

## REF Impact Case Study Template

### Expected format 2021

<b>Institution:</b> Birkbeck, University of London
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 14
<b>Title of case study:</b> Crafting Resistance: the art of Chilean political prisoners
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2011-2018
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2013-2019
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N
<p>Gideon's research with Chilean exiles who were political prisoners under the Pinochet regime has led to the production of a museum exhibition and documentary film, both focused on the craftwork produced in Chilean prison camps. The documentary, <i>Crafting Resistance</i>, was directed by Chilean documentary maker Carmen Luz Parot and has been deposited into the permanent collection of the Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos, the only museum dedicated to the victims of the Chilean dictatorship. Screened at the Victoria and Albert Museum, it threw new light on the museum's South American collections, influenced ongoing curatorial practice at the museum, and helped to shape the thinking of the Director of the Refugee Council, which co-organised the event. The documentary has also had a significant personal impact on its Chilean participants and their families, notably spawning an ongoing craftwork project that has been a focus for emotional conversations and strengthened bonds between these ex-political prisoners and their children.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The project 'Crafting Resistance: the art of Chilean political prisoners' is underpinned by Gideon's research considering the health and wellbeing of Chilean exiles in the UK. As part of her research, Gideon conducted 45 oral history interviews with Chilean exiles and key stakeholders, such as ex-directors of the Refugee Council and the World University Service, focussing on their arrivals to the UK in the 1970s and subsequent coping strategies, adapting to life in the UK in the aftermath of exposure to severe abuse of human rights. It is thought that of the approximately 200,000 Chileans exiled during the military regime, approximately 3,000 exiles came to the UK, of which up to half remain in Britain. The Chilean exile community are a hard to reach and relatively under-researched group but offer important insights into refugee experiences having lived as exiles for over four decades.</p> <p>The work that became 'Crafting Resistance' followed on from Gideon's previous research into the Chilean health system and the health seeking behaviour of Latin American migrants in London (REFS3, 4, 5), and was initiated through contact with a Chilean exile ex-student, with whom Gideon organised an event at Birkbeck in 2013 called 'Chilean women 40 years on', coinciding with the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the military coup in Chile. This event gave Gideon a degree of legitimacy within the Chilean exile community and enabled her to conduct new research, interviewing a number of Chilean ex-political prisoners about common health issues potentially connected to their shared experiences.</p> <p>Several different aspects of the research are explored in Gideon's subsequent publications. Her 2018 article, 'Gendering activism, exile and wellbeing: Chilean exiles in the UK' (REF1) predominantly focuses on the women who accompanied political exiles to the UK but did not consider themselves to be political activists. It shows how UK-based campaigning around Chilean solidarity during the military dictatorship offered an important source of wellbeing for many of the women who otherwise felt isolated and uprooted in exile. Coping strategies in exile was also explored in her 2016 book chapter 'Mental health and forced migration: the case of Chilean exiles in the UK' (REF2).</p> <p>During the course of these interviews, a number of participants referred to their experiences of life within Chilean prison camps. Prisoners in more 'open' camps were allowed to engage in different activities and organised themselves to produce a range of crafts, some of which was sold to raise funds for the families of political prisoners and some kept for personal use. Several respondents reflected on the importance of this craftwork for their wellbeing, both during incarceration when it gave prisoners space to be creative and work communally, and today as the craft items serve as a reminder of their history and how far their lives have changed.</p> <p>These discussions culminated in an exhibition of the craftwork (October to November 2017 at the University of Warwick and January to February 2018 at UEL). Over 100 pieces of craft were</p>

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displayed, making the exhibition the largest collection of this type of craftwork outside of the Museum of Memory and Human Rights in Chile. For the Chilean exile community, it 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. It was also an opportunity for the exile community to tell their own story, something that has arguably been previously denied to them despite the establishment of the Museum of Memory. These events raised public awareness about the Chilean experience and highlighted issues about forced migration today.

To document the exhibition and capture the story of the craftwork, Gideon produced a short film, *Crafting Resistance: The Art of Chilean Political Prisoners*. It tells the story of the survivors of Pinochet's dictatorship, who had been imprisoned by the regime and then later fled Chile. Gideon collaborated with renowned Chilean documentary maker, Carmen Luz Parot. The film was funded through a grant from the Birkbeck ISSF funds for public engagement.

#### **3. References to the research** (maximum of six references)

REF1) Gideon, J. (2018) 'Gendering activism, exile and wellbeing: Chilean exiles in the UK', in *Gender, Place & Culture*, 25:2, 228-247, DOI: 10.1080/0966369X.2018.1428534

REF2) *Crafting Resistance* exhibition, Oct- Nov 2017, University of Warwick and Jan-Feb 2018 at the University East London.

REF3) Gideon, J. 'Mental health and forced migration: the case of Chilean exiles in the UK', in Thomas, F. (ed.) (2016) *The International Handbook of Migration and Health*, Edward Elgar: Cheltenham.

REF4) Gideon, J. 'Access versus entitlements: the health-seeking behaviour of Latin American migrants in London', (2013) in Thomas, F. and Gideon, J. (eds) *Migration, Health and Inequality*, Zed Press, London, pp.163-179.

REF5) Gideon, J. and Molyneux, M., 'Limits to progress and change: Reflections on Latin American social policy', in *Social Politics*, 2012, 19 (3), 293-298. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxs013>

REF6) Gideon, J. 'Exploring migrants' health seeking strategies: the case of Latin American migrants in London', in *International Journal of Migration, Health and Social Care*, 2011, 7 (4): 197-208. DOI: 10.1108/17479891111206328

#### **4. Details of the impact** (indicative maximum 750 words)

The 'Crafting Resistance' exhibition, which Gideon co-curated with an ex-political prisoner, and accompanying film, created with Carmen Luz Parot, has had significant impact not only on the community of Chilean exiles in the UK and their families, but also (through the film's acquisition by the Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos) on the Chilean diaspora worldwide. It has additionally impacted the thinking and practice of professionals at both the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Refugee Council, both major institutions which work with large and varied groups of stakeholders.

**Exhibition at Warwick and UEL:** The 'Crafting Resistance' exhibition was launched at the University of Warwick in October 2017 and repeated alongside the premiere of the accompanying film at the University of East London on 26 January 2018. Panel discussions at both locations focused on both the experiences of those included in the film and the longer-term lessons that the Chilean case offers for refugees and forced migrants today, particularly in relation to health and well-being. Speakers included the then-Director of the Refugee Council, a Professor of Psychology and Social Change at UEL and a Clinical Psychologist, who is himself a Chilean ex-political prisoner.

The exhibition served a number of purposes. For the Chilean exile community, it was a public display of all that had been achieved despite working in extreme conditions in prison camps, while also being a confirmation of their living testimonies of the torture and human rights abuses of many Chileans during the dictatorship. The exhibition was an opportunity for the exile community to tell their own story, not only through the interviews that informed the exhibition but also more directly through Gideon's collaboration with her co-curator. Simultaneously, the events raised public awareness about the Chilean experience while also raising issues about forced migration today and reflecting on 'lessons learnt' from previous generations.

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Approximately 50 people attended the panel discussions at each site, with attendees stressing that they had not previously been aware of this aspect of Chilean history; others commented on the powerful stories conveyed through the craftwork, creating new understanding. One attendee wrote, 'This was a very moving event which I think empowers political prisoners as so much more than simply victims. The power of creativity to resist and challenge the horrific regime illustrates the strength of the human spirit' (1). Visitors noted that the exhibition 'empowers political prisoners as [more than] victims'; visitors frequently use the word 'victims' to describe how their assumptions about Chilean prisoners were challenged and changed (1). Moreover, one Chilean attendee reiterated that this was a story they were familiar with, and that the exhibition had affirmed that the prisoners 'were not passive!' (1). Another Chilean visitor attested that this was a 'hidden' part of their history; the exhibition made them 'aware of the hope [that] prisoners had' (1). Even for those with more knowledge, such as one visitor involved in Chilean solidarity campaigns in the 1970s, 'seeing the [prisoners'] artefacts is a powerful illustration of their [resistance]'.

**Museum of Memory and Human Rights:** In December 2017 Gideon was invited to Chile to attend an event around memory and exile at the Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos and to speak about her *Crafting Resistance* project. During the visit Gideon was shown the collection of craftwork held in the Museum's archive as well as objects on public display and talked in-depth to Museum staff about her own work with the Chilean exile community. After her visit, the Museum Director requested a copy of the *Crafting Resistance* film for their collection. With the support of the Museum, *Crafting Resistance* was subsequently translated into Spanish and deposited as a permanent artefact in the archive of the museum. The film was publicly screened on 23 July 2019 (2), to an audience of 55 (3), and alongside other audiovisual materials in the collection, it is accessible to visitors in a dedicated audiovisual screening room.

The museum was opened in 2010 by President Michelle Bachelet, herself an ex-political prisoner interned and tortured by the military regime. The museum is of unique significance in Chile, documenting the Pinochet dictatorship between 1973 and 1990 and provides an inestimably valuable resource for the former political prisoners and the Chilean international diaspora who fled Pinochet's regime. This community is spread across the globe, with significant Chilean populations in Canada, the UK and Sweden amongst other countries. The inclusion of Gideon's film as a permanent historical artefact in the museum's archive places it at the centre of a global network of Chilean exiles and their descendants. It also situates Gideon's research and the words and experiences of the participants in the documentary within the nationally recognised narrative of this period of the country's history. This is particularly important in context: many of those 'disappeared' by Pinochet have still never been found and the fear of being silenced or forgotten is thus particularly acute amongst survivors of the regime. *Crafting Resistance* allows some of these survivors to speak for themselves and gives their testimony a place as part of the national record.

**Second-generation refugees:** The theme of the inter-generational transmission of trauma ran through each of the two launch events, where self-defined 'second generation Chilean exiles' spoke about their experiences of inheriting the craft objects and the responsibility this entails.

Other second-generation exiles have expressed that watching *Crafting Resistance* together similarly enabled them to start new conversations within their families around the trauma that parents had endured. For example, a second-generation exile whose parents participated in the 'Crafting Resistance' film and exhibition, and whose mother is one of the ten ex-political prisoners who appear in the film, was inspired by this experience to develop her own project. She has continued the work of using craft as a means of political expression, founding 'Bordando por la Memoria' (Embroidering Memory), a community group which is 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.

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In addition to founding *Bordando por la Memoria*, she organised two embroidery workshops as part of the film launch at UEL. Forty people attended the workshops and took the opportunity to embroider their own 'arpillera' while also hearing the stories of some of the Chilean women who had similarly made these small tapestries during the dictatorship. The *Bordando por la Memoria* have subsequently organised a number of workshops around the UK including events in Belfast, Liverpool, London and Cambridge. Workshop participants include several first- and second-generation Chilean exiles who use their sewing as a means of commemorating friends and family members disappeared by the regime – often by embroidering images taken from photos of the person – but also by talking about that person as they sew. Participants are invited to tell their own family stories through their craftwork.

'Sewing to protest in a Chilean prison camp' (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/w3cszf07>), an episode of *Outlook*, aired on the BBC World Service at the beginning of September 2020. In the programme, [redacted] reflects on how *Crafting Resistance* opened up new spaces for her to engage with her parents' experiences of both activism and torture and incarceration during the Chilean dictatorship as well as giving her a deeper understanding of what it meant for them to be forced into exile in the UK in the 1970s.

She discussed in the documentary how the impacts of '*Crafting Resistance*' on families like her own have been both very personal and of much wider importance:

'it's been a very intimate journey. It is emotional. But I think it's important that [my mother] does share these stories with me, with my brother, with my sister; at some point, with her grandkids. Because it's not just a part of our family history. I think it's part of a collective experience.' (4)

She also speaks to the ways in which the conversations facilitated by the craftwork, both as displayed in the original exhibition and film, and as practised in the workshops that she now runs herself, can help those impacted by experiences of imprisonment and exile to talk about their own history and to find both companionship and solace.

'I can't say that it will heal everything thoroughly but I think just getting together, maybe with other people that have lived through the same things, and making these things together and talking about them... and sharing that with a younger generation, I think that does have some healing capacity.' (4)

**Impact on UK institutions:** The V&A is the world's 'leading museum of art, design, and performance', attracting over 4,000,000 visitors between 2018 and 2019. The annual Culture in Crisis programme is one of their flagship events (5). In June 2019, *Crafting Resistance* was exhibited at the V&A in collaboration with the Refugee Council and Counterpoint Arts as part of the V&A's Culture in Crisis programme and to celebrate Refugee week. 117 people attended the screening, which was followed by a panel discussion with Gideon and the Director of the Refugee Council. The *Bordando por la Memoria* founder spoke about her project, discussed above, and several of the Chilean women who featured in the film spoke at greater length about their own craftwork. As well as 'support[ing]... the Culture in Crisis programme's strategic goal to raise awareness and advocacy for heritage protection', the event addressed a historical imbalance in the museum's collections. Museum curator and Cultural Heritage Preservation Lead describes it as 'a very valuable piece of programming [...] because we don't have a huge South American collection. The film that Jasmine has produced has specifically helped to rebalance this' (6).

Evidently, Gideon's collaboration with the V&A has impacted on the representation and preservation of international refugee communities' cultural heritage. In a context where refugee communities are marginalised, misrepresented and often vilified, hearing and amplifying their voices matters, doubly so with a diaspora as diffuse as the Chilean refugee community. This importance is reflected in the fact that the event was promoted by key refugee and heritage projects such as the Living Refugee Archive (7) and the Crafts Council (8).

*Crafting Resistance* also had an ongoing impact on the policy and practice of both the V&A and the Refugee Council. The Cultural Heritage Preservation Lead occupies a key strategic role

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within the V&A. *Crafting Resistance* helped her not only to ‘understand more about the experience of Chilean women of the 1970s’ but to reflect and apply this lesson more broadly, ‘to inform [the museum’s] own work for contemporary refugee or displaced communities’. Additionally, the event format helped to establish a model for future programming at the museum: she describes the screening and discussion programme as ‘advantageous’ when compared to their regular programming of talks given in isolation, serving ‘as a good test for how we do something like this in the future’ (6).

The Refugee Council is a national charity that in 2019 supported over 8,600 refugees (8). The V&A and Refugee Council have a well-established relationship and collaborated in co-organising the *Crafting Resistance* screening and discussions, in which the Director of the Refugee Council participated (9).

#### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- 1) University of Warwick: *Crafting Resistance* exhibition and feedback
- 2) Museo de la Memoria Event Listing: Collectible Cinema: *Creating Resistance* Museum of Memory and Human Rights
- 3) Museo de la Memoria: *Crafting Resistance* attendance figures and screening date email
- 4) ‘Sewing to protest in a Chilean prison camp’ *BBC World Service* radio programme
- 5) Victoria and Albert Museum Annual Report 2018-19
- 6) Victoria and Albert Museum Testimonial
- 7) Living Refugee Archive web listings of *Crafting Resistance*: ‘Culture in Crisis: *Crafting Resistance* Part of Refugee Week 2019’; ‘*Crafting Resistance* Exhibition’
- 8) *Supporting and Empowering Refugees: Impact Report 2017/18*, Refugee Council
- 9) Crafts Council: Web listing, ‘Refugee week: 10 events celebrating émigré craftspeople’