo; considering that their families had no bodies to mourn over, it seemed that they had not died, yet they were denied citizenship and existence by the Chilean government.

Among an array of other small objects, a black and white photograph lies on a night table in the upper right of the composition. The photograph mimics the black and white photographs of the disappeared that the arpilleristas pinned to their blouses during tributes and protests. The specificity of the objects and the setting suggest a particular room, possibly Irma Muller's bedroom. Also in the upper right corner is a
barred window with yellow curtains gathered by red stitches. The bright yellow contrasts with the black bars of the window. The barred window suggests a sense of entrapment and may reference the prisons that Muller would visit daily to search for her son. She also stitched a window against one of the two walls that form the background of the narrative. A floral fabric that mimics wall paper indicates the back wall, while taupe panels of fabric bordered with black stitches show an intersecting wall, suggesting the shadows cast by wood panels. The paneled wall intersects the floral wall at approximately a 120 degree angle and continues to the left bottom corner of the composition. This creates an illusion of depth and places the viewer as a participant entering the room from the left side. From a viewer’s point of view, they stand above the room, due to the birds-eye perspective of the bed and other objects.

In the upper left corner of the arpillera the dream of the sleeping woman appears. A red rising bubble that represents the dream continues to the borders of the red crocheted frame and connects to the woman’s head by three embroidered dots. The dream’s red background adds to the unsettling tone of the arpillera. The dream shows nine women depicted with various patterned dresses and their backs turned, which also comes across as slightly odd. They each face an imposing brick wall edged with wire, which most likely refers to the detention camps such as Villa Grimaldi that many women visited to seek answers regarding their disappeared family members. It also symbolizes the denial and concealment of DINA activities. The black line that frames the brick wall and appears in many arpilleras is created using a stich type called cross stitch. The “x” shape of the cross stitch may reference the letter “x” symbol that stood for

---

8 Gomez Barris, *Where Memory Dwells*, 54.
the phrase “nunca más” or never again. It was used in human rights movements in Chile in need of a quick way to register opposition in urban areas under surveillance.\(^9\)

In the upper portion of the dream has the text “Donde Están?” (where are they?) embroidered several times. The women in the picture cry out this phrase with their hands held up and reaching towards the sky in another gesture of morning and protest.

This arpillera reflects an individual memory of the arpillerista Irma Muller as she recreates the memories of her son and her struggle to find him through a lexicon of colors, symbols, and stitches. Ultimately, the arpillera contains two different representations within one textile panel. The first representation depicts the sleeping woman within an interior domestic setting. This scene is the “wondering” portion of the narrative, indicated by the ghostly presence of her son in the room. The second representation occurs in the image of the woman’s dream, which shows her searching for her son in the company along with the other women. The woman fights for her disappeared family member and finds solidarity within a group of women struggling with a similar situation. Therefore, the individual traumatic event of losing her son exists within a wider cultural and collective trauma. The left half of the composition illustrates her struggle within the collective of women while the right half depicts her personal struggle in a domestic setting.

**An Empty Seat for Their Disappeared Son**

Like the arpillerista Irma Muller, Enlida Rojas portrays a narrative scene of a particular individual and a disappeared son in the arpillera entitled *An Empty Seat For*

---

\(^9\) Gomez Barris, *Where Memory Dwells*, 68.
Their Disappeared Son.\textsuperscript{10} Rojas’ son disappeared, but she did not face the same uncertain agony as other women in constantly wondering whether or not he had survived. One of his bones was found in 1995 in an unmarked grave near the Santiago General cemetery.\textsuperscript{11} The date of the arpillera’s creation remains unknown, but it is likely Rojas made it around 1975 since it lacks the crocheted border commonly attached to later arpilleras. Instead, the arpillera is bordered by yellow blanket stitches. The simplistic style and setting also indicates an earlier date. The background has only one piece of bright yellow fabric, different from the later arpilleras with more complex backgrounds. A line of black blanket stitches that runs from top to bottom divides the textile panel in half. This division creates two scenes that play off of one another to tell a larger narrative: The disappearance and continued absence of Rojas’ son. The effect of her son’s disappearance plays out on the left side of the division while the right side portrays his abduction.

The left portion of the arpillera depicts an interior scene, indicated by way of a window that floats above the figures in the foreground. We have seen the similar use of a window in Muller’s arpillera. Blue cross stitches border the window and harmonize with the blue scraps that compose the sky and curtains. An orange sun with simple yellow stitch details peeks out from behind the semi-transparent curtains. The sun emerges slightly from a white cloud, which may symbolize a theme of hope. Bright, large suns often appear in arpilleras despite the grievous narratives they depict, as seen in arpilleras such as Where Are The Detained-Disappeared (1984) and The Burying of

\textsuperscript{10} For figure, see Agosin, Tapestries of Hope, 65.

\textsuperscript{11} Agosin, Tapestries of Hope, 65.
Hope as a feeling and concept became integral to the philosophy of the arpilleristas and their creative practice. In the following excerpt, arpillerista Violeta Morales describes the importance of hope in the struggle of the arpilleristas:

We have to find something, even if it’s the bones of our disappeared family members. There is still a lot to do. We will continue with the solidarity that we’ve always had, hoping for a response from the future governments. It is sad that the organization is getting weaker and we aren’t making so many arpilleras. I thought that people had generated more political and social awareness, but it seems we haven’t learned much. I hope to God, that the arpilleras remain as a testimony so that other generations, not only in Chile, but also throughout the world learn much more than what we have learned.

A round table decorated with a black and white floral patterned tablecloth sits at the center of the left-hand scene. In the middle of the table, a vase with flowers and two square plates bring to attention the idea of a meal; the plates likely refer to the time of day and the type of meal, whether breakfast, lunch, or las once (a late morning tea time in Chile). Six figures gather around the table and some appear smaller than others, possibly referring to their varying ages. In arpilleras, the size of figures often distinguishes age. Smaller figures represent youth, as shown in the arpillera *Mother and Younger Daughter* (undated). In *An Empty Seat for Their Disappeared Son*, each of the figures sits around the table on a black chair with their heads facing in the direction of an empty chair. This empty chair metaphorically reminds the viewer of the missing family member. We can infer this seat belongs to Roja’s son considering the title of this arpillera. The right side of the panel mirrors one of the female figures on the left. The

---

12 For figures, see Agosin, *Tapestries of Hope*, 70 - 71.
13 Sepúlveda-Pulvirenti, *We*, 58.
14 For figure, see Agosin, *Tapestries of Hope*, 50.
repeated figure has different dresses and has white hair piled on her head. The different fabrics used for the dress allude to the different days that make up the entire narrative of the arpillera. This figure is likely a self-portrait of Enid Rojas because of her white hair color and general appearance in both scenes. Marjorie Agosin describes Rojas as one of the oldest members of the Association of the Detained and Disappeared.\(^{15}\)

The right side of the arpillera depicts an exterior scene, but still maintains the connection to ideas of home and domesticity by way of two columns of three houses, each in the upper portion of the composition. The houses haphazardly stack on top of each other, referring to Chile’s mountainous landscape and economic circumstances of the arpillera makers. The houses allude to Chilean shantytowns, usually located on steep inclines throughout Santiago. The second house of the second column includes scraps of striped fabric to indicate the door and windows. These could further reference the ribbed metal panels used in many shantytown homes to cover roofs and doors. In between the two columns of houses, the woman with white hair has her arms spread wide and her left foot slightly ahead of her right foot. In the foreground a figure in blue appears flocked by two figures dressed in yellow uniforms and black helmets. All three figures have their backs turned. The central blue figure, probably the son of Rojas, has his hands tied behind his back, emphasizing his helpless state. The two yellow figures pull the man by his arms. This arpillera by Rojas presents an interior and domestic scene and connects it to the disappearance and memories of her son. The left side portrays the effect and aftermath of her son’s disappearance through the symbolism of

\(^{15}\) Agosin, Tapestries of Hope, 65.
the empty chair, whereas the right side of the panel depicts her memory of the traumatic event, the cause of her son’s disappearance and abduction.

According to Marcel Proust, creation translates memory. In the following excerpt, Christine McDonald illustrates Proust’s concept of the link between memory and art.

Proust develops a principle of individuation as the basis of memory and art, as that which both demands and resists generalization. Truth resides in the reconstruction of events without precedent, where nothing ever repeats itself exactly. Out of individual experience, he wishes to tease some general quality resembling a scientific law and still maintain what is unique.¹⁶

A Woman Dreaming and Wondering About Her Missing Son While Sleeping and An Empty Seat For Their Disappeared Son bridge the gap of the traumatic process from experience to representation in narratives. Both narrate scenes that depict particular individuals and their disappeared family members. Both arpilleras use domestic settings and symbolic imagery to reconstruct memories, such as chairs, which emphasize the missing children.

The traumatic events that marginalized groups experience process first on an individual level.¹⁷ Memory stores itself within the individual in different ways depending on the length of time a particular person wants to continue remembrance of the experience or object.¹⁸ The arpilleras attempt to document the physical and emotional pain of their makers’ experiences in order to preserve their memories and memorialize individuals. Without individual memory we could not communicate with each other and would lose the ability to express thought. Although the two arpilleras depict experiences

---


¹⁸ Elizabeth Loftus, *Memory, Surprising New Insights into How We Remember and Why We Forget* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1980), 2.
of particular individuals, their formal elements and symbols elicit emotional responses and perform as indexes of collective Chilean memory. The following Chapter discusses two arpilleras that more directly depict collective memory.
CHAPTER 5
COLLECTIVE MEMORY

The struggle of Chilean memory emerges from attempts to assign meaning to the September 11 coup d'état and the subsequent political violence. Although memories begin within individuals such as Violeta Morales and Irma Muller, they become attached to collectives such as the arpillerista workshops and to broader contexts within Chilean culture. Collective memories recollect a shared past represented by sets of ideas, images, and feelings about the past. Collective memory unifies groups such as the arpilleristas through time and space by providing narrative structures as a collective story that locates the individual and his or her biography within it. Collective trauma occurs when members jointly feel they have experienced an irrecoverable event that leaves marks upon their group consciousness and memories. Within this struggle of memory, social factors, such as the relatives of the disappeared, attempted to counter the official memory that the Chilean government hoped to establish. Symbolic carriers of counter-official memory such as the arpilleristas, who were also targets of repression, became cause and symptom of the widening cultural war over memory. The arpilleristas’ use of shared symbolic and cultural imagery communicates resistance and awakening of Chilean sentiments, awareness, and accountability through two arpilleras.

---

1 Stern, Battling for Hearts and Minds. 383.
2 Rodriguez and Fortier, Cultural Memory, 8.
4 Alexander, Cultural Trauma, 1.
5 Stern, Battling for Hearts and Minds. 384.
Salvador Allende

Arpilleras participated in the collective memory struggle by paying tribute to the disappeared. They celebrate the lives of public heroes and express a sense of nostalgia for the past. The arpillera entitled Salvador Allende by Violeta Morales located in the collection of Marjorie Agosin represents this. As with many arpilleras, the date is unknown. However, it is likely that the creation of this arpillera coincided with the re-burial of President Salvador Allende on September 4, 1990. Six months into the democratic transition and after seventeen years of dictatorship, crowds of Chileans gathered to honor Allende on the occasion of his official burial in Santiago’s General Cemetery. The family of Salvador Allende chose September 4 as the day of the funeral because the presidential elections occur on that day in Chile. It also marks twentieth anniversary of Allende’s nomination as president in a Chilean democracy. To hold the ceremony on this day may have reaffirmed Allende’s democratic legitimacy, therefore emphasizing the intervention of the military.

Since his death on September 11, 1973, Allende’s body has remained in a grave in the Santa Inés Cemetery at Viña del Mar, a town outside Santiago where Allende was born.

This arpillera commemorates Allende’s journey from his original gravesite in Viña del Mar to Santiago. Morales depicts the mountains in the upper portion of the composition, creating a characteristic Chilean setting. White thread cross-stitched several times over adds snow to the peaks, possibly referring to the time of year. Tall cypress trees line the path to a portrait of president Allende. The cypress trees and

---


cordillera (mountain range) may directly reference the drive from Viña del Mar. The highway is lined with cypress trees and vineyards indicating Santiago’s location within a valley. The trees decrease in size and width from the yellow crocheted frame as they proceed to the top of the composition. This shows depth, just as the decreasing size of the figures as they get closer to the portrait of Allende. Women make up six of the fourteen figures, distinguished by their dresses, while men make up the remaining eight. They each have their hands up in praise towards the floating portrait head in front of the cordillera.

Patterned and solid bits of color make up the figures. A cross stitch that blends into the figures’ clothing attaches them to the work. A satin fabric, blanket stitched around the edges, makes up the portrait head of Allende. The use of cloth that has a satin sheen is characteristic of Morales’ arpilleras. The glue technique renders Allende’s hair, facial features, and glasses. Morales designed the portrait of Allende in such a way that the viewer feels a sense of participation in a ceremony or attendance of an important a speech. The portrait was likely inspired by a photograph taken during one of Allende’s political campaigns. Allende’s placement within the arpillera gives the viewer a sense that they are participating within the crowd gathered and that they are looking up at him. In the following excerpt, Ariel Dorfman describes an event in which Allende greeted his supporters from a balcony:

I had been among the million shouting marchers who had poured into the streets of Santiago on 4 September 1973, to celebrate the anniversary of our electoral victory. That night it had taken the group I had joined seven hours to reach the balcony of La Moneda where Allende was saluting the multitudes. We marched by singing and chanting and unfurling flags, and, for a magic moment as we passed by our leader, we somehow convinced ourselves that we could still change the
history of humanity and free our country from the misery that had plagued it ever since we could remember.\(^8\)

The use of the glue technique to add black fabric for shadow emphasizes this audience-like perspective. There is no allusion to the violent events of September 11, 1973, nor are there any military figures present in the composition. The coherent stitches that blend into the applied colors give a sense of celebration and peacefulness rare in arpilleras.

For many Chileans, Allende served for almost two decades as a symbol of both collective loss and hope. This arpillera, although aesthetically harmonious, may communicate continued social unrest. For the majority of Chileans in 1990, none of the major problems to which Allende had dedicated his career had resolved, as the standard of living had progressively deteriorated.\(^9\) The arpillera also demonstrates an important step in the collective mourning process; for many Chileans the official burial of Allende’s remains gave the people evidence of Allende’s death and thereby producing a sense of closure and an opportunity to grieve their losses. While the work overall presents a message of unity and nostalgia, this arpillera serves as a tribute to the life of a fallen president.

**La Cueca Sola**

On September 18, 1979 La Cueca was declared the national dance of Chile. On this day, the music previously deemed “typical music” transformed into the military regime’s preferred music.\(^10\) The military junta aimed to mold Chilean identity to fit the

\(^8\) Dorfman, *Dead*, 180.

\(^9\) Dorfman, *Dead*, 181.

structure of the regime and claimed to represent and preserve true Chilenidad (essence of Chilean culture). In becoming the upholders of Chilean culture, the military junta hoped to accuse those who opposed the regime of being outsiders to Chilean culture. The arpillera entitled La Cueca Sola by Gala Torres Aravena demonstrates the subversive reaction of marginalized women to the imposition of the Cueca as the Chilean national dance and the military’s conception of Chilenidad. The Chilean national dance, La Cueca aims to represent a couple’s love.\textsuperscript{11} The dance is accompanied by a guitar and specific cueca songs. The men and women stand in front of each other surrounded by an audience. Those that are singing and watching clap their palms while the couples dance. With their arms raised slightly they jump, turn, move backwards and forwards, and rotate around each other waiving white handkerchiefs until the music fades.\textsuperscript{12}

In 1978, the first members of the arpilleras workshops banded together to create a musical group where they would collectively sing and compose songs about their lives as women alone.\textsuperscript{13} They called the group “the Folkloric Group of Families of Disappeared Prisoners.” In the following quote, Violeta Morales explains the driving force behind their folk music group:

> We were so desperate to get our message out, we wanted, like our people had done so many times, to turn to other art forms- we wanted to also express


\textsuperscript{13} Agosin, Tapestries of Hope, 33.
ourselves in our song and dance. We wanted not only to embroider and shout our pain; we also wanted to sing our message of denouncement.\footnote{Sepúlveda-Pulvirenti, \textit{We}, 55.}

The group’s most famous performance involved the dancing of La Cueca Sola (The Cueca Alone). The Cueca Sola became an important act of protest that used the national dance, but with women dancing and singing with their missing partners. The dance also denounced the Chilean government in a public space. This performance is best demonstrated in the documentary film entitled \textit{La Cueca Sola}, from 2003, written, produced, and directed by a Chilean exile, Marilu Mallet.\footnote{\textit{La Cueca Sola}, dir. by Marilú Mallet (2003; Women Make Movies).} In the film, the women begin by naming their lost and loved ones. Their black skirts and white blouses unify them and highlight the embroidered photographs they wear of their missing loved ones. They begin to sing and dance to one of their composed songs together in the film when one of the women breaks away from the pyramidal group to dance La Cueca Sola (The Cueca Alone). The woman dances with a somber yet determined expression while she marks the absence of her partner by waving her white kerchief. This same unification of dress and somber mood comes across in the arpillera La Cueca Sola. This arpillera was the first to depict La Cueca Sola on cloth. Gala Torres de Aravena, one of the principal founders and musicians of the group, created the work.\footnote{Agosin, \textit{Tapestries of Hope}, 33.} She completed the piece in 1988, the year of the first elections and the beginning of the transition to democracy.\footnote{Samuel J. Valenzuela and Timothy R. Scully, “Review: Electoral Choices and the Party System in Chile: Continuities and Changes at the Recovery of Democracy,” \textit{Comparative Politics} 29 (1997): 511.}

Torres de Aravena blanket stitched five black and white figures in the composition against a royal blue background framed by a white crochet border. The blue hue of the
background juxtaposed against the backdrop may allude to the importance of the space in the performance of La Cueca Sola. The performance took place in public, therefore reaching collective groups of Chileans to publicly denounce the dictatorship. In the arpillera, white fabric makes up the figures’ heads along with simple black stitching to indicate the facial expressions of the women. Shoulder length black hair frames each face. Each woman has her mouth slightly open as if singing the songs they composed to accompany the lonely dancer at the center of the composition. In the upper left corner of the panel, an arpillerista, likely Gala Torres Aravena, holds a guitar composed of light brown fabric with beige blanket stitches. The guitar is the only other colored element in the composition apart from the royal blue background. The colored fabric used for the guitar likely emphasizes the importance of music in expressing grief and protest. Cross stitches used in rows of two short parallel lines at each of the figure’s feet suggest movement and dance.

The women’s white blouses and black skirts and shoes further represent the notion of solidarity and mourning. Each of the figures has an abstract portrait of her disappeared loved one embroidered on the right-hand side of her blouse. Some of the figures in the photographs have longer hair than others, possibly distinguishing men from women, thereby signifying that daughters and daughter-in-laws had also disappeared as well as brothers, fathers, and husbands. Simple white stitches embroider the words “La Cueca Sola Chile” (The Cueca Alone Chile) at the bottom right hand corner. The lack of color and white crocheted frame communicate a solemn dance of grief that contrasts with the sense of joy and patriotic pride that the Cueca dance usually expresses.
The arpillera presents the arpilleristas as united and emphasizes the importance of their collective solidarity. Their artworks, songs, and dances demanded the whereabouts of their disappeared, the return of those exiled, and democracy. Their political expressions and heavy emotions leak through the stitches, composition, and color palette. Ultimately, the arpillera Cueca Sola is a two-fold expression of protest, both in the form of the arpillera as well as in the dance it portrays. The dance, La Cueca Sola, serves as a mediated representation of traumatic loss that plays a decisive role in the struggle for meaning and in coping with trauma. "Trauma drama" refers to public performances that help with collective representation of collective experience and social anguish that become a crisis of meaning and identity.\(^{18}\)

The arpilleristas appeal to the collective cultural identity and memory through the representations of Salvador Allende and the Cueca Sola in their arpilleras. The arpillera of Salvador Allende represents the democratic and socialist dream that the majority of Chileans believed in. The subject of Salvador Allende demonstrates the persistence of the dreams and emphasizes the injustice of the military junta's turnover of what many pro-Allende supporters deemed a peaceful and necessary socialist revolution. The arpillera represents a specific individual, not through text but through portraiture. This individual stood as a beacon of certain concepts, emotions, and expectations for different groups. Created by shared practices and representations, a memory can become a pivotal part of a given culture.\(^{19}\) As demonstrated by the arpillera, Salvador Allende's portrait carries cultural significance through collective memory.


Like the image of Salvador Allende, the Cueca plays an important role in the structure of Chilean culture. Its symbolic meaning dynamically plays out through performance and movement in the arpilleras. The arpillera *Cueca Sola* references Pinochet’s attempt to manipulate and re-represent Chilean culture using collective music, however, it also represents the subversive action of the arpilleristas and their attempt to unveil truths about Pinochet’s human rights abuses. In addition, this arpillera reveals the tear in Chile’s social fabric and the struggle of the arpilleristas. Each arpillera illustrates a traumatic loss of a collective through symbolic images and by representation and recreation of memory. The arpilleras transport memory in the sense that they represent the past and formulate a shared cultural knowledge for successive generations.  

Furthermore, the arpilleras also function as objects of collective cultural memory, as demonstrated in the poster entitled *Folklore y Religiosidad Popular* (Folklore and Popular Religiosity in Chile). An unidentified artist created this poster to advertise a summer school and it was commissioned and distributed by the Chilean Ministry of Education in 1987. The style of the poster imitates the embroidered stitches, broad planes of color, simple shapes, and various patterned scarps of fabric used in arpilleras. The arpillera refers to scenes from the Bible and uses iconography such as the crucifix and the Chilean flag together. This union of symbols refers to the Catholic patronage of the arpilleras, but also achieves through the medium of lithograph the transformation of arpilleras into a medium of mass communication. The poster also

---


21 For figure see Russ Davidson and David Craven, *Latin American Posters : Public Aesthetics and Mass Politics* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico, 2006), 150.

22 Davidson and Craven, *Latin American Posters*, 150.
emphasizes arpilleras’ inclusion into Chilean cultural identity, through its artistic tradition.
CHAPTER 6
DISREMEMBERING

The act of repressing memory or attempting to unravel individual and collective memories often comes from an external source such as the governing body of a nation. Juan Ramon Resina (Professor of Romance Studies and Literature at Cornell) uses the term “disremembering” to discuss the imposition of memory narratives or induced amnesia by transitional governments in his book *Disremembering the Dictatorship: The Politics of Memory in the Spanish Transition to Democracy.*\(^1\) Beginning in 1988 Chile’s transitional government proposed reconciliation or a “coming to terms” with the past, which many Chileans saw as synonymous with an attempt to cause Chileans to forget the past. Forgetting meant accepting to ignore the traumatic events that would linger unresolved into future generations. This would also allow the memory of the disappeared to fade and succumb to the military regime’s version of historical events.\(^2\)

Repression of memory takes form in the idea of forgetting rather than remembering. Repression of memory includes an imposition, substitution and screening of memories, and is meant to block access to disturbing memories and kindle feelings of national unity.\(^3\) The battle for memory in Chile exists in the clash of voices between those victims that call for recognition, remembrance, commemoration, and accountability, and those who deny the past and insist on looking to the future.\(^4\) History shows us that after traumatic episodes, nations often find it easier to forget the past and look onward to the

---


\(^2\) Lazzara. *Chile in Transition,* 12.

\(^3\) Olick and Robbins, “Social Memory Studies,” 109

\(^4\) Alexander, *Cultural Trauma,* 7.
future, enabling them to overlook victims and focus on moments of glory that bolster national self-image.

Media plays a large role in what will be documented, forgotten, and remembered for present and future generations. In Chile, the Edwards family privately owns the principal newspaper *El Mercurio*, which during the military regime also held a monopoly on the dissemination of information and news throughout the country. Pinochet used this resource during his regime and in the 1987 elections. Forms of visual memory making were also used to alter the perception of Pinochet, as illustrated in the poster entitled *Vote Yes, President Pinochet*. This propaganda poster portrays a smiling and sympathetic Pinochet in military regalia as he looks down at an older woman clutching onto his uniform and a white kerchief. The elderly woman, who embraces Pinochet, for an unknown reason, wins his sympathy and assurance through his smiling facial expression. The image of Pinochet’s is meant to appeal to women including mothers and lower social classes that seek basic economic support such as welfare and healthcare. It may also intend to subvert the political activism of women involved in the Association of the Detained and Disappeared.

While considered another form of media, many regarded the arpilleras as clandestine in their attempt to remember and commemorate the disappeared, detained, and exiled. As a collective, the arpilleristas retold the story of the past through narrative. The group used images of recent history and its struggles as a means to achieve change. Arpilleras commonly questioned the memory of the Chilean people and the

---

6 For figure see Davidson and Craven, Latin American Posters, 152.
7 Olick and Robbins, “Social Memory Studies,” 127.
whereabouts of the disappeared. Through the persistence of the arpilleristas, their work acted as a vehicle that operated against the disremembering encouraged by the Chilean government.

**Did You Forget? If You Have No Memory You Will Vote Again for Pinochet**

The arpillera entitled *Did You forget? If You Have No Memory You Will Vote Again for Pinochet*, also by Violeta Morales, presses the Chilean people to remember the disappeared and tortured. While unconfirmed, the date of this arpillera alludes to the elections of 1988. In this election, Pinochet had a 54% vote against him in continuing his leadership. Morales most likely created this work in the years leading to the election. The backdrop of the embroidery depicts a dark and urban scene with three large apartment or office buildings cross stitched against the sky. Morales stitched three rows of empty windows on their facades. Two of the buildings show a three-quarter perspective done with fabric stitched at a declining angle from the facade. A deep blue crocheted border cuts the third apartment building off the picture plane. The sky looks ominous, grey, and seems to predict a stormy night. The application of a shiny satin material stitched behind the buildings creates this effect. The choice of grey contributes to the overall gloomy tone of the arpillera. Against the sky, black stitched antennas protrude from the buildings. This addition does not simply distinguish the buildings’ urban setting; the cross shapes of the antennas resemble the grave markers placed at large grave sites such as Patio 29, located in Santiago’s General Cemetery.¹¹

---

¹¹ Gomez Barris, *Where Memory Dwells*, 68.
inclusion of antennas on urban and unidentified buildings also appears in the arpilleras *Truth and Justice for the Detained and Disappeared* by Morales and *Detention Scene in Downtown Santiago* by Irma Muller, both from the early 1970s.\(^\text{12}\)

In the foreground, Morales places eleven figures. A charcoal colored satin cloth forms six of them which alternate between a total of five women clad in dresses of colorful tones of pink, red, yellow, and green. The color contrast draws the eye of the viewer into the picture plane and gives the dark figures a shadowy appearance. The five women depicted have simple stitched faces done in black woolen thread. Most likely, Morales used black wool for their hair, applied using the glue technique. The black color of their hair unifies the group of women despite their different clothing. Each of the satin shadow figures between the women have white cross stitch outlines and are meant to represent the disappeared. The “x” shape of the cross stitch suggests emphasizes the border between the living and the dead. Morales attached each of the women directly to their disappeared, thereby emphasizing the arpilleristas unity while simultaneously stressing the absence of their loved ones. The shadowy figures of the disappeared are similar to the shadow figure in Irma Muller’s arpillera *A Woman Dreaming and Wondering about Her Missing Son While Sleeping*.

Morales stitched the names onto the body of each shadow. The individuals’ names embroidered on the figures demonstrate a combination of the personal memory of Morales and her attempt to appeal to collective Chilean and international memory. The third figure from the left, identified as her brother Newton Morales, demonstrates the emphasis on her own individual memory. However, the arpillera also includes public

\(^{12}\) For figures see Agosin, *Tapestries of Hope*, 43-46.
figures who associated themselves with the Allende administration, including Chilean diplomat Orlando Letelier and Vice President General Carlos Prats, both assassinated by car bombs organized by the DINA in Washington D.C and Buenos Aires during the early 1970s.\(^\text{13}\)

The phrase “Me Olvidaste, Si –No?” (Did you forget me, yes – no?) is embroidered below each of the names.\(^\text{14}\) By adding the specific name of each individual missing or killed and by posing a question, the arpillera asks its audience for accountability as well as participation. The arpillera forces the viewer to decide between remembering and forgetting. By including the phrase “If you have no memory you will vote again for Pinochet” in the title of the arpillera, Morales directly addresses those who choose to forget the disappeared, continue acts of violence, and inflict traumatic cultural experiences to supporters of Pinochet. In this arpillera, Morales pays tribute to the memory of the dead and expresses silenced opinions through visual narrative.

**Where Are the Detained-Disappeared?**

The arpillera entitled *Where Are the Detained-Disappeared* illustrates the most prevalent theme in Chilean arpilleras and women’s active role in resisting the silence and complacency encouraged by Pinochet.\(^\text{15}\) This anonymous arpillera depicts a protest that occurred on International Women’s Day in Chile on March 8, 1984. The choice of date strategically sought an appeal to women on a larger and more international scale, therefore creating a well-publicized and meaningful protest. Acts of


\(^{14}\) Agosin, *Tapestries of Hope*, 55.

\(^{15}\) For figure see Agosin, *Tapestries of Hope*, 70.
protest in Chilean women’s movements peaked in May of 1983 when Chileans opposed to the regime organized mass demonstrations in Santiago. The success of these protests triggered a series of other protests that took place monthly for the next three years until 1986. By the end of 1988, the women’s movement in Chile became one of the largest and most dynamic in Latin America. It joined together human rights groups, feminist organizations, shanty-town groups organized around issues of economic subsistence.

Two buildings intersected by a long wall make up the most prominent part of the composition. Carefully cross stitched, beige thread highlights a wall against a light blue sky. The upper left side of the textile panel includes a white building with a façade of four rows of grey paneled windows. A black antenna sits on top of the building, cut off by the white crocheted border that frames the arpillera. The antenna reflects those in the arpillera *Did You forget? If You Have No Memory You Will Vote Again for Pinochet.* To the right of the building a long white wall is separated from the buildings by black scraps of fabric that indicate shadows. Against the blue sky, green trees, leaves, and purple and yellow flowers emerge from behind the wall. The artist placed a Catholic church on the upper right of the panel, composed of two dark brown doors adorned with gold crosses and four stained glass windows made of patterned fabric. A radiating orange sun shines next to a black cross which crowns the church. The union of these symbols likely refers to the hope that the Catholic Church kindled and supported for the arpilleras.

---


17 Baldez. *Non-Partisanship as a Political Strategy*, 254.
At the left side of the foreground, twelve women clad in an array of brightly colored and patterned dresses raise their arms in protest. This gesture mimics the dream scene of Irma Muller’s *A Woman Dreaming and Wondering about Her Missing Son While Sleeping*. Four of the women raise a white banner with the stitched phrase “Donde Estan los Detenidos Desaparecidos?”. Due to a misspelling, the last word should read *desaparecidos*, meaning “Where are the Detained Disappeared?” At the right side of the foreground, the artist placed three dark green and faceless police officials, each of their forms outlined by black cross stitches as well as their specific uniform: pants tucked into their combat boots, helmets, and long flared coats. The three figures have bats in their hands and stride towards the women in a triangular formation. At the center of the triangle a black and white van sprays water on the women protesting. Evenly spaced white stitches illustrate the sprayed water. As the water falls to the ground and separates the two sets of people in the foreground, the stitching changes into several lines of close blue stitches. As a whole, the arpillera also asks the audience to question the retaliation of the officers to the women’s peaceful protest. The depiction here of both the protest and the police reaction illustrates the arpilleristas’ persistence in remembering the detained-disappeared as well as their resistance to the disremembering, symbolized by the abusive officials.

The arpilleras *Did you forget? If you have no memory you will vote again for Pinochet* and *Where Are the Detained-Disappeared* appeal to cultural and collective memory through a combination forms, texts, and symbols. Both arpilleras memorialize the victims of oppression and demonstrate the efforts of the arpilleristas in protesting and creating artworks. These represented efforts attempt to restore the objective reality.
of the brutal events and separate them from the unconscious distortions or forced oppression of memory. Each arpillera shows a collective of women fighting for recognition and preservation of memories of the detained and disappeared. A common theme that unites both arpilleras is the questioning of memory of the audience and the ways they practice memory. The battle of traumatic memory resides between those who wish to forget (to ignore the past) and those who seek accountability. This struggle blocks the flow of history and hence the possibility of transition and reconciliation.19

18 Alexander, Cultural Trauma, 8.
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

Processes of reflection, recognition, and reconciliation aid the transition from trauma to memory. The conception of the arpillera workshops by the Vicariate of Solidarity not only provided a means of financial stability and protection, but also initiated the process of reflection. Through the creation of arpilleras, women gained the ability to reflect on traumatic events and memories of lost loved ones. This process of reflection allowed the arpilleristas to express, recreate, and reinterpret their memories and emotions using scraps of fabric to form symbolic narratives. The arpilleras embody the struggle of arpilleristas for recognition and truth. The export of arpilleras enabled their creators to spur political change by spreading knowledge of their individual and social conditions. Through their work, they sought the truth about the whereabouts of their disappeared and tortured as well as recognition and truth from the Chilean government. Attempts at reconciling victims of the military regime followed with Chile’s transition to democracy, which began to take its final shape in 1988.

Through a combination of local and international pressure, Pinochet agreed to a plebiscite in October of 1988. The voting resulted in an overwhelming “No” and in December of 1989, Chile had its first free elections in nineteen years.\(^1\) Christian Democrat Patricio Aylwin won the election. President elect Aylwin had the responsibility of forming an uneasy alliance of Center and Left elements, leading to a transition to democracy, and reconciling victims of the military junta. In Aylwin’s inaugural speech at the same Estadio Nacional used in the past as a location for the mass detentions,

tortures, and assassinations on the part of the military regime, President Aylwin apologized to all victims and their families on behalf of the Chilean people. In addition, he attempted to lay to rest any hopes or doubts the families had about their missing loved ones. After assuming power, Aylwin named a National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation, charged with gathering information to establish the truth in cases of disappearances, illegal executions, and death resulting from torture carried out by state agents between September 11, 1973 and March 11, 1990.² In the following excerpt, Vivana Diaz Caro, a Director of the Association of Families of the Detained – Disappeared, discusses the struggle for truth and reconciliation many women, including the arpilleristas, continued to experience despite attempts at reconciliation by the transitional government.

Even now when they are building a monument in the general cemetery of Santiago in homage to the detained-disappeared and executed political prisoners people who aren’t aware of what really happened in our country say that we have to forget, that all this is like a wound that has to close so it will heal. Not a single parent who has a disappeared son can say that, no woman who has a disappeared husband can say that, I will never say that I will forget what happened while I don’t know where my father’s remains are and how to recover those bones. We women, more than anyone in the country, want the wound to close. But we want it to close and heal because of truth and from then on we’ll look to the future with what we learned for our experiences, what we lived in the past.³

The arpillerias communicate and represent the traumatic experience that occurred during the military regime. In a Chilean contemporary context the arpillerias seek truth and assurance that the memories of loved ones are not lost and forgotten. The arpillerias attempt to stand as reminders of a troubled history for past, current, and future

² Wyndham and Read, “From State Terrorism,” 37.
³ Sepúlveda-Pulvirenti, We, 133.
generations. Ultimately, the arpilleras are not only vehicles of change but they also represent and recreate individual and collective memories.
LIST OF REFERENCES


Guzmán, Patricio, Yves Jeanneau, Éric Michel, Films d’ici (Firm), Sept/Arte (Firm), and National Film Board of Canada. 1998. Chile, Obstinate Memory. Montreal: NFB.


Sepúlveda-Pulvirenti, Emma. 1996. We, Chile : Personal Testimonies of the Chilean Arpilleristas. Falls Church, VA: Azul Editions.


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Maria Cristina Trujillo received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 2009 from Florida International University. During her time as a master’s student at the University of Florida, her work focused on 20th century Latin American Political art.