Crafting Resistance: Archiving and Documenting the Art of Chilean Refugees

By Paul V. Dudman
Archivist
Structure of Presentation

- Introduction to the Archives held at the University of East London including the Refugee Council Archive
- Crafting Resistance: An Introduction to our new exhibition on The Art of Chilean Political Prisoners
- Brief contextual history of the Military Dictatorship in Chile in the 1970s and the role of the Refugee Council
- Examples from the Exhibition
- Archives and Civic Engagement at UEL
- Online Resources for OLIve
Introduction to the Archive

- My name is Paul Dudman and I have been the Archivist here at UEL for the last 15 years.
- So, to put this lecture in context I will start with a question.
- So, what is an Archive?
Archives are the same as libraries, right?

Wrong. Archives differ from libraries in a number of ways:

- Libraries traditionally hold secondary source materials in the form of books and journals, whilst archives hold the primary source materials as indicated above.

- Archives are organised differently too! Archives are catalogued differently too in a more descriptive fashion which focuses on context, provenance and original order.

- It is also important to remember that not everything has been kept or has survived!

- Equally not everything is open as we have to comply with legislation including the Data Protection Act.
Archives are:

- Sometimes called record offices or repositories, an Archive is a place where archives are stored.
- Archival material essentially represents evidence of activities subsequently kept for their functional or historical value.
- Archival materials are very often unique and are therefore considered to be primary sources for research.
- They contain first hand accounts and narratives which can be used in the production of secondary sources e.g. books and articles.
In essence, ....

- Archives are primary source materials that have been created by individuals, groups or organisations during the course of their life or work and deemed to be worth keeping permanently for the purposes of research.

- Archives are often perceived to be dusty old manuscripts stored in a forgotten basement! However, Archives can consist of records of any age, from ancient manuscripts right through to contemporary digital records and can be in any format. Archives act as our cultural and social memory, recording our personal, social, economic and political activities throughout history, and they provide the primary evidence on which our history is based.
Archives at UEL

- Docklands Campus
  - Refugee Archive Collections
    - Inc. Refugee Council Archive; Northern Refugee Centre Archive, & UNHCR Audio-Visual Collection, CARA Archive.
  - British Olympic Association Archive & Library
  - Eastside Community Heritage Oral History Collection
  - UEL Institutional Archive

- Stratford Campus
  - Hackney Empire Theatre Archive
Refugee Archive Collections

- Refugee and Migration based collections held at the University of East London

  - The Refugee Council Archive
  - Council for Assisting At-Risk Academics (CARA)
  - Northern Refugee Centre Archive
  - UNHCR (London Office) Audio-Visual Library
  - Charter 87
  - Cambridge Refugee Support Group Archive
  - Just Arrived: Information Centre of Asylum and Refugees (ICAR)
What is archival research in refugee and forced migration studies?

“Refugees are the experts of their own experience” (Hynes, 2003, p.1)

How accessible are these experiences and narratives within the surviving archival record?

Refugee voices and first-hand testimonies can be very important when used in conjunction with policy documents and academic research.

“Text is always biased, always limited and always deceptive.” (Prescott, 33)

We must always be aware of inherent biases in the archival materials we examine.
Crafting Resistance: the art of Chilean political prisoners

- An exhibition co-curated by Jasmine Gideon, Birkbeck, University of London and Gloria Miqueles, Chilean Ex-political prisoner and hosted by the Refugee Council Archive here at UEL.
- Exhibition contains over 150 had crafted artworks of various types created by Chilean political prisoners whilst in detention. Many of these prisoners subsequently fled Chile to become refugees ensuring the survival of their art and craft works.
- Friday, 26th July 2018: Launch Event for Crafting Resistance: the art of Chilean political prisoners, including a Panel Discussion (1400-1630) and a series of Talks, Poetry and Music (1645-1830). Speakers include Maurice Wren, Chief Executive of Refugee Council and Professor Rachel Tribe from the UEL School of Psychology on issues pertaining to mental health in refugee situations.
- Exhibition will be showcased in the Docklands Campus Archive (Library)
- Exhibition and Workshop: Crafting Resistance: The Art of Chilean Political Prisoners Embroidery Workshops: Saturday, 3rd February 2018: 1300-1600 and Wednesday, 7th February 2018: 1300-1600
- Booking via Eventbrite Page at: https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/department-of-geography-5929549317
Flyers Available

Exhibition

Crafting Resistance: The art of Chilean political prisoners

Dates: 24th January – 14th February 2018
Venue: Library & Learning Service: Archives
Address: University of East London, Docklands University Way, London E16 2RD (DLR Cyprus station)
Opening hours: Mon - Friday 09:00 - 17:00
Saturday 12:00 - 17:00

EVENTS DURING THE EXHIBITION:

Opening event: 24th January 2018, 14:00 – 18:30

‘Refugees and exiles: Resistance, well-being & mental endurance’
- Panel discussion: 14:00 – 14:30
- Chilean exiles - talks, poetry, music: 16:45 – 18:30
Venue: UEL Docklands Campus Room EB.G.10

Embroidery Workshops: 3rd February and 7th February, 15:00 - 16:00

‘Embroidering memory and resistance’
Embroidery and talks exploring the use of textile as a form of preserving memory & as an act of solidarity and resistance.
Venue: Library & Learning Services: Archives Room
Limited spaces, please register: e-mail: craftingshienrmemory@gmail.com

The objects create the borders we forget and today, they are an example of solidarity, resilience and resistance.

An exhibition co-created by Jessica Collier, Limmber, University of London & Chile Memory Chilean political prisoners.
Project partly funded by 'Limmber welcome trust' funded by University of East London - archives.
Programme - Panel Discussion

- Refugees and exiles: Resistance, well-being & mental endurance
- Panel discussion organised by Jasmine Gideon, Dept of Geography, Birkbeck, University of London
- Programme:
  - Welcome and Introductions: Dr. Jasmine Gideon, Dept of Geography, Birkbeck.
  - 'Refugees and Social Justice' Prof. Rachel Tribe, Professor of Psychology and Social Change, Psychology, UEL.
  - 'Post-migration Stressors as Possible Predictors of Mental Health Problems among Resettled Refugees'. UEL Refugee and Mental Health team.
  - 'Refugees, Mental Health and the Refugee Council' Maurice Wren, Director, Refugee Council.
  - Writing Peace and Resistance in Afghanistan: "Ghazals (poems) are our guns too", Dr Ayesha Ahmad, Lecturer in Global Health, St Georges University of London.
  - Chilean clinical psychologists and their work with survivors of war and torture". Kenjiro Sato (Chilean ex political prisoner and Swedish-based Clinical psychologist) and Cristian Pena (Clinical psychologist)
Programme

- 16:45 - 18:30
- Chilean exiles in conversation, talks, poetry, music
- A session organised by Gloria Miqueles, Chilean Ex-political prisoner.

Programme:
- Welcome and Introductions: Gloria Miqueles
- Music in Solidarity: Patricia Pons and Ignacio Rivera
- Documentary ‘Crafting Resistance: the art of Chilean political prisoners’ introduced by Jasmine Gideon
- In Conversation. A panel of Chilean (ex-political prisoners, relatives of ex-pp and second generation) will reflect on the importance of making handicrafts, resilience, resistance and solidarity and will answer questions.
- The Poetry of Resilience: Reading of poems written in concentration camps
- Closing remarks and announcements
Background to Crafting Resistance

Crafting Resistance challenges the idea of political prisoners as 'passive victims' which fails to recognise the degree of agency many prisoners retain despite the horrific circumstances they endure. During the military dictatorship of General Pinochet in Chile (1973-1990) hundreds of political prisoners were held in concentration camps throughout the country. In a number of these camps, prisoners organised themselves and crafted items from the very limited materials and improvised tools available to them. The exhibition brings together a collection of these artefacts and reflects on their importance in relation to sustaining the mental health and wellbeing of those incarcerated. These artefacts are now testimony to the mental endurance of all those who were political prisoners under the Pinochet regime.
Chilean History: Military Dictatorship

- Military rule existed in Chile from 1973 through to 1990.
- The dictatorship was established following a CIA-backed coup d’etat on the 11st September 1973, which saw the democratically elected socialist government of Salvador Allende.
- The coup resulted in the creation of a new ruling military Junta headed by General Augusto Pinochet.
- A recent economic crises in Chile and a perceived breakdown in democracy was the cue for the coup which was presented in terms of “national reconstruction.”
Military Rule in Chile

- The rule of General Pinochet and the military junta was to become characterized by the systemic repression of political parties and the persecution of dissidents.
- Figures estimate that over the course of the regime, over 3,000 people were left either dead or missing whilst a further 200,000 Chileans were forced to flee into exile.
- Human rights violations during this period became common through the use of detention centres/concentration camps and the forced disappearances of many thousands of Chileans who opposed the new regime.
General Augusto Pinochet

During the later 1980’s the commander in chiefs of the Chilean army, navy and airforce disassociated themselves from Pinochet in favour of civilian rule.

Defeat in the 1988 Plebiscite designed to confer a further 8 year term for Pinochet resulted in democratic elections in 1989 resulting in Pinochet leaving the presidency on 11 March 1990.

Post presidency there were many attempts to bring Pinochet to trial over human rights violations. He spent time under house arrest in the UK but was declared unfit to stand trial in Spain and returned to Chile.

Further attempts to try Pinochet occurred in Chile but he eventually passed away in December 2006, without being convicted of any of the crimes he had been accused.
Chilean Refugees and the Refugee Council

- The British Council for Aid to Refugees (BCAR), and forerunner of the Refugee Council, was one of the lead organisations who responded to the need to help resettle Chilean refugees who fled to the UK.

- In partnership with the charity Christian Aid and the UK Government, BCAR founded the Joint Council for Refugees from Chile to help with resettlement as no one organisation had the resources to do this single-handed.

- BCAR was able to receive over 100 Chilean refugees following the Coup.

- The work of the Joint Council was later expanded to cover other South American countries and by the end of 1979, over 3,000 Latin American refugees had been resettled in the UK.
Refugee Council Annual Reports
Examples from the Exhibition 1

- **Clothing - Textiles - Accessories in Leather**
- **Name:** Weaved in a loom cigarette holder

**Description:** A weaved in a loom cigarette holder with leather sides, drawings and dedicated. Made by men prisoners in Tres Alamos (3 Alamos) detention centre, a present.
Examples from the Exhibition

2

- **Name:** Sea Horses

- **Description:**

  - 3 Sea horses. Made in 1975 in Tres Alamos concentration camp. In the middle of 1975 some prisoners including myself were moved back to Tres Alamos. Temporarily (for about a month) we were located in what had been the women’s prison section of Tres Alamos. I cut a piece of wood from my cell and these Sea horses.
Examples from the Exhibition

3

- Section of Exhibition on Toys
- Name: Small Soporopo
- Description:

Crafts were made in 1974 in Tres Alamos concentration camp and given to a fellow prisoner while both were detained in Tres Alamos. 1 small figure (known as Soporopo) made in the women’s section of the Tres camp.
Examples from the Exhibition 4

- **Name:** Peace dove en moneda and lapis lazuli

- **Description:**

  Peace dove made in Tres Alamos concentration camp in 1975. The dove was made from a Chilean coin and the stone (Lapiz lazuli ?) was shaped and polished from raw material brought from Chacabuco concentration camp (Atacama Desert).
Arpilleras

- **Arpilleras** are brightly colored patchwork pictures made by groups of women (also known as **arpilleristas**) in Chile during the **military dictatorship (1973-90)** of **Augusto Pinochet**. Constructed from simple materials such as burlap and scraps of cloth, they typically depict scenes of hardship and violence that many women experienced during the dictatorship due to impoverished living conditions and government repression.

- Many were made by women imprisoned in concentration camps by the military regime reflecting the conditions and hardships the women faced.
Examples of Arpilleras in the Exhibition
Documenting Experiences and Narratives

- The exhibition also includes materials which helps us to draw narratives and experiences of those who experienced life as a political prisoner.

- For example, *Crafting Resistance* contains hard drawn pictures and documents examples of solidarity and resistance which both show the suffering of the individual bit also the commitment and courage against the incumbent military regime.

- The following examples I hope will highlight the importance of preserving such items given the importance of the narratives and stories they hold.
Experiences
From my own perspective as an Archivist, this highlights the importance of the role of Archives in helping to preserve and make accessible our collections to ensure that these narratives and stories survive.

Archives are home to a multitude of interacting stories, narratives and testimonies. Some rise to the surface easily, others are hidden.

For example, How can archives approach the documenting of the life history narratives of refugees and migrants?

Ongoing civic engagement projects looking at bottom-up oral history approaches towards exploring the “contradictory narratives of transcultural encounters of refugees and undocumented migrants in London” (Hashem and Dudman (2016)).
Materials from the Archive
Archives & Civic Engagement

- **Refugee Mental Health and Wellbeing Portal**: A project to develop an online resource portal specifically for Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Health and Social Care Professionals. Link: [https://www.uel.ac.uk/schools/psychology/research/refugee-mental-health-and-wellbeing-portal](https://www.uel.ac.uk/schools/psychology/research/refugee-mental-health-and-wellbeing-portal)
“Democratic Access or Privileged Exclusion: Civic Engagement through the Preservation and Access to Refugee Archives.” To engage with local communities to establish a Living Refugee Archive and to promote and enable accessibility and engagement through the collection of oral histories. Link: http://www.livingrefugeearchive.org/
Archives & Civic Engagement

- Supporting the OLlve programme.
- “Supporting Refugees into Higher Education: A Research Hub for London”: A project designed to create an online resource hub of higher education resources for refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. This formed part of our wider Erasmus+ funded OLlve (Online Learning Initiative) course. Link: https://www.uel.ac.uk/schools/social-sciences/olive

- Resources are available on our website from the two previous OLlve courses and we will be adding lecture and workshop materials from this course as well.

- We also have an OLlve blog at https://olivecourseuel.wordpress.com/ and if any of you would like to contribute your experiences from this course please do let us know.
UEL Web and Online Resources

- Living Refugee Archive:  www.livingrefugeearchive.org
- Refugee Mental Health and Wellbeing Portal:  https://www.uel.ac.uk/schools/psychology/research/refugee-mental-health-and-wellbeing-portal
- UEL OLlve Course:  https://www.uel.ac.uk/schools/social-sciences/olive
- UEL OLlve Course Blog:  https://olivecourseuel.wordpress.com/
- UEL OLlve Facebook:  https://www.facebook.com/groups/1481275878572785/


Contact Details

- You are welcome to come and visit the Archive. We are on the ground floor of the Docklands Library.

- Opening hours are: Tuesday and Wednesday - 10am-6pm; and Thursdays and Fridays: 1pm - 5pm. Other times by appointment.

- Contact me, Paul Dudman, on:

  - Email - p.v.dudman@uel.ac.uk
  - Telephone - 020 8223 7676
  - Twitter - @refugee_archive / @pauldudman