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**“TO TAKE WITH YOU A LITTLE PIECE OF CHILE”:
EXILES AND ART FROM HOME**

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Abstract: Forced migration is one of the most pressing issues of current and recent times. How refugees, one category of forced migrant, manage their condition of being unwillingly in a foreign land is a question that deserves further examination. This paper focuses on the Chilean exile during the Pinochet regime, and examines a dimension of their experience: their engagement with art from their home country. It explores the meanings that such art held for them, and the effects that the exiles attribute to their engagement with it.

The Pinochet government's doctrine of national security with its focus on eradicating leftists caused the phenomenon of Chilean exile, which began with the coup of September 11th 1973. On this day, President Salvador Allende was overthrown. He had headed a leftist coalition dominated by the Communist and Socialist Parties, since 1970. On September 11th, the air force bombed *La Moneda*, Chile's White House, and thousands of people were arrested. Many Chileans decided to leave as soon as possible, taking refuge in embassies, and escaping the country with the help of international and national humanitarian agencies. Many others left because the Pinochet government adopted Decree Law 81, giving itself unconditional authority to expel citizens. A year and a half after the coup, some of the incarcerated were allowed to petition for their freedom on condition of immediate expulsion. At least 4000 Chileans left the country through expulsion, and the expelling of individuals occurred for the duration of the regime (Wright and Oñate, 2007; Orellana 1991: 218-221).

Before the end of 1973, the government established the *Dirección Nacional de Inteligencia* (DINA), its secret police, and the DINA hunted down and persecuted those of the left that had not already been incarcerated or killed, as well as others. Thousands of individuals left the country under pressure from the DINA or other agencies of repression, particularly between 1973 and 1976, but also for the duration of the regime. These types of

exiles, who made up the majority of Chile’s political exiles, left the country legally, using their passports, and on scheduled flights. Many witnessed the harassment, incarceration, torture, murder, or disappearance of their family members, friends, and acquaintances, and as they also became targets of repression, they decided to go into exile. Those who left under duress wanted to get their families out, and so spouses, children, and in some cases parents also fled (Wright and Oñate, 2007).

Some of the regime’s political enemies were forced out of the country because they lost their jobs in universities, public schools, the bureaucracy, and the private sector, and were placed on the government’s blacklist and denied employment in Chile. In France, for example, after 1984, the arrivals from Chile tended to be economic migrants. However, as fear was a motive for their departure, they managed, nonetheless, to obtain the status of refugee (Gaillard, 1997; 1998). Numbering at least 200,000 (roughly two percent of Chile’s 1973 population), Chilean exiles settled on every continent, going to at least 100 and possibly as many as 140 countries (Wright and Oñate, 2007). Between a third and half settled in Western Europe.

Art and Exile

In this political activity, and in exiles’ private lives, art from Chile played a significant role. A substantial number of exiles owned, sold, and exhibited such art, including posters, pottery from the villages of Pomaire and Quinchamalí, and *arpilleras*, pictures in cloth depicting the poverty, repression, and social problems that existed during the dictatorship. Exiles put on cultural events such as evenings of folk music and dancing called *peñas*, at which they sold Chilean wine, food, and artworks in order to raise money to send back. In the eyes of some scholars, such cultural activities were a form of political work aimed at raising awareness of and solidarity with the struggles of the political Left in Chile (Gómez-Barris, 2009). For others, these and other artistic activities that exiles engaged in, such as forming folkloric groups, and publishing newsletters and periodicals, were a way of keeping Chilean culture alive and transmitting it to their children (Wright and Oñate, 2007).

Exile gave rise to a body of literature, art, and music by Chileans who were both professional and amateur artists (Wright and Oñate, 2007; Alegría, 1982; Cobos and Sater, 1987, López-Calvo, 2001). A number made exile itself a theme in their work (Gómez-

Barris, 2009). Many professional Chilean artists were exiled (Castro, 1989) and continued to create in their host countries. Some of these, in particular the exiled Chilean musical groups Inti Illimani and Quilapayún, constantly traveled to entertain and sustain other exiles' culture and spirit of resistance (Wright and Oñate, 2007; Cobos and Sater, 1987). In some cases, such as that of the visual artist Guillermo Núñez, the art was well received in the host country, better so than in Chile after the return home (Gómez-Barris, 2009).

Scholars have taken a number of approaches to the topic of art and exile. One has been to focus on the art works themselves. Analysts have examined the theme of exile in an artwork or a collection of art works by a particular exile or group of exiles (Figueroa, 2006; Forsyth, 2005; Bresheeth, 2002; von Borman, 2006; Píchová, 2002; Ellis, 1987; Becket, 2009; Edmondson, 1999; Munro, 2007; Rosenfeld, 2007; Gómez-Barris, 2009). They have also examined style in the art works of exiles (Eppler, 2001), plot and language (Bouteneff, 1996), the construction of memory (Bosch, 2004; Erens, 2000), and the changing ways in which music is performed in the course of becoming a refugee (Reyes, 1999). They have, further, cast the net more broadly and analyzed genres produced by exiles, be they popular culture genres (Naficy, 1993; Horak, 1996; Dovey, 2005), genres traditionally classified as "high art" (Zeps, 1995; Shneer, 2009; Bosch, 2004), or others (Lukas *et al.*, 1998). The focus of such research has included the ways the genre is produced, the themes within it (Naficy, 1993), and the evolution of the genre (Knudsen, 2001).

A second approach that scholars have taken is to focus on the artists themselves. They have studied the unfolding of their lives (Hall, 2008; Bellini, 2000; Gready, 2003), the artistic activities that artists engage in while in exile (Spreizer, 1999; Frank, 2007; Berghaus, 1989; Ratcliff, 1997; Bryant, 2009; Claasen, 1999), the impact of exile on the creative ambitions of exiles (Horowitz, 2008), the ways exiles go about creating music (Baily, 2005), and the effect of making art on artists in exile including the effect on the artist's sense of identity (Rosenfeld, 2007). There exist numerous biographies of exiles who engage in creative activity (e.g. Godden, 2008), as well as works that describe an artist or community of artists in exile (Bosch, 2004; Hall, 2008).

A third approach to the study of art and exile has been to examine the influence or reception of the art that exiles produce. One focus has been on how exiles inject novelty into artistic production in their host country (Horowitz, 2008; Fu, 2008). Another has been

on how art produced in exile shapes cultural practices in the country of origin (Baily, 2005). Some analysts focus on how particular art works are received (Seeber, 2001), or how they should be read and judged (Mardorossian, 2002).

A final approach to the study of art and exile has been to examine the role of the arts in exile communities. One analyst finds that music in Afgan exile communities may serve to maintain links with the past for some members of some exile communities, but contribute to the forging of a new Afgan American identity for others (Baily, 1994). Another suggests that writing may be a way to confront grief and loss for some exiles (Helfgott, 2005). A third, exploring the African National Congress’ work in exile from apartheid South Africa, suggests that music, poetry, theater, and dance were used to garner international support for the struggle against apartheid by raising consciousness in the international community, and raising funds, and points to their limitations (Gilbert, 2007). A further analyst, examining exiles’ motivation for making art while in exile, suggests that art is a means of resistance for them (Heller *et al.*, 2003). Finally, one scholar suggests that some musical performances among migrant communities are inward-directed, while others are outward-directed, fulfilling different goals. Chinese refugees arriving in the United States in the Forties and Fifties, for example, aimed with their musical performance to be better understood by American society, and they selected their instruments and repertoire accordingly, in an outward-directed effort (San Zheng, 1990).

Within the large body of literature on art and exile, only a handful of works examine the meanings and consequences that art forms from home may hold for exiles. This paper aims to extend the investigation of exiles and art in this direction. It extends it with a focus on visual arts that come from the country of origin, and in particular visual arts with political content, made by the impoverished and politically marginalized.

It focuses on exiles’ engagement with one art form, the *arpilleras*. These were appliqué pictures made primarily by women inhabitants of Santiago’s shantytowns, but also by relatives of the disappeared, women political prisoners, and low-income women in two rural towns in Chile. *Arpillera*-making began just over a year after the 1973 *coup d’état*. For most *arpillera*-makers, the primary motivation was to earn money with which to feed their families, but the wish to engage in a therapeutic activity and to tell their story were also salient motives. The women typically worked in chapels in shantytowns, as priests

were willing to lend them a room. The subject-matter of the *arpilleras* was the repression and poverty that they were enduring, and their resistance. The *arpilleras* depicted soldiers beating protesters, shantytown communal kitchens (often families' only means of feeding themselves), women's subsistence-level entrepreneurial activities such as washing clothes and baking bread, closed factories signaling high unemployment, arrests and disappearance, and the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Few *arpilleras* were sold locally during the dictatorship. Most were exported in a clandestine fashion by a Chilean human rights organization, the *Vicaría de la Solidaridad*, which was legally part of the Chilean Catholic Church. The *Vicaría* sent the *arpilleras* to Chilean exiles, priests, Catholic organizations, and local human rights activists, mainly in Europe, Canada, and Latin America. These individuals and organizations, in turn, sold them to the public, typically to liberals who wanted to help the victims of the regime. The selling venues included solidarity events for Chile or other repressive regimes, cultural festivals, churches, and craft markets. In the last years of the regime and subsequently, decorative *arpilleras* without political content emerged (Adams, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2005).

It draws on a database created by the author¹ for two books, and consisting of 170 interviews with *arpillera*-makers, sellers, exporters, and buyers of *arpilleras*; participant observation with five groups of *arpillera*-makers, over a thousand photographs of *arpilleras*, and archival research. These data were collected five and fifteen years after the end of the dictatorship, in 1995-6 and 2005-6. While informed by this large body of data, the paper is most directly based on a close analysis of interviews with twenty exiles who owned, sold, exhibited, made, or bought *arpilleras*. These exiles lived mainly in Europe, but also in Canada, the United States, Latin America, and North Africa. The author found them by approaching exile organizations, Chilean acquaintances, and other interviewees, and asking if they knew any exiles who had had contact with the *arpilleras*. The interviews were conducted in England, Switzerland, and Chile, and were semi-structured. A large number of other exiles were interviewed as part of the larger project, but as their interviews focused on their exporting of *arpilleras* after returning to Chile or before leaving the

¹ The topics of resistance against Pinochet, exile, and the arts interested me perhaps because I am the daughter of a Chilean sympathetic with the plight of the regime's victims, although not an exile herself. I grew up in Geneva, a city of a great many exiles, and the human rights situation in Chile affected me indirectly.

country, or on their activism unconnected with *arpilleras*, their interviews were not used as a direct source of data for this paper.

The paper also draws on semi-structured interviews with the staff of organizations in Chile that sent the *arpilleras* to exiles, and on interviews with human rights activists who were natives of the exiles’ host country, and who mentioned these exiles’ work or activities. In addition to using interviews, the paper draws on visual and textual data from the newsletters of Chilean exile organizations, and documents belonging to an exiled *arpillera* group in Sweden (including newspaper articles and exhibition catalogues about the *arpilleras* they made).

Engaging with *Arpilleras*

Chilean exiles engaged with *arpilleras* in a number of ways. They kept *arpilleras* in their homes, sold them to members of the public, and organized exhibitions of them. These various ways of engagement with the *arpilleras*, and the *arpilleras* themselves, carried a number of meanings and consequences for the exiles, which point to the importance of the *arpilleras* for them.

Owning Arpilleras

Many Chilean exiles had an *arpillera* in their foreign home. A number reported that “all” Chileans who were left-wing and living abroad had an *arpillera*, and sometimes more than one.² Rodrigo, the son of exiles in Britain, told me:

So yes and all the Chilean families, for example we had about four in our own house, I mean, so we would buy them ourselves and that money would come back, so in every Chi- there was twenty five families, let’s say, a hundred Chileans, they all had at least two or three in their houses, so whenever we could we would buy them.

For exiles, *arpilleras* in the home were special objects. First and foremost, they denoted their link with Chile. Rodrigo stated that to have an *arpillera* in the home meant to be in touch or connected with Chile, to know how people in Chile were faring, to know that

² One exile whom I interviewed, however, did not own one, although she said she had seen them in Germany, her host country.

one was helping an important cause, and to know that one was doing something good. He expressed:

What did it mean to have an *arpillera* in the house, well, um, being in touch with Chile, knowing that we were helping a very, very important cause. Ummm, we were all very um politically motivated because as you know we were politically exiled, so, so anything to help. Uh, I don't like to think of it as charity work, you see what I mean, it is more like 'we are selling these things, you know to help a cause.' I mean it's not charity at all if you see what I mean. Um so it was very important to have these kind, of uh objects, I mean the Pomaire pottery, everyone had it, so uh. Being in touch with Chile, knowing that we were doing something good. I mean we were no- we weren't living in, uh, you know, very good conditions ourselves, you know, in those years back in England, you know, so knowing that we weren't doing very well let's say and people here were doing, you know, really badly we were like, really in touch with really what was going on here, so the political side of things was very important, so I'd say that was the most, just being in touch, being connected, I mean we all spoke Spanish at home.

The *arpilleras* were a link with Chile and a signifier of their contribution to the cause.

Exiles bought *arpilleras* in order to have something from back home. Noemi, an exile in Holland, uses the word “sentimental,” suggesting the emotionality that surrounded the buying of an *arpillera* to express one's link with Chile:

Chileans would buy, yes, to have something sentimental in their homes. Because in every house, in almost every Chilean home in exile, there were *arpilleras*. Just as there were posters about solidarity with Chile, posters, for example, Salvador Allende, with, with, with, eh, eh- posters that had been made in Holland, I mean they were in Dutch, calling for people to come to some demonstration, or some act, some concert, or some *peña*. So there were, in, in the houses of Chileans there were these types of posters, there were- and also *arpilleras*, which were an identification with Chile.

For some exiles, *arpilleras* were treasured presents that friends back home had given them before they had left. Gloria, when she left for exile in Mexico for example, took two with her, that that *arpillera*-makers whom she had worked with had made and given her. People in exile had *arpilleras* in their homes, Gloria further explained, because to do so was to value creativity and popular organizations. At the same time, the *arpillera* was a symbol of a group of people working against the dictatorship. To take one with you in exile was like taking a piece of Chile, or a photo:

Gloria: I was exiled in '81. Until '85. You would see how, abroad, there was no Chilean without an *arpillera*. Ah? And I took my *arpillera* with me. I mean it was like, like impossible to think that you were not going to, not going to take it, you understand? It is like-

JA: You took it along, why?

Gloria: Because it was a really important symbol. Ah? And because they, they, they, they gave me- when I left they gave me one which was called- which was sort of about, about exile, so they made one for me. Which was, eh, a farewell, like this, ah, in a bar... very, very nice. So I had that one, I had another one of *Puente Alto* that was, that showed a bit of what the, the, the work of our *Puente Alto* group had meant. And I had those two in my house in exile. And everyone, if you like, who was left-wing, had an *arpillera* in their house. Everyone. I mean, it was sort of like valuing creativity, perhaps, but also popular organizing at that time, eh, a symbol, a really important symbol. I think that, that one, one side of it was this aspect of signifying, signifying for many women a type of income at a particular moment in time. When they started with the exporting and all that, this, this system gets perfected. But that was one aspect, ah. And another thing was how it became a symbol of a fairly large group of people who at that time were working, eh, socially, against the dictatorship. You see? That was sort of the, the main thing. I mean for you to take this with you- I took it with me, but there were people who had been in exile for many years, abroad, and who, and who didn't know the process of the *arpillera*, but their relatives or friends had sent them one. And this happened in Europe, everywhere- I was in Mexico.

[...]

I was never a specialist in the *arpillera*. I mean, I was really, I was involved tangentially [in her work with the *Vicaría* in Chile], you understand? But nevertheless, as I say, I went into exile with my *arpillera*. I mean [laughs] I still say, 'It's my *arpillera*.'

JA: Why did you, did you take it with you in exile? To-

Gloria: Yes, it was as if I were taking some photos, you see? A really important photo. It was, it was the, a symbol. To take with you a little piece of Chile.

For exiled Chileans, the *arpilleras* were symbols of creativity, of popular organizations, and of a group of people working to resist the dictatorship, according to Gloria, but they were also like important photos, and even a piece of Chile.

To own an *arpillera* had an emotional impact on some exiles, raising their spirits when they were feeling the strain of their exilic condition. Scenes of their neighborhood that were depicted in the *arpilleras* brought comfort, as did the news about Chile that the *arpilleras* carried. Noemi told me:

JA: What motivated the Chileans, first, to buy *arpilleras*?

Noemi: The identification with Chile. Because each *arpillera*, also, has its story, as you know. Each- You have already, you have, eh-. So for example *arpilleras* that came from the prisons were very symbolic because there were many references to the neighborhoods where they, where the, the political prisoner lived, for example. So they would make, eh, *arpilleras* with, with themes of communal kitchens, the working class kitchens, or the soup kitchens for children. Or also protests in the neighborhoods where they lived. And, and it was, that was very, very, how to- it

raised the spirits of people who lived in exile, and who knew that they could not yet return.

JA: Raised the spirits-

Noemi: Raised the spirits in the sense that people in countries where they are exiled get depressed a lot. They get depressed because it is very different when you travel to a- Holland is wonderful, it's a beautiful country, but not, not to live in, because we are not Dutch. Every, everyone wants to live in his or her own country. Well, at least we Chileans do. And above all, I think the key point is not so much that we want to live in our countries, but it's the idea that we are *forced* to be abroad. [JA: Yes]. That's the problem. [JA: Yes, of course]. So when people would get depressed a lot, and they always be waiting for news of Chile, eh, and one of the ways of having news of Chile was via the *arpilleras*. [JA: Ah, really?] Because the *arpilleras* were also very much about what was happening. Well, the, the idea, this issue of the community kitchens, as I say, which was very well depicted there. Eh, there was also news- there were *arpilleras* that told the story of, of the raids on shantytown homes, when they would go to the houses to raid them, when they would arrest people. That was awful, horrible, and so on, but it was also a record. It was also something of one's own. Look, it was like saying, 'Look at this, this is what is happening in my country.' And I can depict it by means of, of this, of this, of this, of this wonder, which is artistic, which is colorful, and which is telling a drama, a situation that was experienced intensely in this country, and painfully. Over such a long period of time.

These meanings that owning an *arpillera* held grew out of the fact that being forced to live in a foreign country was difficult. Exiles suffered depression and alienation, a sojourn mentality, family dysfunction, a continued sense of persecution in exile, the absence of a mutual support system among themselves, and, in the case of single men, lack of financial support and loneliness (Gonsalves, 1990). Many experienced a sensation of separateness from locals, and identified more with other immigrants than with their hosts. Alcoholism, divorce, and suicide were also among their problems and almost all experienced a sensation of living neither in Chile nor in their host country, or what they called “living with one's suitcases packed.” Many had to manage a new culture, language, food, and climate, and found adaptation difficult. They lost the public roles that their political involvement had given them in Chile, and while in exile lived less in the “public sphere.” Some parents became dependent on children, who learned the local language faster. Many professionals found menial jobs that provided little satisfaction. Exiles did not enjoy the support and solidarity provided by many extended families in Chile (Wright and Oñate, 2007; Kay, 1987; Vásquez and Araujo, 1990). Despite these difficulties, many

pursued higher education, learned new skills, and accumulated capital for their return (Wright and Oñate, 2007).

The *arpilleras*, then, cheered up people who were depressed about not being able to return to Chile. In sum, an *arpillera* in the home expressed one’s identification with Chile, meant being in touch with Chile, and was a “piece of Chile,” a treasured gift from Chile, or similar to a photo. It was a signifier of creativity and popular organization, a symbol of a group of people working against the dictatorship, and a reminder that one was contributing to a good and important cause. Meanwhile, it helped with the depressed feelings exiles had.

Selling arpilleras

Exiles did not only own *arpilleras*; many also volunteered to do the work of selling them. They sold mostly to locals of their host country, who bought with the understanding that to buy would help the victims of the regime in a concrete way. This selling took place at evenings of folk music and dance that exiles organized to raise money, at talks about Chile, at church after mass, at music festivals, and at “third world” fairs or solidarity events. The money earned would go back to Chile, in most cases to the *Vicaría de la Solidaridad* (the main human rights organization that lent the *arpillera*-makers support), but also directly to groups of *arpillera*-makers. The *arpilleras* that exiles sold typically reached them via the *Vicaría de la Solidaridad*, although there were other organizations that also sent out *arpilleras*, including a feminist NGO, an ecumenical human rights organization called the *Fundación de Ayuda Social de las Iglesias Cristianas*, the Catholic *Fundación Missio*, a shantytown organization, members of the clandestine Chilean Communist Party, and members of the association of relatives of political prisoners. All of these groups sent *arpilleras* to exiles because they wished to help the *arpillera* makers earn an income by selling their work abroad. There were also a few cases of the *arpillera*-makers themselves sending their work to people abroad directly.

Not all exiles were involved in selling, naturally. Some participated in activities of a different nature with the goal of sending money to Chile, and some were not involved in such “solidary” activities at all. However, a great many Chilean exiles did sell *arpilleras*, and were the main distributors of *arpilleras* for the *Vicaría de la Solidaridad*, alongside human rights activists who were citizens of their host countries. Even those exiles that did

not sell *arpilleras* directly participated in the effort indirectly, by attending the events at which the *arpilleras* were sold, for example (interview with Bernardita).

Selling *arpilleras* was part of a broad spectrum of political activities that exiles engaged in. Exiles wanted to keep the repression and human rights violations of the dictatorship in the news, and to pave the way for the restoration of democracy in Chile. They formed new branches of the Chilean political party to which they had belonged, such that the Chilean left rapidly became replicated in dozens of countries around the world. This “external front” was the site of much resistance work in collaboration with the branches of the same parties operating underground in Chile (interview with Noemi). Exiles wrote letters to their local Chilean embassies, collected signatures, carried out protest actions of different kinds, disseminated information on Chile, organized talks about Chile, and raised funds. They also lobbied host country governments to condemn the Pinochet regime at the United Nations and in other international fora, to support campaigns to release selected political prisoners, and to ban trade with Chile (Wright and Oñate, 2007; interview with Noemi). Cross-party organizations such as Chile Democrático lobbied international organizations, disseminated information on human rights and the dictatorship, published an influential exile periodical, and gave material support to the Chilean human rights movement (Wright and Oñate, 2007).³

Exiles understood selling *arpilleras* as important resistance work they were doing for Chile, and another way of achieving the goals described above. To sell was to inform locals about what was happening, and to inform was to raise awareness and contribute to the struggle. Rodrigo told me about the importance of informing, expressing that he saw selling *arpilleras* as part of a range of activities that all shared this goal:

JA: You mentioned, just, with this, that you were trying to get the word out, um, was that something that you were trying to do with the, with the *arpilleras* as well?

Rodrigo: The *arpilleras* was one part of the whole thing, I mean, the idea was you know we were literally exiled from our country, so basically we wanted to make the world know why what had happened, and that this military dictator had taken over our country. I mean a lot of the people that went to Bristol were, you know, were the intellectual society of Chile at the time. I mean we’re not talking about, you know, I

³ The phenomenon of resistance to dictatorships by exiles is not limited to the Chilean case. It occurs with many countries under military regimes, and disseminating information about the reality under the dictatorship is often part of such work (see, for example, Nyeko 1996, Ellis 1991).

mean we're talking like, you know, a very important part of, of Chile was kicked out of the country and then those people were 'what could we do in England?' We had to get the message across, what happened. We wanted to come home.

From Rodrigo's perspective, selling *arpilleras* was part of a bigger goal of making the British public aware of the fact that a military dictator had taken over in Chile.

In the eyes of some exiles, the *arpilleras* were informative documents of such significance that they were "pieces of the country's history." Noemi explained:

If you sell *empanadas* [Chilean meat pies] or you sell a glass of wine, it's something pleasant, of the moment, you are eating something that is Chilean, but that's all there is to it. On the other hand, if you sell an *arpillera* you are giving a piece of the history of your country. That's what it is. It is- they are pieces, fragments of the, of what was happening in this country.

Noemi's words suggest that she saw the *arpilleras* as highly meaningful documents tied to what was occurring in her home country.

For some exiles, the *arpilleras* were a means by which buyers became more than informed; they became deeply moved about the situation in Chile. The *arpilleras* (and the way the exile explained them) produced in buyers a vivid sense of the living, feeling person who had made the *arpillera*, and brought these distant individuals, buyer and maker, together. Patricio, exiled in Paris, described what it was like to open up the little message sewn into a pocket at the back of many *arpilleras*; for him there was something "sacred" about that moment of contact, when he read out the *arpillera*'s message in the piece of paper:

For me the fact of that, that little envelope, that little piece of paper at the back of the *arpillera*, for me it was, it was very important, very important. It was like coming close to the person herself. [JA: Yes.] It was not any, any old thing, 'that thing, who made it?' 'I, I don't know who made it.' But for me that, that little paper at the back was tremendously important. Those moments when I would open the, the, the little envelope and, and show it, for me it was something, like almost sacred, and that's how I would try to communicate it, ah, 'Here is the person, here is, here is what that person is feeling.' I remember that many people bought without even knowing where they were going to put the *arpillera*, but on principle. There were many people who would say, 'Let's see, which do you like?' 'Never mind which,' I would say. 'I want to buy something made by these, by these people.'
[...]

It seems to me that, via the *arpillera* a human contact was achieved that was, to repeat what I said before, ah, every time I opened a, a little envelope with a message of the *arpillera*, I felt that that Frenchman or that Frenchwoman, and I always remember, a mother with her daughter for example, to whom I read a message, 'We do not have, we do not have enough to eat, we have to go about picking up cardboard,' for example, ah. A mother discussing it with her daughter.

[...]

I think that even, even Chileans who became refugees abroad, I realized, often became distanced from the reality and stopped being solidary even with their own fellow countrymen, how many Chileans stopped being solidary. I think that, well, as a Christian, I think about this issue of one's fellow man, 'fellow man' means 'near to,' but it's we who have to move close because it is not the fellow man who has to move close to us, we have to move close, I mean we move close to other people. And I think that for me, the *arpillera* was just that. The *arpillera* was a wonderful means of bringing two people close, ah, the person who was looking at the *arpillera*, the Frenchman, far away, eh, with a comfortable economic situation, not suffering any, any human rights violations, or lacking in material means, to bring him close to that reality and talk to him, and say to him, 'I lived that, I was a prisoner, I was in a prison where they tortured, I was, I have been with, with these people who make these, these *arpilleras*.' In other words, to humanize relations. I think that that is tremendously necessary.

Selling *arpilleras* carried still another meaning, for exiles. It was important work they did to raise money. The exiles thought of the money as going primarily to the *arpillera*-makers, but also as helping the *Vicaría de la Solidaridad* and the resistance more broadly. Patricio's words, for example, suggest that he understood his work of selling as an activity that enabled him to send much-needed money to Chile:

So, I spent many week ends for example, selling this, this material. What I would try to do was that when the packet arrived I would immediately send the, the money. I would pay for it, you could say, so that the money could arrive soon. And afterwards I tried to sell. When you are in Europe you don't have the economic urgency that you have here, so, what they asked me to do was to guarantee them a fixed amount monthly, whether or not I sold. So that they always knew, 'well, we sent such and such and amount of-', normally 45 *arpilleras* would arrive each month.

People needed money urgently in Chile, and Patricio saw the selling as a way of providing that money on a regular basis. In the exiles' eyes, then, selling *arpilleras* was an activity with economic and political consequences. It enabled the exile to send to Chile money that was sorely needed, it resulted in locals becoming informed about the situation

in Chile, it produced a vivid sense of contact with the experiences that *arpillera*-makers in Chile were having, and it moved buyers. To sell was to be “solidario”, and to contribute to the effort to overthrow the dictatorship.

Selling *arpilleras* was an activity that exiles saw as having consequences not only for others, but also for themselves. It helped them cope with the trauma they had experienced, and the emotional difficulties that exile brought. Many had experienced arbitrary arrest and torture and suffered the death or disappearance of family members. They had endured defeat, sudden, often violent and forced uprooting, shattered lives, truncated careers, and separated families (Wright and Oñate, 2007; Vásquez and Araujo, 1990), as well as political violence and a rupture with their earlier way of life (Bolzman, 1996). They were preyed upon by feelings of guilt for having left dead, jailed, or disappeared comrades behind, and by memories of prison and torture. They arrived with dreams ruined, families torn apart, and careers destroyed (Wright and Oñate, 2007). A number experienced a condition similar to bereavement due to the rupture with their cultural past, geographical environment, and attachment to society and nation (Muñoz, 1980).

A number of exiles described selling *arpilleras* as therapeutic. Bernardita, the daughter of exiles in Holland, for example, found the work painful at first, as it reminded her of traumatic experiences she had had in Chile, but later helpful in overcoming this trauma. Selling also provided emotional succor in that there was comfort in the knowledge that one was helping by enabling locals to learn what was happening in Chile, and even happiness and pride:

JA: How did you see the *arpilleras*? I mean, what, what do they represent for you?

Bernardita: Well, at the beginning it was sad, it was hard because the, the things that were depicted in the *arpilleras*, I remem-, made, made me remember all the traumas I had experienced here, when I was a girl. Because I was eleven years old when the *coup* happened. I saw it when they arrested my father, the many times that all the soldiers came to the house to look for things we didn't have in the house. Mm? When they took my mother, when they took my sister, so for me it was painful, to explain what, what was in the *arpilleras*. But at the same time it was a way of doing therapy. Because while explaining it, I, it did me good, because everything started to come out, all this sadness I was carrying inside me. Mm? And then it stopped hurting in the way it had in the beginning, ah. After a while it didn't hurt, any more. Then you told it happily, thinking about, about how good it was that people dared to, to make known what was happening, and how brave the women were, daring to, to, with this little piece of, of cloth, make the human figures and tell people what was happening

to them. Mm? So in the end instead of being work, work that was difficult, sad, painful, it started to be comforting. Because you say, ‘Well, in this way I am helping my people, I am making known the atrocities that they are committing with my people.’ And that made me very happy, very pleased, and I felt very good, proud, to be able to do it. And to have lived through all that seeing the positive side of things, seeing the experience, seeing the strength that a woman starts to have when faced with all the terrible things that we experienced, that we experienced here in Chile.

Being able to explain the *arpilleras* to buyers was soothing to individuals who had had traumatic experiences because it provided a reason to talk about experiences related to their own. In parallel, seeing oneself as “helping one’s people” by making known what was occurring in Chile, may have been especially comforting in a context in which one did not fit easily into the host society; it provided a positive self-concept.

There is a strong sense of duty to her country and perhaps a hint of guilt about being an exile in Bernardita’s words.⁴ She was aware that many exiles had “forgotten Chile” and felt comforted being able to see herself as different from them. To be able to do something for Chile by selling *arpilleras* enabled her to feel good when Dutch people asked if she was helping her country:

JA: What was the solidarity thing like there?

Bernardita: Well, eh, solidarity with Chile was like opening a little window onto what we had-, onto the past, onto what we had left behind. Because at first, when you arrive in ex-, in exile in Holland you feel as if you are in a prison. Because you don’t speak the language, you are different, you carry *many* traumas, you have experienced something *very* terrible, so you don’t arrive, mentally, you don’t arrive in good shape. I mean, you’re not well, you’re not well. So when the moment comes in which you can do something for your country, for your people, it, it is as if something opens up for you. It’s something new, an enriching experience, that makes you feel better. Mm? Because many, eh, many Dutch people ask you, ‘So, you are Chilean, ah, that’s good, and do you help Chile?’ In other words, people know, at that time they knew what was happening here in Chile, the terrible ex-, experiences people were having because of the Pinochet dictatorship. So you feel good being able to say, ‘Yes, I help. I had to leave Chile but I did not forget Chile, because I, I carry Chile here in my heart, I carry it here. So I continue to help my people.’ And that was comforting and, and it made you much better. Mm? Because many, many Chileans, upon, upon going to another country, started to sort of forget, perhaps unconsciously or perhaps what

⁴ Literature by Chilean exiles is peppered with references to guilt about being safe and relatively comfortable in Europe or elsewhere while other Chileans were suffering repression and poverty under the dictatorship (Puz, 2006). Hence, it is possible that the work of selling *arpilleras* helped assuage any guilt that the exiles had.

had happened was so painful that they wanted to forget, to forget everything about Chile, and start a new life.

Bernardita’s words suggest a sense of relief about having found a way to do her duty to her country. Selling *arpilleras*, then, was a source of solace in that it helped Bernardita overcome trauma, gave her a sense that one was enabling locals to become informed, and provided her with the satisfaction of feeling one was doing something for Chile.

There were still other ways in which selling *arpilleras* brought comfort. It helped resolve some of the on-going emotional strains of living in exile. Selling *arpilleras*, together with other activities, led Noemi to feel that Dutch people were in agreement about the desirability of an end to the dictatorship:

JA: What other consequence for you, emotionally or psychologically-speaking, or in any other sense, was there from the fact of being in contact with and selling this?

Noemi: The thing is that I could not say that it was just a consequence of the *arpilleras*. I think one has to- that it is a consequence of everything, of everything. Emotionally, you are always with one foot there and one foot here. Always things that, that you are in a borrowed country. Always thinking that, that you have to, to, to struggle to survive there, but also to return at some point. And, and to be able to return to overthrow the dictatorship. So the, the, the way of, of, of spreading the word as I was saying, and of, of telling, telling, telling people that that was what was happening here, eh, helped you to think that there were people who were in agreement with you. In agreement about saying that they did not want this either. I mean Dutch people, ah.

The context being one in which most of the population had very different concerns from the exiles may have contributed to making it comforting to realize, as a result of selling *arpilleras*, that Dutch people were in agreement with her about the need for the dictatorship to end.

Selling *arpilleras* also “gave meaning” to one’s exile. This happened when Patricio witnessed the solidarity of a local who bought an *arpillera*, wanting to help people in Chile. He described how deeply moved he was by a boy with only ten francs, who wanted to spend it on something from Chile:

I was very moved by children who would come, and who would say, one boy who had 10 Francs, which was *his* money and he wanted to buy *something* from Chile. And spend *his* money, which was his pocket money no doubt, his, how do you say it? ‘argent

de-’ [JA: argent de poche] ‘de poche’, he wanted to spend it on, on- I always remember that I sold him, I, I gave him one that was more expensive because he liked it, and ‘well, I will, someone else will pay me more for something else, it doesn’t matter.’ ‘This is the one you like? Take it, it costs 10 Francs.’ I was worth more, but, ‘this is worth 10 Francs.’ He took it. A boy who wanted to spend his ‘argent de poche’ on something by a Chilean. These are things that when I, when I remember them they still move me, and this nourished me a lot, it gave a meaning to my exile. I mean, I don’t regret my exile. I am happy about my exile, I don’t regret having been a prisoner, I am happy about it.

Patricio’s words point to the alienation of exile, in which a sense of purpose may become lost, but which the selling of *arpilleras* helped relieve.

There were also indirect ways in which the selling of *arpilleras* was a source of solace. Exiles set up stalls at festivals, solidarity fairs, and other events, in order to sell the *arpilleras* and other Chilean items, and these were happy moments in the hardship of their banishment. They were times when exiles came together, heard their own music, and received appreciation from local audiences. As such, they provided the warmth of community and a respite from “chilly England.” Rodrigo described his family’s efforts to sell the *arpilleras* by setting up stalls at music festivals and other events:

Rodrigo: I mean we did go to every single event that was happening. That, I mean, that, that to me was the, the main thing. Being, you know, a participant of all of these fairs, but, but they were all very similar in the sense that you know we’d always have, always have lots of people involved, so I mean meeting *people* um you know the atmosphere that was created around those stalls, in itself, is the anecdote let’s say

[...]

JA: What was the atmosphere?

Rodrigo: Fun, um, happy, um, living chilly in England, um keeping, keeping the candle lit over there in England. I mean that, that was the, uh, main thing.

Rodrigo’s phrase “keeping the candle lit over there” suggests the warmth of a hearth in a foreign land, and may also mean “creating a continuation of Chilean activism and community in a distant land”. Both meanings point to a sense of distance from Chile in England, and the coldness of that experience, for which the joyfulness of the stalls for selling the *arpilleras* and other products provided some relief.

The selling of *arpilleras* had still other personal consequences. Many children of exiles helped their parents in their efforts to sell. As they tended to pick up the local language more quickly, it was sometimes they who talked directly to the customer, translating for their parents. Some of these children found that this work enabled them to learn about political events in Chile and Latin America. Rodrigo told me:

Rodrigo: Becoming politically informed myself you know, I mean, I was ten, twelve years old, you know and learning about, um, you know through selling the *arpilleras*, I mean, you learn yourself, you know? Um.

JA: About what exactly?

Rodrigo: About the political situations, you know, what’s happening, you know. Anything to do with, um, the leftist-Socialist movement back here in, uh, in Chile, and other countries in South America. So it was all a learning experience for all of us, right, all of us involved. My generation I’m talking about. And um, some of them are younger, some of, some of my generation have had kids, so I mean it all gets, gets passed on really.

As well as offering him the chance to learn about politics in Chile, Rodrigo later mentioned that the translating he was doing at the stalls for his parents, who spoke little English, influenced his choice of career, making him a Spanish-English translator.

To sell *arpilleras*, then, had consequences at the personal level. Initially it was painful as it reminded exiles of traumatic experiences in Chile, but later it did them good, they felt, because it involved talking about what they had experienced. It was comforting and made them feel proud and happy even, because it meant helping Chile, by telling others about what was occurring; moreover, it was enriching. It was also reassuring because it made exiles think that locals of the country were in agreement with them about the undesirability of the dictatorship. It gave meaning to one’s exile. In addition, the *peñas* and stalls of which the *arpilleras* were an intrinsic part brought happiness because they gathered exiles together, and there was good food good music; it “made it all worthwhile” and was a way of keeping the candle lit in the chill of exile. Children, moreover, learned about political events in Chile and Latin America.

Organizing exhibitions

A small number of exiles organized exhibitions of *arpilleras*. Isabel Morel was one such exile. A researcher at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington D.C., she had been married to Orlando Letelier, once minister and ambassador under Allende, later founder of the exile and resistance organization *Chile Democrático*, and subsequently murdered by the Pinochet government. Isabel organized two exhibitions about human rights in Chile, containing *arpilleras*, photographs, and texts based on research. One traveled around the United States in a bus, and she lent out the other for exhibition by libraries, universities,

churches, women's organizations, museums, and Chilean exile organizations throughout the country, sometimes giving a talk on the opening night. She described:

After they killed Orlando we created, also within the Institute, the Letelier Moffitt Memorial Fund. So with the Letelier-Moffitt Memorial Fund and with the Human Rights Project I organized the 'Traveling Exhibit- Human Rights in Chile.' Where we showed, it was with big placards, mobile placards, almost like screens, big screens, with photographs, the situation of human rights since the military *coup*, the role of the United States in this *coup*. An education for the North American public. It traveled in a van, this exhibition, with a, with Chilean speakers, with Chilean music, they prepared Chilean food, to Churches, etc. It was very lovely. And there, for the first time, my mother sent me some *arpilleras*, which I included in this exhibition. So this must have been '77 when the *arpilleras* started, in this exhibition.

Isabel saw the exhibitions that she organized as educating North Americans about the human rights situation in Chile and about the role of the United States in the *coup*. At the same time, she saw the process as leading to empowerment for the women who made the *arpilleras*. She told me about the groups from whom she bought the *arpilleras* for the project:

And there would be a teacher who would, who would teach them. Either to sew, or to weave, or to make *arpilleras*. But that teacher would also give them classes in personal development. And that was the key thing. Because the change in those women was extraordinary... because look, in that group, for example, there was one woman who says, 'I am a journalist now. Because Miss Mónica' –because Mónica Urrutia was the one who had those groups- 'she has taught us, well, she has given us classes. Now I know that I am a person. I have now received-' let me see, what was it? 'because I have received some education.' And Mónica would say [in a low voice] '4 classes.' 'Because now I know that I am a person, and that I have a right to live on this planet, but that I also have obligations to fulfill for this piece of planet that I occupy. I have obligations to others. So I have taken on the work of journalist. And the classmates give me money once a week and I take a bus and go to the center, and I go to the *Vicaría*, and I go to-' I don't remember where to, to various organizations that existed, 'the Human Rights Committee, and I see, and I see everything that is happening- FASIC [the Foundation of Social Aid of Christian Churches], and so I write that and I put it on a notice board here.' Another would say, 'Well, now I have had classes in personal growth, I know that you have to do things for others, so I go and visit prisoners. And my husband is very angry with me, but I have to do this, it's my duty.' I mean, such a change! 'And, and also, now we talk with the other women about our problems and we help each other, for the first time. Because before this I had never talked with anyone else about my problems. But now we all realize that our husbands drink, they get drunk, eh, they are unemployed. We now know a different

life. And, we can talk to each other.’ I mean, this produced, this type of workshop, the *arpilleras*, produced all this because all this came with the personal development. Which really made them into people.

Isabel understood these exhibitions as leading, indirectly, through the women’s activity of making *arpilleras*, to the empowerment of these women.

As well as organizing exhibitions, she offered an Institute for Policy Studies prize to one of the *arpillera*-makers, and invited this *arpillera*-maker and an artist who helped the *arpillera*-makers with their technique to Washington D.C. to give classes to American women. She was not the only exile to organize exhibitions. Others, such as the Chilean professor in the United States, Marjorie Agosín, also did so, although Isabel Morel may have done it on a larger scale than any other.

Other Art Forms

The *arpilleras* were not the only important art form for exiles. Many exiles who owned or worked with *arpilleras*, also owned or worked with other artistic genres. Patricio, for example, sold not only *arpilleras* but also Chilean tapestries made out of wool. Noemi sold books of poetry and Salvador Allende posters at the same stalls at which she sold *arpilleras*. Isabel Morel had not only *arpilleras* in her exhibitions, but also photography and Chilean music. The *peñas* brought together numerous art forms, including Chilean posters, pottery, literature, and the *arpilleras*. Rodrigo’s parents were part of a Chilean folk music group, in which they sang, and the family had pottery from Pomaire in their home. They also sold this pottery, alongside pottery from Quinchamalí, in order to send money back to Chile. He told me:

Well, Glastonbury is the big enormous, music festival, um, um. Ashtoncourt festival is um- generally music festivals but with many different stalls: human rights and um Amnesty International, umm, and so any time- Saint Paul’s, um, Reggae Festival was very popular every year, so any time there was a, any kind of local event, um fairs, fêtes anything really happening in Bristol, or near Bristol, we would umm, set up stalls, and it was all for, all the money umm raised there was all sent back to, to Chile. We would sell *empanadas*, *arpilleras*, umm pottery, as I said, the same products that we mentioned before.

Exiles tended to be involved with a number of different art forms, in different ways.

Some worked only with art forms other than the *arpillera*. Rossanna, an exile in Belgium for example, formed a group of women exiles who danced to Chilean folk music. They drew inspiration from the political folk music group of the Association of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared in Chile. Hermosilla, exiled in Canada, painted and made *arpilleras* that depicted children and were very different from the *arpilleras* with political content. For some of these Chileans, these other art forms, like the *arpilleras* provided a “refuge.” For Hermosilla, for example, they were a means of escape in the alienating experience of exile:

Hermosilla: In Canada, em, for me it is, it was very hard to suddenly find myself in another country that, that speaks another language, and me not knowing how to speak it. Where, in practice I was alone all day because the people who were there, the Chileans, were working. And I didn’t understand anything, so I also felt somewhat desperate, not being able to communicate with anyone. [JA: Yes, terrible] To turn on the television, not understand anything, or the radio, nothing. [JA: Total isolation.] Yes. So I, I took refuge somewhat in painting, eh, and also in making things. And something occurred to me, eh, for example, that did not have some many elements that were so, so, how do you say, so common, in which a child is ... playing with a kite. And it also occurred to me there, for example, suddenly, to do a- I experienced many events, I observed many native cultural events in Canada, very similar to those we have here, and the people most like me were the natives. So I observed, I compared, I learned, and it occurred to me suddenly, for example, in a, in a moment of desperation about being in another country, and in imagining how Chile was faring, where it was, over there, so far away, so suddenly it occurred to me to do some snowy mountains. Because the thing is that what I missed most were the mountains, the *cordillera*, because in the part of Canada where I was there were none, it was very flat. So I realized the importance that the *cordillera* had for me. To have it present, always. And so it occurred to me to make a *collon* mask.

JA: What is a *collon*?

Hermosilla: A *collon* is a mask of a *Mapuche* character, which is a wooden mask that you put here, and which acts in *Mapuche* ceremonies. They go around on a stick horse, keeping people in order like this. So I made this *collon* mask, symbolizing that it was me with my native culture as well, looking toward South America. In these clouds here. And I also embroidered the mask, the mask, with signs of the *cultrún*.

Hermosilla found comfort in using different artistic media, in the “desperation” of exile in Canada. He, like many exiles worked with art forms other than the *arpilleras*, and sometimes engaged in numerous art forms from Chile simultaneously.

Conclusion

In sum, Chilean exiles engaged with *arpilleras* in multiple ways, owning (and buying) them, selling them, and organizing exhibitions of them. What meanings did these varied forms of engagement hold for them? To own or buy an *arpillera* was to express a tie with Chile and with people there who were working against the regime. It was to express that one had a bond that persisted despite abrupt severance of the physical self from home. It was also to express that one was helping an important cause and doing something good, important in a situation of relative non-integration in the host society, and of personal security compared with the danger in which lived those they had left behind.

An *arpillera* in the home was an object that exiles' emotions were wrapped up in; they say it was “something sentimental,” “an identification with Chile,” and “like a photo.” It had the power to cheer them up, with its images of familiar neighborhoods, and its news from Chile. The *arpilleras* inspired the depths of feeling that a longed for home may evoke when one is far away, and they did so because of their fundamental significance of “something from home.”

As well as owning *arpilleras*, exiles sold them. To sell *arpilleras* was an activity that held political significance. It meant trying to get the word out about what had happened in Chile, and giving someone a piece of the history of the country. It was a way of fostering human contact between buyer and *arpillera*-maker and of sharing what the maker was feeling as she made the *arpillera*; it moved buyers. It was, finally, to be able to send money to Chile, where it was badly needed. In sum, it meant to help Chile.

In addition to these political meanings, to sell *arpilleras* held personal consequences and meanings. To sell *arpilleras* and the talking about experience in Chile that this involved was therapeutic. It was comforting and made exiles feel good, and even proud and happy, to be doing something to help Chile, something which meant that one had not forgotten one's country. It was reassuring because it made one think that locals of the country were in agreement with you about the undesirability of the dictatorship. The work of selling gave meaning to one's exile. The *arpilleras* were an intrinsic part of stalls at festivals, and these events were moments of happiness and the warmth of community, a way of keeping the candle lit in the chill of exile.

Finally, exiles organized exhibitions, and to do so was, in the eyes of one such exile, to educate Americans about human rights in Chile and the role of the United States in the *coup*, and indirectly to bring about empowerment in the *arpillera*-makers.

In all these forms of engagement, the *arpilleras* were more “special” than an ordinary decorative object. They were like sacred objects; laden with ideological significance, they inspired emotion, and were powerful in their consequences. It was not their relationship to a god that gave them this quasi-sacred status, but to home, and to a set of ideas and an anti-dictatorship community associated with home, that exiles held dear. This home and community that the *arpilleras* evoked were so emotionally charged because the exiles had been forcibly torn away from them through their sudden and often violent banishment. The *arpilleras*, to an extent, occupied the place of that home; they stood for it, taking on the importance and significance of home and community by proxy, in a similar way to an image of a god standing for the god and moving people to an extent as if it were the real thing. At the same time, the *arpilleras* were a weapon with which exiles fought the military regime. In their engagement with them, exiles’ sense of closeness to Chile was to some extent increased, and the emotional strain of exile and trauma relieved.

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