Crafting arts-based stories of exile, resistance and trauma among Chileans in the UK

Abstract

In 2017 an exhibition of over 100 craft pieces created by Chilean political prisoners held in concentration camps during the military dictatorship of General Pinochet, was launched in the UK along with an accompanying short film, '*Crafting Resistance: the Art of Chilean Political Prisoners'.* In the film, several of the craft makers, who came to the UK in the 1970s as political exiles following their imprisonment, discuss the making of the objects as well as their significance today. Drawing on these arts-based interventions, the paper reflects on the use of craft objects both a symbol of political resistance as well as a means of initiating difficult conversations around forced political exile, trauma and mental health while creating space for people to 'tell their stories'. Indeed, the paper contends that projects such as Crafting Resistance can 'care for knowledge' through the curation of craftwork while simultaneously creating space for counter memories. The analysis also highlights the changing relationship between the craft makers and the craftwork itself and argues that placing the craft objects within the exhibition assigned a new role to the objects as they became part of a display of collective memories and potentially contribute towards collective healing. Finally, the paper advocates for greater recognition of the historical use of craft as a political expression, which to date has been relatively neglected in debates around the use of arts-based research and methods.

Key words: Chile; crafts; exile; healing; resistance; trauma

> ‘They were objects with a lot of meaning. For instance, some people were doing some kind of … necklace, with the wood from the place where they execute people. So it was … that piece of wood has even today a lot of meaning, you know. You know that significance, that people were … killed, touching this piece of wood. So … now it’s kind of a testimony for those times’.

These are the words of Juan Carlos, who was, with many others, imprisoned in a concentration camp during the Chilean dictatorship (1973-1990). In these camps, many such political prisoners created craft objects. The exhibition and documentary film[i] on which this paper is based curated over 100 craft pieces belonging to prisoners who were subsequently forced into exile in the UK. This collection of craftworks ended-up being the largest of its kind outside of the Museum of Memory and Human Rights in Chile. The discussion here explores how craft objects became a way of creating political resistance as well as opportunities for the community to reflect on their exile, their mental health, and trauma, including intergenerationally, as well as communicating their experiences to new audiences.

With reference to this work, known as Crafting Resistance, this paper considers some of the tensions when engaging with arts-based methods (ABM) to produce work that is both ‘academic’ and ‘collaborative’. I contend that the synergies created by uniting different perspectives alongside diverse skills and resources has produced invaluable outputs in terms of initiating new conversations around the impact of trauma for those directly affected by events depicted in the film, but also demonstrating the central role that craftwork can play as a means of political resistance. The paper also considers how Crafting Resistance offers a means of ‘caring for knowledge’ (Andrä et al., 2020) through the curation of the craftwork while at the same time creating space for counter memories.

The paper begins with an overview of debates around the growing use of ABM as researchers have sought new ways of understanding health-related phenomena (Fraser and al Sayah, 2011) and other aspects of the social sciences (c.f. Hawkins, 2015). Much of this research has tended to focus on how the use of ABM can strengthen the potential impact of academic research. While this is clearly important I argue, along with others in this Special Issue (Lopes Heimer, this issue; Lines, this issue), that we need to expand the scope of current ABM debates through conversations around the use of crafts as a means of political resistance and expression (Andrä et a., 2020; Kargól, 2021; Tidy, 2019). In the Chilean case, the use of craftwork as well as other cultural activities including music and dance, provided a vital means of expressing opposition to the military dictatorship and raising international awareness of the human rights abuses that were taking place. Indeed, as the discussion of justice for

the disappeared continues to be politically charged in Chile, as well as more widely, art and craft have provided a way in which the victims of state oppression can be commemorated and elevate the voices of the families of those left behind (Bliesemann de Guevara and Krystalli, 2022; Boesten and Scanlon, 2021). Yet while feminist scholars have long argued for the need to recognise 'everyday' forms of resistance which may take place outside of the formal political arena (Jackson, 2016), there is more limited acknowledgement within ABM debates of the historical uses of craft as a means of political expression.

The paper then discusses the Chilean case and considers how arts and crafts have been used both as a symbol of resistance and as a means of promoting well-being in the context of the military dictatorship and its aftermath. This section draws on interview transcripts with 10 ex-political prisoners, where they explain how craft workshops were set up in the midst of military concentration camps across Chile following the mass arrests and human rights abuses of thousands of Chileans in the aftermath of the 1973 military coup. All of the ex-political prisoners interviewed as part of the making of the film Crafting Resistance were directly involved in producing craftwork themselves and were part of the Crafting Resistance project. I outline this below, reflecting on how participants talked about their experiences in the concentration camps and the importance of the craft work today. Initially some Chilean exiles were reluctant to become involved in 'yet another' academic study about their refugee experiences but many were drawn to the craftwork produced by the political prisoners, something which has remained under-researched over the past forty years. Crafting Resistance therefore created an important opportunity for Chilean exiles to tell a new 'version' of their story and at the same time offers new insights into the relationship between arts-based work and mental health and well-being.

The paper also considers the changing relationship between the craft makers and the craftwork itself. In the interviews for the film, participants reflected on the creative process involved in the making of the craft objects but at the same time placing the craft objects within the exhibition assigned a new role to the objects as they became part of a display of collective memories and potentially part of 'a pathway of social repair' (Alcalá and Baines, 2012, cited in Kerr, 2021: 160). While the exhibition itself was a temporary installation, the Crafting Resistance film provides a more permanent form of memorial art, consolidating the potential of the project to incorporate a wide range of voices in discussions around transitional justice and reparations (Boesten and Scanlon, 2021).

As well as creating new opportunities for the research participants to contemplate their own experiences while raising a greater public awareness of this period of Chilean history, the use of ABM generated new spaces to reflect on the intergenerational aspects of trauma. This was an unanticipated outcome of the work and is not something that has been widely addressed within debates around ABM. While it has not been possible to explore this in detail, the paper offers some final reflections on the possibilities of ABM to generate new conversations and reflections around inter-generational trauma.

Arts-based methods and refugee health

Within what can broadly be defined as the 'refugee health' research there is a general consensus around the significance of qualitative research methods particularly in relation to better understanding the long-term impacts of trauma (Gideon, 2022). Critics have highlighted the limits of biomedical approaches to trauma given their failure to acknowledge the social, political and economic factors that shape refugees' lives while acknowledging their responses to these processes (Watters, 2001). Moreover, within biomedical paradigms no space is offered for refugees to define their own needs and priorities nor challenge assumptions about the 'refugee experience'. Yet, as Miller et al. (2002) contend, the temporal or historical nature of the refugee experience is fundamental to understanding refugees' experiences of exile.

As alternative forms of qualitative methods, arts-based research has the potential to progress our understanding of 'refugee health' issues. Mcilwaine and Ryburn (2024, this volume) provide critical insights into the ways in which arts-based research has been used as a means of engaging with multiple issues located at the intersections of migration and violence. Arts-based and especially visual methods are best seen as 'a way to generate new knowledge, to tap into existing resources which would otherwise lie dormant, unexplored and unutilized' (Packard 2008: 63, cited in Bachelet and Jeffrey, 2019: 26). The combination of conventional research approaches with ABM can promote interchange between two distinct regimes of knowledge production and representation and forge new ways of knowing (Nunn, 2017).

For some, ABM offer a means of prioritising refugees' voices in health analysis particularly where emphasis is given to participatory processes (Lenette et al., 2018; Nunn, 2017). ABM also present a way of getting collective voices heard, challenging the ways in which migrants see themselves, enabling them to construct alternative narratives of resilience not victimhood (Lenette et al., 2018; O'Neill et al 2019). Moreover, listening to refugees' stories told on their own terms can limit the ways

in which academic research can at times 'simplify participants' experiences and assign meaning to contributions for the purposes of reporting key research findings' (Lenette et al., 2018: 5). Indeed, when employed more reflexively, arts-based methods can be a means of critiquing 'expert' knowledge and values and addressing the power dynamics that can frame research as well as policy interventions (Khorana, 2021; Whelan et al. 2020). Care must also be taken to acknowledge the potential pitfalls of using arts-based work to document and share experiences of forced displacement (Blomfield and Lenette, 2018). Researchers must pay attention to the structural conditions of migration and resettlement, as well as the power relations embedded within the research design if arts-based methodologies are going to play a more transformational role in promoting social justice (Khorana, 2021). Addressing these inequalities means paying close attention to the position of the researcher and the perceived benefits to the community from the proposed research (ibid). We must also acknowledge the limits to 'community' and should not under-estimate the potential conflict and tensions contained within them nor the divergent positionalities of community members (Mistry and Breardi, 2012). Moreover, complex questions can surround which refugee stories are 'valid' and whose voices are amplified in different contexts as well as how social identity markers such as gender can shape community relations (Gideon, 2018).

Nevertheless, the use of ABM to disseminate research can provide a less threatening space in which to represent challenging ideas and stage difficult conversations (Nunn, 2017). Artworks have the potential to elicit emotions; art is a gateway to accessing the affective domain (Corcoran and Lane, 2018: 74). The telling of refugee stories through ABM can promote a more empathetic audience response as they are encouraged to engage more directly with people's stories and offer a different experience of hearing 'trauma stories' (Johnson and Kendrick, 2016; Lenette et al., 2018). In part this can be a result of the range of vocabularies offered through art-based methods giving greater scope to express the sensuous, affective, embodied and tacit aspects of migration, settlement, and marginality (Nunn, 2017). In contrast to written narratives, mediums such as digital storytelling or film have the additional benefit of including sound and listening to a narrative, particularly if told by the protagonist of the story, can have a very powerful impact. These complexities are very evident in the Crafting Resistance film when several of the respondents talk in very emotional terms about the impact of their experience of forced migration on their lives (see below). The inclusion of sound allows emotion, significance and meaning to be produced in the sound of the words and not just the words themselves, adding a specific richness to a narrative (Lenette et al., 2018). Moreover, the creative and visual expressions that ABM can evoke often result in more empathetic and engaged responses from

audiences and stakeholders compared to text or spoken language alone (Corcoran and Lane, 2018; Guruge et al., 2015).

As well as providing new opportunities for 'refugee stories' to be told to the wider public in new ways, arts-based methods can also create spaces within families to talk about past trauma and forced migration. A growing body of literature has reflected on the gaps and silences that often surround these traumatic family histories (Bloch and Hirsh, 2018; Eastmond, 2007; Müller-Suleymanova, 2021; Puvimanasinghe et al., 2014). Yet intergenerational silence may be a space of tacit understanding rather than an absence of communication (Nunn, 2017) and can include what Kidron (2009) terms 'empathetic' knowledge of first-generation experiences. Similarly, Bloch (2022) notes the importance of non-verbal agreements about what elements of the past can be discussed and what remains off-limits. Nunn (2017) argues that the range of vocabularies offered by arts-based methods with which to explore the embodied aspects of migration makes them particularly useful. ABM can offer a meaningful entry point by engaging with these embodied aspects of migration and go on to develop more nuanced understandings of intergenerational trauma and the impact of forced migration. This is important because as Bloch (2018: 662) argues:

> 'the second generation from refugee backgrounds, [who] are often forgotten in policy arenas and in research and scholarship, have experiences that are framed and shaped by their parents' histories of persecution and trauma and through migration and resettlement.'

Dissemination events that encompass arts-based work can allow the participation of wider family members and create opportunities for people to readily see their contribution which can help valorise identities and roles in everyday lives (Parr, 2007). Although it has not been possible here to sufficiently consider the possibilities offered by ABM to better understand the intergenerational aspects of trauma in this paper, it is clear that this constitutes an important area for future research.

Art and craft as political resistance and 'object witness' in Chile and beyond

Recent debate has drawn attention to the importance of 'counter memories' and their contribution to cultural interventions and memorial arts within transitional justice processes. Boesten and Scanlon (2021) highlight how the affective nature of cultural interventions creates space for empathy and solidarity in ways that statistics or written reports do not. Yet as Andrä et al (2020: 343) contend, many cultural interventions that have sought to engage with war and militarised violence have tended to 'privilege high or fine art and arts institutions, abstract artistic expressions, and 'masculinised' creative

forms'. Critics have emphasised the importance of recognising 'different ways of knowing' (Andrä et al. 2020: 343; Kerr, 2021) and the importance of incorporating marginalised voices, particularly women in the construction of and debates around memory (Boesten and Scanlon, 2021). Thus, alternative forms of cultural intervention can constitute 'feminist memorial arts [that] are counter-memories against the hegemonic male narrative' (Hirsch and Smith 2002, cited in Boesten and Scanlon, 2021: 8).

In a South African context, Segalo (2022) analyses the use of embroidery by Black women as a means of expressing the trauma they experienced during the Apartheid era. Considering the ways in which textiles create new spaces for people to express their 'hidden narratives', Segalo (2022: 5) argues:

> 'Embroideries offer those who make them the opportunity to excavate their buried histories and memories of the past … and visually make them accessible and knowable to others (e.g., their family members, and community members) within and outside their close circles'.

During the military dictatorship in Chile the arts played an important role in the expression of dissent and opposition to the Pinochet regime, particularly among political exiles (Adams, 2012; McSherry, 2017). Recently, the importance of *arpilleras* or stitched tapestries has generated new interest (Andrä et al., 2020; Beattie et al., 2022). *Arpilleras* frequently depict the repression and deprivations endured by low-income families (Adams, 2018). As Agosín (2008: 17) reflects, *arpilleras* have played a foundational role in Chile's history.

> 'It is an art denouncing torture, forced disappearance and violence…The *arpilleristas* record Chile's political history by capturing the most important voices of Chilean history from Allende's presidency to Pinochet's arrest. The *arpilleras* express the silenced and silencing space of the military dictatorship.'

Given their depictions of daily life under the repressive conditions imposed by the military regime, *arpilleras* carry 'difficult, unsettling knowledge' (Lehrer and Milton, 2011: 4, cited in Andrä et al., 2020: 343). Building on this idea further and reflecting on their own exhibition of Chilean *arpilleras* and other 'conflict textiles', Andrä and colleagues (2020) argue that these constitute 'object witnesses' that carry and convey difficult knowledge. Furthermore, the curation of these textiles can constitute an important way of 'caring for' this unsettling and difficult knowledge (ibid., 2020: 343).

One of the important aspects of the *arpilleras* during the dictatorship was that they were sold outside of Chile, predominantly in Europe, as a means of raising money for the families of Chilean political prisoners. They were also a means of expressing solidarity with the Chilean population not only for those who bought the *arpilleras* but also for the sellers, many of whom were Chilean exiles. This also assigned further political meaning to the selling of *arpilleras* since it fostered collective working in Chile (Adams, 2012).

However, less attention has been given to the creation of craft work inside Chilean concentration camps during the dictatorship. It is this story that is captured in the Crafting Resistance film and exhibition. Craftwork produced in the prison camps was initially intended as way of making gifts for family members to maintain a tangible link with loved ones while the prisoners were incarcerated but this soon developed into a means of generating income for the families of political prisoners and was sold by human rights organisations alongside the *arpilleras* described above. Workshops were established by the prisoners to ensure craft items such as embroidered blouses could be produced more quickly for sale. Yet, as in the case of the *arpilleras*, the craftwork also generated some unanticipated therapeutic benefits, particularly for those making the items in the most extreme circumstances. Moreover, these craft items have subsequently taken on a new importance for family members and the second generation as they embody the stories of all that the exiles endured as well as representing a very dark period in Chilean history.

Art and craft as resistance in Chilean prison camps

The human rights abuses suffered within Chile are well documented (c.f. Bernasconi 2019). Once arrested, many prisoners were tortured and those who survived were eventually moved into a number of concentration camps located across the country but many prisoners were also 'disappeared' as the military failed to acknowledge many of the arrests that took place. Large numbers of these prisoners remain unaccounted for today (Collins, 2018; Lira, 2016). As a preliminary step to making the Crafting Resistance film I conducted interviews with 10 ex-political prisoners (six women and four men) who had been held in different concentration camps during the military regime and had been involved in craft making in the prison camps and were subsequently exiled, ending up in the UK. The interviews were incorporated into the film and here I have drawn on the transcripts where participants talked about the process of craft making within the camps. The majority of the women had been held in Tres Alamos, a concentration camp within the capital city of Santiago, whereas some of the men were held there while others were imprisoned in concentration camps in other parts of Chile. Unlike the torture centres which were highly secretive places, whose existence the military denied (Aguilar, 2005;

Wyndham and Read, 2012), prisoners held at Tres Alamos were publicly acknowledged. As explained by Sara de Witt in the Crafting Resistance film, Tres Alamos 'was the place where you were certified and acknowledged that you were, had been detained'.

In Crafting Resistance, the exiles describe how the organisation of craft making in the prison camps evolved and emphasise the importance of the craftwork as a means of not only generating income to support prisoners' families but also as a way of fostering solidarity among the prisoners. Although women and men were held in separate prison camps, prisoners across the country structured their day around a series of different workshops where people spent time on a range of activities including language learning, music, political debates, mathematics, and craft activities in order to generate mutual support and provide people with new skills to use once they moved into exile.

In the film, Juan Carlos explains how the workshops evolved as a way of filling the time and as a distraction from the horrors of their situation:

> 'We started doing, you know, something … to spend time, to try not to think about your trial, your family, what is going to happen with you, with the other people, what about your family …. A lot of questions. So, in order to avoid that we start doing a lot of activity – sport and also some craft.'

Moreover, as Sergio reflected, these workshops were a way of maintaining solidarity and working communally within the prisons:

> 'So, the unit, the basic unit, where everybody does things, yeah, in particular regarding the craft, was *la carreta* (the cart). Because in that place you met with a carpenter who has been arrested or you met with a doctor who's been arrested or you met with a student, so it was a mixture of everybody there and everybody have different skills. And because you are there, then you learn the skill from those people… So, from the very beginning in Tres Alamos people were already asking their relatives to bring wool and to bring looms, small looms… or to bring coins which were very easy to mould and to do different types of craft.'

However, as Beatriz states in the film, the craft production also had a very practical purpose:

> ‘At some point this idea of making crafts was very, very important, and I sent them out to sell because eventually we all started to have a salary. It was like a true socialist movement in prison because we all had a salary which was according to our needs. In my case my parents didn’t have any resources so my salary was like the minimum salary but was to help my parents and my sisters to have transport to take the bus to come and see me.’

Although prisoners were constantly under the ‘gaze’ of the prison authorities and never knew whether or not they would be returned to the torture centres, they were allowed to continue with the craft workshops. In the film, Sara provides more insight into how this worked:

> ‘It wasn’t facilitated in the way that they were giving us tools or anything. We were just doing it. And it was facilitated in the sense that they [the prison guards] were allowing us to take the merchandise once the products were finished. They were allowing us to do that. But with quite a lot of harassment to the people that were coming to get them, there were people from mainly human rights organisations, La Vicaría,[ii] … and we were passing them the merchandise and then they were coming for more, they were bringing us the materials.’

Prisoners made a wide variety of craft objects, working both individually and as part of a wider group. Sara explains how women worked together to produce embroidered blouses that were often sold to raise money:

> ‘The materials we were using, it was a sort of white linen, and that was being washed, it was being ironed, and then other people will, you know, design, do the design there, other people will cut it. Other people will do the embroidery. So, it had so many steps, you know, and there were a good number of people involved doing that.’

Another popular item that was made for sale was small pouches to hold cigarette packets. Sergio recalled how they made a small loom and asked their wives and other relatives to bring them wool. They then weaved *cigarreras* to hold packets of cigarettes inside.

Insert Figure 1: cigarette holder crafted by Sergio on display at the Crafting Resistance exhibition

Some items were made as gifts for friends and family both within and outside the camps as Hernando noted:

> 'I have a … I think it's a piece of onyx which I shaped it in the shape of a heart. And another one whose shape is sort of a drop, a teardrop. In terms of the things that I brought here, I don't think I brought my best work in terms of jewellery because I give it to my sisters (laughs).'

Prisoners also crafted things for themselves as Beatriz explains when talking about a knitted cardigan she made:

> 'So, I was very, very proud of my cardigan. I had to take lots of lessons from people who knew what they were doing and it's a complete cardigan with a zip, and it's like a hoodie really, you know, something like that. And obviously it's over 40 years old, the zip bit is rusty, I don't know I just kept it for sentimental reasons. It's even got some holes by now. I haven't really worn it for years and years, but it was something that I was very proud of and I did that.'

Insert Figure 2: Knitted cardigan made by Beatriz on display at the Crafting Resistance exhibition

While making craft items in the camps was an essential way of surviving, creating solidarity and in resisting the wider dictatorship, these items were transported to the UK where they have taken on a related although different role. This is explored in more detail in the following section of the paper.

Creating Crafting Resistance in the UK

The exhibition and film that make up Crafting Resistance' emerged out of research considering the health and wellbeing of Chilean exiles in the UK (Gideon, 2016; 2018; 2022). The wider study grew from preliminary conversations with several Chilean exiles who had themselves been imprisoned in the early years of the regime[iii]. In particular, Chilean exile Gloria Miqueles, who I had met when she

studied with me at Birkbeck, played an essential role in facilitating my access to the Chilean exile community and was a key driver behind the research and Crafting Resistance project. The idea of making the film and exhibition was not part of the initial research which focussed on the arrival of Chileans to the UK in the 1970s[iv] and subsequent coping strategies, adapting to life in the UK in the aftermath of suffering severe abuse of human rights carried out by the Chilean military regime led by General Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990). Instead, the idea came to fruition as the research progressed and respondents talked about their experiences in the prison camps as well as in several conversations with Gloria. As I reflect below, neither Gloria nor I had any previous experience in mounting an exhibition or making a film and we approached the project as amateurs. At the same time, we had not anticipated the scale of response from the Chilean community in terms of loaning their craftwork for the exhibition or the input from a professional Chilean documentary maker, Carmen Luz Parot, who agreed to get involved following a chance meeting with Gloria early on in the project. Parot's previous work has included several documentaries focused on the abuses of the military regime including *Estadio Nacional* which examines the use of the national football stadium as a detention centre in the aftermath of the coup in 1973 (Medina-Sancho, 2013).

Our initial idea was to display a small number of craft items that had been made by prisoners, some of which had been sold to fundraise for their families, but we had not anticipated the level of enthusiasm among the exile community. Indeed, one of the most challenging parts of the project was finding a location for the exhibition although we eventually secured space, firstly at the University of Warwick and subsequently at the University of East London.

Insert Figure 3: Selection of items on display at Crafting Resistance exhibition

The film, *Crafting Resistance: The Art of Chilean Political Prisoners,* was conceived by Gloria and myself as a means of documenting the exhibition and capturing the story of the craftwork in a more permanent way. It was also intended to amplify the voices of the craft makers, allowing them to tell the stories of their individual pieces of work. The involvement of Carmen Luz Parot as co-director alongside Gloria, and her expert knowledge and experience completely transformed the film project and ensured a very professional output. The film was premiered at the University of East London on 26th January 2018 and has subsequently been shown at numerous events in a range of settings including the Victoria and Albert Museum in London as part of Refugee Week activities in 2019 and at the Museum of Memory and Human Rights in Santiago, Chile in 2018.

The film presents the collective memories of many of the Chilean exiles in its telling of their story of survival and forced migration following their imprisonment and exile by the military regime. Arguably, Crafting Resistance offers a space to care for difficult knowledge (Andrä et al., 2020). Indeed, as Gloria herself suggests in the film, despite the coup taking place over 45 years ago, the issues still generate a lot of interest and that: 'whenever I see the blouses [she had made in the concentration camp] I remember the situation so hard that we were living and they show that I can survive and that anyone else can survive a horrendous situation and keep on living'. For the Chilean exile community, the exhibition was a public display of all that had been achieved under extreme conditions, as well as a confirmation of their living testimonies of the human rights abuses during the dictatorship. Moreover, as others have previously argued, '[a] focus on craft and material production, [and] conflict textiles bring "missing makers" to the fore of accounts of war and militarized violence' (Andra et al., 2020: 343).

Insert figure 4: Arpilleras and embroidered blouse on display at the Crafting Resistance exhibition

The exhibition was an opportunity for the exile community to curate their own story, something that has arguably been previously denied to them despite the establishment of the Museum of Memory in Chile (Hite and Collins, 2009). The impact of state-sponsored memorials can often be problematic because they 'freeze the event in time and make it history – it is over – thereby neatly fitting it into a hegemonic narrative of collective memory' (Boesten and Scanlon, 2021: 7). However, one of the challenges in the Chilean case has been the 'fragmented, diverse and atomised nature of many of the collective memory voices at the grass roots' (Hite and Collins, 2009: 386). Indeed, the experiences of the Chilean exiles have been complex and their experiences and memories have still to be officially recognised (Hirsch, 2016: 83).

Film participants were identified by Gloria as she had asked for volunteers when collecting the craftwork. I had already interviewed some of the participants in my wider research project and many had publicly 'told their story' of exile from Chile. However, for a small number of the participants, being involved in making the film was the first time they had publicly spoken of their experiences. As noted above, I interviewed 10 exiles with each interview being filmed by a research assistant. The interviews were all transcribed and then excerpts from the transcripts selected to construct the narrative. Given the subject matter of the interviews I was particularly conscious of my own positionality as an academic researcher who has never experienced forced migration or exile. Nevertheless, reflexivity means acknowledging the different subject positions of both interviewer and

interviewee, how they are being negotiated during the interview and the ways in which these differences and negotiations inevitably affect research outcomes (Vacchelli 2018). Building trust is central to any collaborative work and this means listening, attunement, recognition, respect and reflexivity leading to understanding (O Neill et al 2019: 133). At the same time, as Rose (1997) observes, it is important that we acknowledge understandings of the spaces in which positionality takes place. The interviews took place in a university building and I was conscious of how this might be interpreted by the respondents in terms of the power balance between me as the interviewer and them as the research participants. Respondents were free to bring family members with them to the interviews and Gloria and Carmen Luz Parot were also present. While on the one hand, the number of people in the room may have proved disconcerting for some, the atmosphere was relaxed, potentially disrupting possible unequal power dynamics.

Practical challenges in making Crafting Resistance

Within the wider debates on ABM, a number of challenges have been identified that can constrain the success of initiatives and potentially limit the scope of what can be achieved through using ABM as a means of conducting research or in the dissemination of research. In particular, ABM can be very costly both in terms of financial resources but also academic and time pressures for both researchers and community participants (Boydell et al., 2012).

Although I had secured some funding from a public engagement grant within my institution, funds were limited and did not cover the real costs (both financial and non-monetary). Ultimately the success of the project depended on the voluntary contributions of both Gloria herself and her networks and others who supported the project. The project funding paid a research assistant to film the interviews and the Derek Jarman Lab, Birkbeck for editorial support. Film equipment was borrowed from the Jarman Lab and staff at both UEL and Warwick contributed many unpaid hours to help set up the exhibition. Without all of this unpaid support, the project would not have been possible and again this points to the unforeseen challenges I faced around the scale and cost of work involved. While all of the participants gave up their time because of a personal or political commitment to the project, it is nevertheless important to ensure arts-based work is sufficiently costed and does not depend on volunteers to be successful.

As an academic it was hard not to feel conflicted around my own time contributions to the project. Given the widespread failure to acknowledge films and exhibitions as 'legitimate' academic outputs it can be hard to gain professional recognition for this type of project (Mistry and Berardi, 2012; Mistry

et al., 2014). In addition, tensions between 'communities' and 'academics' are not uncommon in arts-based work as academics may have unrealistic expectations about community partners (Mistry and Berardi, 2012). The differing positionalities of academics and community participants can mean participants come to projects with different understandings and intentions (Bachelet and Jeffrey, 2019; Parr, 2007) and this can result in misunderstandings. Garrett and Brickell (2015) reflect on their experiences of collaborating in a community-based film making project and while they believed as researchers they were on occasion 'taking a back seat' in order to let events unfold, their behaviour was interpreted very differently by project participants who felt that they were being lazy. Collaborative film-making between academics and community film-makers is not a straightforward process, nor easy to manage or predict in terms of concerns about equality and dominance. However, this does not detract from what collaborative arts-based work can potentially offer, particularly in terms of challenging 'the myth of the objective and purely observant social scientist' (Parr, 2007: 130; see also Ryburn, 2024 this volume). Moreover, co-production can challenge ways of knowing and existing power dynamics by assigning value to the expertise of experience rather than prioritising academic knowledge (Darby 2017).

Crafting resistance and talking about trauma

Despite these limitations and challenges, there is much to be learnt from Crafting Resistance about the relationship between ABM and talking about experiences of forced migration and the associated trauma experienced by many refugees. Although research on the use of arts-based therapy in this context has found that the most statistically significant decrease in trauma symptom severity was after art therapy intervention in combination with psychotherapy treatment (Schouten et al., 2015), there is considerable potential in working with ABM alone. Indeed, the possibilities offered by art and craft to explore memories and emotions subtly and symbolically and the role arts can play in providing a safe space to resolve overwhelming traumatic symptoms should not be underestimated (Rowe et al., 2017). In the film, respondents reflect on the importance of crafting to them in the context of the prison camps and how this creative work served as an important coping mechanism. Beatriz reflected on the significance of the crafts in terms of helping them 'carry on' and to survive.

Sergio expands on this further:

> 'I think that's mainly the meaning of what, you know, the crafts are … And of course, it has a meaning, how to survive in terms of money. Little money, it's not a big money but it's, yeah, it is enforcing your belief and transmitting what you feel at that moment

> through that object. You are alone sometimes, you know, working, doing the small things, and you are fully concentrating and your mind is thinking about, you know, how I pass this message to my kid or to my wife or to our friends, you know… But for the people who are prisoners, yeah, you have the creativity to do things but it's more than that. It gives you, you know, the strength, and you build that with that … and there is a sense of fulfilment also you know. Even you do something which is, you know, not very brilliant (laughs) but you do it yourself with, you know, very tiny means. You don't have the means to do that, but you manage to do very difficult things.'

Similarly, Cristina explains how they gave her something positive to focus on:

> 'It would certainly concentrate our minds on something that, although we didn't think at that time it was going to have that historical value. But, certainly, [it] helped us to at least to transfer some of our energy, some thoughts on something positive that we were creating something, again, as another way of demonstrating that we were not only alive but we're still able to create and do something nice and positive.'

She also contemplates the meaning of the craftwork today:

> [I] would like to think that they would be a testimony … an historic testimony of an activity … of a period of, of a dark period in Chile, but I would like to think it's a testimony of something that was produced in spite of adversity. Something that, certainly, I don't … personally I did not make these thinking, oh, I want this to be something in 40-whatever years' time. But I'd like to see that's what they have become – a testimony, and that will contribute to the construction of the memory of what happened in Chile at that time, or that it could happen in any part of the world.'

The therapeutic value of craftwork and its potential role in terms of facilitating discussion about trauma and stories of forced migration is clearly articulated by the Crafting Resistance participants. Moreover, the contribution of craftwork to 'difficult conversations' is not time-limited and has continued to play a role in enabling Chilean exiles to progress down the 'road to social repair', coming to terms with the long-term legacies of the military regime, both on a personal level but also at a community level. Furthermore, revisiting the craftwork today has

enabled new conversations to happen within families of Chilean exiles and it has created a space to discuss the intergenerational impacts of trauma.

Conclusions

Through reflections on the making of Crafting Resistance, this paper has highlighted some of the opportunities and challenges associated with ABM both as research tool and as a means of achieving 'real world' impact. Beyond this, it has also focused on two central arguments: the importance of craft as a means of political resistance and the contribution of ABM in creating spaces to talk about intergenerational trauma. The case of Crafting Resistance vividly illustrates how the creation of craftwork both during the Chilean's incarceration in concentration camps and subsequently from their position as political exiles, was able to facilitate the telling of collective memory and 'promote active remembering—enacting the link between remembering the past and changing the future' (Bold et al., 2002: 130).

The analysis also points to the importance of ABM as a means of generating new conversations around intergenerational trauma and the need for future research in this area. As Bloch (2018) contends, the telling of stories of traumatic pasts can help build bridges between first and second generation 'victims'. While it has not been possible to explore this in any depth in this paper it is clear that Crafting Resistance has been important in creating a space for stories to be told across generations. For one second generation Chilean exile, Jimena Pardo, whose mother features in the film, listening to her parents tell their stories prompted her to continue the work of using craft as a means of political expression. Pardo subsequently took on the facilitation of '*Bordando por la Memoria'* (Embroidering Memory), a community group focused on embroidering the names of approximately 3,000 men, women and children who were disappeared under the military regime. *Bordando por la Memoria* also organises sewing workshops and public talks about the history of the Chilean dictatorship, maintaining an active community on Facebook (with approximately 1,400 members) where participants share their work and discuss issues of relevance to the Chilean diaspora.

The paper also emphasises the importance of Crafting Resistance in terms of 'caring for difficult knowledge'. At the same time, the project is testimony to the fact that while 'trauma stories' can be difficult to both tell and hear, craftwork can play a critical role in facilitating this process and potentially has a central role to play in the longer-term healing of trauma. Moreover, as forced migration remains a constant challenge in the world, the paper highlights the vital importance and potential of ABM in

academic research as a means of incorporating marginalised voices and creating a space for people to tell their stories on their own terms.

Acknowledgements

I would like to firstly thank Gloria Miqueles for her friendship and support and all of the work that made this project possible. I am also grateful to all the participants of Crafting Resistance and the wider research project who shared their stories with me and gave up time to be a part of this research. Thanks also to Carmen Luz Parot for her work on the film and to everyone else who played a role in the different stages of the project. Finally thank you to Cathy McIlwaine and Megan Ryburn for inviting me to be a part of this Special Issue and for their helpful comments on my paper, alongside those of the anonymous referee.

Bibliography

Adams, J. (2018) Using visual methods in human rights research. *Journal of Human Rights*, 17 (5): 674-684.

Adams, J. (2001) The makings of political art. *Qualitative Sociology* 24 (3): 311-348.

Agosín, M. (2008) *Tapestries of hope, threads of love: The Arpillera movement in Chile*. Rowman & Littlefield: Lanham, Maryland.

Aguilar, M. (2005) The ethnography of the Villa Grimaldi in Pinochet's Chile: From public landscape to secret detention centre (1973-1980). *Iberoamericana* 5 (18): 7-23.

Aguilar, M. (2001). The Vicaría de la Solidaridad and the Pinochet Regime (1976-1980): religion and politics in 20th century Chile. *Iberoamericana–Nordic Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, 31(1): 101-115.

Alcalá, P. R. and Baines, E. (2012) Editorial note: Transitional justice and the everyday, *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 6: 385–393.

Andrä, C., Bliesemann de Guevara, B., Cole, L., and House, D. (2020) Knowing through needlework: curating the difficult knowledge of conflict textiles." *Critical Military Studies* 6 (3-4): 341-359.

Angell, A., & Carstairs, S. (1987) The exile question in Chilean politics. *Third World Quarterly*, *9*(1): 148-167.

Bachelet, S., and Jeffery, L. (2019) Creative engagement with migration in Morocco: An ethnographic exploration of photographic encounters. *Crossings: Journal of Migration & Culture* 10 (1): 25–42

Bernasconi, O. (2019) *Resistance to Political Violence in Latin America: Documenting Atrocity.* Palgrave Macmillan: Cham, Switzerland.

Bliesemann de Guevara, B. and Krystalli, R. (2022). Doing memory with needle and thread: narrating transformations of violent conflict. *Contemporary Voices: St Andrews Journal of International Relations*, 3(1), p.21. DOI: http://doi.org/10.15664/jtr.1630

Bloch, A. (2022). How memory survives: Descendants of Auschwitz survivors and the progenic tattoo. *Thesis Eleven*, *168*(1), 107-122.

Bloch, A. (2018) Talking about the past, locating it in the present: The second generation from refugee backgrounds making sense of their parents' narratives, narrative gaps and silences. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 31 (4): 647-663.

Bloch, A., & Hirsch, S. (2018). Inter-generational transnationalism: The impact of refugee backgrounds on second generation. *Comparative migration studies*, *6*(1), 1-18.

Blomfield, I. and Lenette, C. (2018) Artistic representations of refugees: What is the role of the artist?, *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 39 (3): 322-338.

Boesten, J. and Scanlon, H. (2021) Gender and the arts of transition, in Boesten, J. and Scanlon, H. (Eds.) *Gender, Transitional Justice and Memorial Arts: Global Perspectives on Commemoration and Mobilization.* Taylor and Francis Inc: Abingdon, Oxon and New York pp. 21-38.

Bold, C., Knowles, R., & Leach, B. (2002) Feminist memorializing and cultural countermemory: The case of Marianne's Park. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, *28* (1): 125-148.

Boydell, K., Gladstone, B. M., Volpe, T., Allemang, B., & Stasiulis, E. (2012) The production and dissemination of knowledge: A scoping review of arts-based health research. In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 13 (1): 1-30.

Collins, C. (2018) Transitional justice 'from within': Police, forensic and legal actors searching for Chile's disappeared. *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 10 (1): 19-39.

Corcoran, L., and Lane, A. (2018) Exploring the impact of off the beaten path: violence, women, and art." *Women's Studies International Forum* 67 (March): 72–79.

Darby, S. (2017) Making space for co-produced research 'impact': learning from a participatory action research case study. *Area*, *49* (2): 230-237.

Eastmond, M. (2007) Stories as lived experience: Narratives in forced migration research. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *20* (2): 248-264.

Fraser, K. D. and al Sayah, F. (2011) Arts-based methods in health research: A systematic review of the literature. *Arts & Health*, 3 (2): 110-145

Garrett, B. L., & Brickell, K. (2015) Participatory politics of partnership: video workshops on domestic violence in Cambodia. *Area*, 47 (3): 230-236.

Gideon, J. (2022). Journeys to health: the case of Chilean exiles in the UK. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 35(3): 1089-1106.

Gideon, J. (2018) Gendering activism, exile and wellbeing: Chilean exiles in the UK. *Gender, Place and Culture* 25 (2): 228-247.

Gideon, J. (2016) 'Mental health and forced migration: the case of Chilean exiles in the UK', in Thomas, F. (ed) *The International Handbook of Migration and Health*, Edward Elgar: Cheltenham, pp.318-339.

Guruge, S., Hynie, M., Shakya, Y., Akbari, A., Htoo, S., & Abiyo, S. (2015, August). Refugee youth and migration: Using arts-informed research to understand changes in their roles and responsibilities. In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 16 (3); 1-36.

Hawkins, H. (2015) Creative geographic methods: knowing, representing, intervening. On composing place and page. C*ultural Geographies* 22 (2): 247-268.

Hirsch, S. (2016). Chilean exiles, reconciliation and return: an alternative view from below. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *29* (1): 82-97.

Hirsch, M. and Smith, V. (2002) Feminism and cultural memory: An introduction, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28 (1): 1–19.

Hite, K. and Collins, C. (2009) Memorial fragments, monumental silences and re-awakenings in 21st-century Chile." *Millennium* 38 (2): 379-400.

Jackson, L. (2016) Experiencing exclusion and reacting to stereotypes? Navigating borders of the migrant body. *Area*, 48 (3): 292-299.

Johnson, L, and Kendrick, M. (2017) "Impossible is nothing": Expressing difficult knowledge through digital storytelling." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 60 (6): 667-675.

Kargól, M. (2022) Knitting as a remedy: women's everyday creativity in response to hopelessness and despair. *Cultural Studies*, *36*(5): 821-839.

Kerr, R. (2021) Fabricating reconciliation in Canada, in Boesten, J. and Scanlon, H. (Eds.) *Gender, Transitional Justice and Memorial Arts: Global Perspectives on Commemoration and Mobilization.* Taylor and Francis Inc: Abingdon, Oxon and New York pp.155-171.

Khorana, S. (2021) How to make arts-based interventions appropriate for young refugees?: towards a decolonial framework, *Journal of Youth Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2021.1929885

Kidron, C. A. (2009) Toward an ethnography of silence: The lived presence of the past in the everyday life of Holocaust trauma survivors and their descendants in Israel. *Current Anthropology*, 50 (1): 5-27.

Lehrer, E., and C. E. Milton. (2011) Introduction: Witnesses to Witnessing, in (Eds) Lehrer, E., Milton, C.E. and Patterson, M.E. *Curating Difficult Knowledge: Violent Pasts in Public Places*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. Pp 1-22.

Lenette, C., Brough, M., Schweitzer, R. D., Correa-Velez, I., Murray, K., & Vromans, L. (2018) 'Better than a pill': digital storytelling as a narrative process for refugee women. *Media Practice and Education*, 20(1): 67-86.

Lines, T. (2024, forthcoming) 'Portraits of feminicide: mural painting as protection among migrant women in Quintana Roo, Mexico', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies.***,**

Lira, E. (2016) Reflections on rehabilitation as a form of reparation in Chile after Pinochet's Dictatorship. *International Human Rights Law Review* 5 (2): 194-216.

Lopes Heimer, R. (2024, forthcoming) 'Embodying intimate border violence: Collaborative art-research as multipliers of Latin American migrant women's affects', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies.*

McIlwaine, C. and Ryburn, M. (2024, forthcoming) 'Introduction: towards migration-violence creative pathways'**,** *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies.*

McSherry, J. P. (2017) The political impact of Chilean New Song in exile. *Latin American Perspectives* 44 (5): 13-29.

Medina-Sancho, G. (2013) Spaces recovered by memory: Film language and testimony in Parot's Estadio Nacional. *Latin American Perspectives* 40 (1): 161-169.

Miller, K.E., Worthington, G. J., Muzurovic, J., Tipping, S. and Goldman, A. (2002) Bosnian refugees and the stressors of exile: A narrative study. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 72(3): 341–354.

Mistry, J. and Berardi, A. (2012) The challenges and opportunities of participatory video in geographical research: exploring collaboration with indigenous communities in the North Rupununi, Guyana. *Area*, 44(1): 110–116.

Mistry, J., Bignante, E. and Berardi, A. (2016) Why are we doing it? Exploring participant motivations within a participatory video project. *Area* 48 (4): 412-418.

Müller-Suleymanova, D. (2021) Shadows of the past: violent conflict and its repercussions for second-generation Bosnians in the diaspora, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studie*s, DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2021.1973392

Nunn, C. (2017). Translations-Generations: Representing and producing migration generations through arts-based research. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 38(1): 1-17.

O'Neill, M., Erel, U. Kaptani, E. and Reynolds, T. (2019). Borders, risk and belonging: challenges for arts-based research in understanding the lives of women asylum seekers and migrants 'at the borders of humanity'. *Crossings: Journal of Migration and Culture* 10 (1): 129–47.

Packard, J. (2008) "I'm gonna show you what it's really like out there": The power and limitation of participatory visual methods. *Visual Studies*, 23(1): 63–77.

Parr, H. (2007). Collaborative film-making as process, method and text in mental health research." *Cultural Geographies* 14 (1): 114–38.

Puvimanasinghe, T., Denson, L. A., Augoustinos, M., & Somasundaram, D. (2015) Narrative and silence: How former refugees talk about loss and past trauma. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 28(1): 69-92.

Rose, G. (1997). Situating knowledges: positionality, reflexivities and other tactics. *Progress in Human Geography*, *21*(3): 305-320.

Rowe, C., Watson-Ormond, R., English, L., Rubesin, H., Marshall, A., Linton, K., Amolegbe, A., Agnew-Brune, C. and Eng, E. (2017) Evaluating art therapy to heal the effects of trauma among refugee youth: The Burma art therapy program evaluation. *Health Promotion Practice* 18 (1): 26-33.

Ryburn, M. (2024, forthcoming) 'Animating migration journeys from Colombia to Chile: Expressing embodied experience through co-produced film' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies.*

Segalo, P. (2022) Embroidered voices: Exposing hidden trauma stories of Apartheid, *Textile*, DOI: 10.1080/14759756.2022.2036071

Schouten, K., de Niet, J., Knipscheer, J., Kleber, R. and Hutschemaekers, G. (2015) The effectiveness of art therapy in the treatment of traumatized adults: a systematic review on art therapy and trauma. *Trauma, violence, & abuse* 16 (2); 220-228.

Thomas, M. (1998) Estranged bodies and Vietnamese identities. *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 9 (1): 74-88.

Tidy, J. (2019) War craft: The embodied politics of making war. *Security dialogue* 50 (3): 220-238.

Vacchelli, E. (2018) Embodiment in qualitative research: Collage making with migrant, refugee and asylum seeking women. *Qualitative Research*, *18*(2), 171-190.

Watters, C. (2001). Emerging paradigms in the mental health care of refugees. *Social science & medicine*, *52*(11), 1709-1718.

Whelan, M., Wright-Brough, F., Hancox, D., & Browning, Y. (2020) The generous boys and the nice to meet you band: Students from migrant and refugee backgrounds as leaders in reshaping university values through creative arts-based programmes. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 1-17.

Wyndham, M. and Read, P.J. (2011) The day Londres 38 opened its doors: a milestone in Chilean reconciliation. U*niversitas Humanística* 71: 193-212.

[i] The film is accessible at: Crafting Resistance: The Art of Chilean Political Prisoners (youtube.com)

[ii] After the military coup in Chile in 1973 and the suppression of all political parties, La Vicaría de la Solidaridad, with the support of the Catholic Church, was the only institution that could publicly speak out against human rights abuses within Chile and offered practical support to victims of human rights abuses and their families (Aguilar, 2001).

[iii] In some cases political prisoners had their sentences commuted in exchange for exile – as set out in Decree 504 which was established in 1975 - but many remained in concentration camps while arrangements for the exile were put into place (Ley Chile - Decreto 504 10-MAY-1975 MINISTERIO DE JUSTICIA - Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional (bcn.cl))

[iv] Although the exact figure is unknown it is thought that around 200,000 Chileans were exiled during the military regime, and of those around 3000 exiles came to the UK, of which up to half remain in Britain today (Angell and Carstairs, 1987; Hirsch, 2016).