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Doing memory with needle and thread: narrating transformations of violent conflict

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Dr Roxani Krystalli is a Lecturer at the University of St Andrews, Scotland, with a research focus on feminist approaches to peace and conflict studies. For over a decade, she has worked as a practitioner in humanitarian action, peace-building and transitional justice. She is also a writer and storyteller, interested in the themes of memory and loss, nature and place, violence and care.

Abstract

The two authors embark on a conversation about how textiles open up space for different kinds of storytelling – understood as central to interpretive research – about violence, memory and transformation in the aftermath of armed conflict. They draw on their respective research and experiences in the context of the armed conflict and fragile peace process in Colombia, where Roxani investigates the politics and hierarchies of victimhood, and Berit is involved in a project that combines narrative practice and textile narratives into a methodology to explore former guerrilla combatants' subjectivities and wider society's resonances to their preferred stories. Photos of textiles and textile-making accompany their conversation.

Keywords: [textiles](#), [violent conflict](#), [transformation](#), [ex-combatants](#), [memory](#), [Colombia](#)

Introduction

As the contributions in this special issue highlight, textiles represent and facilitate different kinds of storytelling about violence. In this conversation, we discuss the insights that have emerged from engaging with textiles in our respective work in the context of the armed conflict and fragile peace process in Colombia.

Roxani has worked in Colombia in various capacities since 2010, predominantly focusing on questions of gender and violence in conversation with former combatants, individuals who identify as victims of the conflict, human rights defenders, and bureaucrats administering the transitional justice system. Her most recent project investigates the politics and hierarchies of victimhood (Krystalli, 2021). While textiles have not been an explicit subject or object of study in her work to date, they have emerged organically as sites of storytelling and activism for both former combatants in the process of leaving armed groups and those who identify as victims.

When Berit analysed the Internet presence of Colombian guerrilla groups for her Master's dissertation in 2002, she did not imagine she would be embroidering with demobilised FARC fighters two decades later. In her current project¹ with Colombian and UK colleagues, the project team uses textile-making and narrative interviews to explore everyday re-integration processes among former FARC combatants and supporters, their families and new peasant neighbours. Exhibited in the light of an increasingly fragile peace process, the textile narratives have also evoked deep resonances and reflections among their audiences.

Both Berit and Roxani's work represents a commitment to reflecting on the ethics of storytelling about violence, and a keen interest in highlighting the spaces of care that emerge during armed conflict and in periods of transition from violence.

This research unfolded at a crucial time of transition from violence. In 2016, the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), Latin America's oldest guerrilla group, signed a peace agreement to mark the formal ending of over five decades of armed conflict. This conflict involved numerous armed actors, including state armed forces, several guerrilla groups, paramilitaries and criminal bands, and resulted in a range of harms, including large-scale forced displacement, gender-based violence, enforced disappearance, land dispossession and more besides. As of January 2021, the Colombian state has officially recognised over nine million Colombians as victims of the armed conflict (UARIV, 2021). In this context, recognition as a victim can be powerful, since this status can facilitate access to reparations (symbolic and material), as well as shape claim-making during the transition from armed conflict (Krystalli, 2019).

The transitional justice bureaucracy in Colombia, pieces of which pre-date the 2016 peace agreement, also includes several provisions pertaining to the lives of former combatants. These provisions are commonly understood under the frame of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) policy and practice. The most recent DDR provisions, based on the 2016 peace accord, apply specifically to FARC combatants, and cover a range of activities, from gathering in "zones of transition" to lay down their weapons to accessing psychosocial care, vocational training and various other forms of socio-economic assistance (McFee et al., 2019). Both the victim-oriented bureaucracy and the DDR system face the challenge

of providing much-needed services to their respective populations while also navigating competing demands for justice, accountability and reparation. While a full accounting of these complexities and their historical antecedents is beyond the scope of this brief analysis, we discuss this dimension in our conversation below. Throughout our discussion, we are guided by the feminist principle that a peace accord and “peace on paper” are important, but not necessarily synonymous with the experience of peace in daily life (Lemaitre, 2020).

Textiles and surprises

Roxani: I am a beginner when it comes to thinking about textiles. They first appeared in my research in Colombia in 2017, weeks after the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) had concluded their final peace agreement. A friend working on a local peace and memory initiative invited me to accompany her and her colleagues to one of 26 designated zones for combatants in the process of laying down their weapons (McFee et al., 2019). As a peace-building practitioner, I had had some experience in incorporating a gender analytical perspective into programmes for former combatants in Colombia; on this occasion, however, my task was merely to participate in and observe the memory workshop that my friend and her colleagues were facilitating.

The particular area we visited was in the Meta region, and it is known by the name ‘transitional zone for normalisation’ (ZVTN). The name inspires more questions than it answers: a transition from what, to what? Whose “normal” is this, and who has the power to “normalise”? On the morning of the workshop, twenty former combatants of all genders gathered in the recently built classroom, with two of its sides open to the air. Some of them asked the others what we were meant to be doing that day. *Hacemos memoria*, the others responded. We are doing memory.

I must admit that I was not sure this answer provided enough information about the goals and activities of the day. Yet, it became a refrain, oft repeated and met with nods. *Hacemos memoria* was a script in the vernacular of the transition from armed conflict. Bureaucrats administering the transitional justice system, peace-building practitioners and researchers alike spoke a particular language of peace, memory and justice, prescribing certain relations to the armed conflict and its actors, legacies and effects.

Just as I was initially curious about what “doing memory” entailed, I also had some questions about the medium through which memory would be done. It soon became apparent that the people in the workshop were invited to engage with textiles to stitch together, literally and figuratively, a quilt that depicted some of their experiences of violence and attitudes to peace. This was an adaptation of the approach pioneered by the *Costurero de memoria* [Sewing box of memory].² The *Costurero* came into being in 2007 to bring together various social groups, including those who identify as victims and human rights defenders, aiming to commemorate the experiences of people who had suffered harms in the Colombian armed conflict. On this

particular day in the transition zone in 2017, the textiles that people who identify as victims had created were laid out on tables as examples and sources of inspiration (*Figure 1*).



Figure 1. A textile created by people who identify as victims of the Colombian armed conflict. It reads ‘Ministry of Protection – the victims unprotected’, referring to the disjunction between institutional promises and the reality of the experiences of people who identify as victims during the Colombian transition. The textile was displayed by representatives of the *Costurero de memoria* at the workshop Roxani observed in Meta. Photo by Roxani Krystalli.

Textiles dismantled some of my ethnographic scepticism. By this, I mean that I had initially questioned whether former combatants would, indeed, be interested in spending their day sewing and stitching. I had made a gendered assumption – noting that most of the participants were men and assuming they would not be interested in stitching and sewing.

I was also afraid that asking combatants in transition to civilian life to engage in these tasks would have a similar effect to other interventions aimed at other subjects in transition during armed conflict (Crane and Vallejo, 2018). In my prior experience, asking those who identify as victims to draw or paint their experiences of harm was often met with dismay. ‘We are political subjects (*sujetos políticos*)’, people would remind me, scoffing at activities that programme implementers had framed as “empowering”, which were perceived among some audiences to be infantilising or depoliticising (Cronin-Furman et al., 2017).

When it came to stitching in the transition zone, however, the reaction was different. ‘This is familiar work’, a former combatant told me with relief as he threaded a needle. ‘We used to sew to repair uniforms and to pass the time’. As they cut up pieces of fabric, workshop participants told stories about their experiences in the guerrilla, their impressions of the transition zone, and their hopes and fears for the fragile peace accord. Many suggested that it was, in fact, easier and more pleasant to tell stories while sewing – looking down at a textile, rather than sitting across from an interviewer with pen and paper or a tablet.

Stitching stories in the time of project-isation

Berit: This resonates a lot with our experiences, Roxani. In our project, needlework is a method to explore the subjectivities of former FARC guerrillas who are in the process of “re-incorporation” into society, their family members who have come to live with them, and their new peasant neighbours (Arias López et al., 2020b). We work in two locations in the

department of Antioquia: Llano Grande, a ‘territorial space for training and reincorporation’ (ETCR), the successor to the ZVTN mentioned above, and in San José de León, a village built by former combatants of a fighting unit on their own initiative. ‘What stories about you would you like other Colombians to know?’ was the prompt we used to invite our participants to embroider. We soon realised that many former fighters could do the fiddly chainstitch to perfection, for it was a preferred stitch to mark clothes with personal codes.

During our narrative biographical interviews, needlework does not only keep hands and gaze busy; it is also a slow craft that makes time for becoming aware, feeling, thinking, remembering, reflecting, projecting possible futures (cf. Bello Tocancipá and Aranguren Romero, 2020). For Jhonatan, a former combatant in his mid-thirties, ‘with each stitch, it’s like letting go of those burdens that one carries’ (Arias López et al., 2020a, p. 18). He has signed his embroidery not with his “war name” Jhonatan, which he uses in everyday life, but with his *nombre de cédula* (the birth name on his ID card), Edwin, together with the description ‘ex-combatant’, to document the different experiences that come together in his sense of self. Jhonatan/Edwin has embroidered a large anatomical heart, using only a single thin strand of the six-stranded embroidery thread – a slow, painstaking labour. The heart, he says, symbolises ex-guerrillas’ humanity: ‘We FARC are beings who love and feel like anyone else’, his words in thread read (*Figure 2*; Arias López et al., 2020a, p. 93).



Figure 2. ‘A heart like everyone else’, by Jhonatan/Edwin, ETCR Llano Grande, Dabeiba, Antioquia, 2019. Photo by Laura Coral.

Despite ex-combatants’ affinity with needlework, research access has not been easy (Bliesemann de Guevara and Kurowska, 2020). Getting past gatekeepers who claim that only economic projects (*proyectos productivos*) are worthwhile, and navigating the growing over-research and project-isation of ex-combatant communities, have been challenges. There are, in fact, several *proyectos productivos* run by the FARC peace signatories, among them the ex-combatants’ textile cooperatives Confecciones La Montaña³ in Antioquia, Avanza⁴ in Tolima, and Fariana Confecciones⁵ in La Guajira, which have turned war-time sewing skills into peace-time income sources and, during the Covid-19 pandemic, have produced face masks for marginalised communities in Colombia (UN Verification Mission in Colombia,

2020). Yet, while most of these cooperatives see their productive projects also as a form of socio-political communication and action, incentivising such economic activity was not an objective of our research. More ironically and worryingly, our project – funded under a joint UK-Colombian research council call on “reconciliation” – has taken place in an ever more violent context, in which large numbers of social, indigenous and Afro-Colombian leaders, former combatants and politically active young people are killed by paramilitary and criminal armed groups, whose actions are tolerated by the state (Indepaz, 2020; López Morales, 2020).



Figure 3. ‘Shaking hands’, by Marleida, San José de León, Mutatá, Antioquia, 2019. Photo by Laura Coral.

In this context, one of the things that surprised me was the enthusiasm with which the socio-economically and politically marginalised rural communities hosting ex-combatants embrace the peace process and worry about its uncertain future, visible not in high-level agreements and frameworks, but in everyday interactions and gestures. In her textile narrative, Marleida, a woman from the peasant community of San José de León, remembers the uncertain moment when the former guerrillas arrived to settle in their area (*Figure 3*): ‘Here, we’re shaking hands for the first time. After so much fear, we came and shook hands, and we welcomed them to our area, so that we can live together and build peace in the village. He lay down his weapon to shake hands with us’ (Arias López et al., 2020a, p. 72). These everyday encounters stand in stark contrast to the scepticism of many Colombians in the (urban) centres of the country. ‘The Peace Agreement is like the carnival of Barranquilla: those who live it, enjoy it!’, Mariela, the teacher at the school in Llano Grande, explains, hinting at the tourism slogan of Barranquilla, a city on Colombia’s Caribbean coast known for its annual carnival, which features as a ‘masterpiece’ on UNESCO’s representative list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity (UNESCO, n.d.). Her statement is an appreciation of the micro-processes of reconciliation at the community level, as much as it is an invitation to the sceptics to join in.

Yet, there are also cautious textile voices that express the uncertainties both ex-combatants and rural host communities face. Luis Carlos, an elderly peasant in Llano Grande, has experienced the marginalisation of Colombia’s rural communities throughout his life,

symbolised in his textile by armadillos without claws (*Figure 4*): ‘Like a little animal that has its claws removed and must dig with its injured fingers. They can’t make their houses or look for their food, and all they do is roam and roam. That happens to the armadillos when they don’t have their fingernails, and that is what happened to the peasants and hopefully it doesn’t happen to these FARC folks (*muchachos de las FARC*) as well’ (Arias López et al., 2020a, p. 154).



Figure 4. ‘Armadillos without claws’, by Luis Carlos, Llano Grande, Dabeiba, Antioquia, 2019. Photo by Laura Coral.

Roxani: So much of what you describe echoes my own observations, Berit. I want to pick up on the point about how the “project-isation” of transitions from violence affects people’s experiences of those times. Catalina Vallejo (2019) has written thoughtfully about how the logic of ‘productive projects’, typically referring to income-generating livelihood activities, has inflected reparations programmes for those the state recognises as victims of the armed conflict in Colombia. She argues that the emphasis of the reparations programme ‘is not on the past and the causes of violence, but on legitimizing a future post-conflict society where victim-citizens are economically independent and productive’ (Vallejo, 2019, p. 118). A similar logic appears to permeate engagement with former combatants, whereby, as Emma Shaw Crane notes, ‘[those framed as] dangerous former combatants are transformed into productive individuals’ (Crane and Vallejo, 2018).

The sewing workshop I observed in Meta promised no productivity – at least not the economically oriented, measurable productivity that can be tracked by quantified indicators. It did not “create livelihood opportunities” for the participants, nor did it embrace the vernacular of “capacity building” and “empowerment” that many such interventions put forward. As they stitched together materials, the participants shared their concerns around livelihoods in their own terms. ‘We have been wanting land on which to farm’, one of them told me, pointing towards a small parcel of land within the transition zone, ‘but the soil we have here won’t even grow a potato’. I was fascinated by the ways in which workshops *about*

land, or explicitly *about* economic opportunities during transitions from violence, sometimes did not make room to discuss people's economic needs, their understanding of the meaning and significance of land, or their attachment to it. In this sense, "doing memory" through textiles became an opportunity not only to reflect on the shadow the past casts over the present and future, but also to discuss the texture of life in transition.

Textiles as story and method

Berit: The narrative approach we work with is inspired by *prácticas narrativas* [narrative therapy] (White and Epston, 1990), which looks at how people give meaning to their lives through stories – the ones they tell about themselves, chosen from their stock of life experiences, and the ones others tell about them, against a background of societal conventions. Beyond the dominant stories about war and peace, we are interested in finding out about alternative, silent/silenced and preferred stories. The textile narratives tell our participants' preferred stories, those they want others to know, and which may help re-author combatants' lives in the process of "becoming civilians." Dozens of textile narratives have been sewn and embroidered already, which we have organised into "textile books" around a number of themes, including journeys, reunions, roots, transformations and hopes. Mariela's textile page (*Figure 3*) is from the textile book *Trust*, Luis Carlos' armadillos (*Figure 4*) from the book *Uncertainties*, and Jhonatan's heart (*Figure 2*) from the book *Commitment* (cf. Arias López et al., 2020a).

Textiles' ability to give people space to express their meanings and needs around aspects such as land, which you observed in Meta, Roxani, is also visible in these textile books. Water, for example, is a recurrent theme in San José de León. Vianey, a peasant woman, embroidered the importance of water in her life: 'I am talking about water because here in this area we are rich in water, that is our wealth, that is our life, the life of the village, of the animals, of everything you can see' (Arias López et al., 2020a, p. 71). San José de León is located on the banks of the river Fortuna. It is the source of ex-combatants' new (aqua-) farming projects, but it is also starting to show the effects of the increased environmental strains, as development outranks environmental concerns and creates potential for future tensions between long-time residents and newcomers.

Flicking through the pages of the textile books, two further observations regarding textiles as a particular form of narrative stand out for me:



Figure 5. 'Gun', by Adriana, San José de León, Mutatá, Antioquia, 2019. Photo by Laura Coral.

One is their ability to bring memories, emotions and thoughts to light which do not easily come up in our interviews, perhaps because the demobilising fighters fear that such memories are “inadequate”. Adriana, an ex-FARC fighter in San José de León, tells us about her embroidery that centrally depicts a gun (*Figure 5*): ‘It was my faithful companion, it didn’t fail me because that’s what happens to you when you are in the war, it’s the only one that doesn’t betray you... If you don’t pay attention, it kills you. If you know how to use it, it never betrays you. It was very hard for me to turn it in, I cried a lot’ (Arias López et al., 2020a, p. 49). Adriana’s textile is a page in the book *Nostalgias*, which it shares with textile memories of childhoods and families. Fond memories of the FARC as a family and of joyful moments during the armed conflict – like that of the “adopted” bear cub Sandy who lived with the guerrillas until it had grown up, of long marches through the jungle, or of the joint baths in the rivers and the rain – have little room in public discourse but they are part of Colombia’s collective memory.

The other observation that stands out for me is how the textile narratives of ex-combatants and peasants converge in many aspects, making it hard to uphold rigid categories of victims and perpetrators. Most textile books have pages embroidered at the hands of civilians and ex-combatants, and especially the book *Roots* – formed by stories about people’s rural origins – shows how childhood experiences are widely shared among civilians and ex-combatants. The textiles make the findings of other studies – that joining an armed group was seldom down to ideological conviction (alone) and more often driven by a mixture of domestic or structural violence, survival strategies in view of armed groups’ shifting control over territories, forced recruitment, and indeed factors like friendship and romance – tangible on a personal level (e.g. Arjona and Kalyvas, 2012).

Roxani: I want to pick up here on the question of war nostalgias, and its expression in textile-making. As Zadie Smith writes, ‘time travel is a discretionary art: a pleasure trip for some and horror story for others’ (2018, p. 37). Conversations with former combatants remind us that not all nostalgias are equally permissible – that nostalgia, too, is disciplined and policed. During the fragile transition to peace, attachment to weapons or nostalgia for being armed causes nervousness in many corners.

Working on a textile to depict what she called ‘her life in the jungle’, a female former combatant stitched trees and animals onto a piece of fabric. She lamented that what ‘they’ always wanted to know – referring to journalists and researchers – was whether she missed her weapon. What she missed, however, was the jungle: ‘not the war, not the weapon – the jungle’, she told me. Depictions of that life on a textile remind us, as you say, Berit, that life in an armed group cannot merely be summed up as ideology, or even as the tactics and militarised activities of that group. Life in an armed group also consisted of meals and reading, and the environments that many former combatants called home. I am always interested in knowing what those dimensions of life looked and felt like for former combatants, and how the transition away from them is requiring people to learn to live in new environments and configurations of community.

I am also curious about the question of audiences. Namely, if these textiles were to be displayed (rather than created as a process internal to the transition zone, without seeking external audiences), how would people react to the depictions of the various facets of life in an armed group? How do expected audiences shape the memory we make?

Berit: It is hard to tell which audiences our research participants had in mind, Roxani, when we invited them to sew and embroider ‘what they wanted others to know’ – did they think of their families, comrades and neighbours, or perhaps of us researchers or some more abstract society at large? We told them that we were planning to exhibit their embroidered stories in different parts of Colombia and in Europe, and asked for their consent to borrow their pieces for this purpose before we would return them to their makers. Yet, our impression was that these words had little meaning until they actually saw the exhibition – museums and galleries are neither a part of life “in the bush” (*en el monte*) nor of peasant life in Colombia’s rural areas (*territorios*).

Part of the *prácticas narrativas* approach that underpins our methodology is the idea of resonances. Since subjectivity is understood, in a nutshell, as the meaning a person gives to their life through their own and others’ stories, telling preferred (rather than dominant) stories about one’s life may contribute to a re-authoring of both how a person comes to tell themselves and how others tell them (White and Epston, 1990, pp. 28-32; White, 2007, p. 181). We observed resonances among all audiences – resonances not in an intellectual way but through the embodied encounters with textiles (cf. Andrä et al., 2020, pp. 351-353; Arias

López et al., 2020b). We exhibited the textile books in both research sites, as well as in the regional capital Apartadó and the department's capital Medellín.

In San José de León, the location of the very first exhibition, we used wooden planks, large sheets of fabric and professional lighting to turn an open shed occupied by chickens into a temporary gallery (*Figures 6 and 7*) – an almost magical transformation and for our team by far the most emotional exhibition: would people in the village visit it at all, and how would they react? To our relief, the whole community came, and it became clear that the exhibition brought home the value of “doing memory.”

The exhibition also highlighted the contributions of community members who are seldom in the limelight. You are right, Roxani, that gendered ideas about embroidery do not capture the ease with which male ex-combatants take up needle and thread. In the course of our fieldwork, however, in which we accompanied this community during monthly week-long visits for a year, the core of our participants shrank to a group of women, most without positions of leadership. Perhaps this was, we reflected, because of the gendered geography of the village, with its fish tanks, football field and billiard bar – all male-dominated spaces. This article does not offer enough space to unpack the intersections between gender and the many other factors at play here. What we can say, however, is that we witnessed how our workshops, and the intimate embroidery sessions on people's porches, made space for other encounters (cf. Perez-Bustos and Chocontá Piraquive, 2018), and in the exhibition these took centre-stage.



Figures 6 and 7. Exhibition *(Des)tejiendo miradas* [(Un-)stitching gazes], San José de León, Mutatá, Antioquia, 30 September – 5 October 2019. Photos by Berit Bliesemann de Guevara.

For most exhibition visitors in Apartadó and Medellín, the textile books were their first encounter with the peace signatories of the former FARC guerrilla. We organised “resonance workshops” in which we invited visitors to reflect on ‘what ideas the exhibition had made them stitch, un-stitch, or re-stitch’. While we had hoped, of course, that the exhibitions would contribute to a constructive dialogue about the ex-combatants’ role in society, I was struck by the power of the resonances the textile narratives evoked. ‘We were victims of violence. We lost family members in the war, so telling and releasing those emotions through the fabric is a good way to do it’, an exhibition visitor in Apartadó reflected. ‘I thought that they [the FARC] were very bad people who stole children, forcibly took them away, who mistreated mothers’, an elderly woman in a *comuna* [poor suburb] of Medellín shared, reflecting a common trope of public (media) discourse about the former fighters. ‘Now I can think differently, I think of them as normal and good people with feelings’ (Arias López et al., 2020a, p. 188). A colleague at the university told us how these textiles had given him hope for the fragile peace process.

When probed further, it was the humanity that spoke through the textiles which moved people most – humanity like that reflected on by Jacobo, an ex-combatant in his fifties in the ETCR Llano Grande, who had spent 19 years in prison before being freed by the peace agreement (*Figure 8*). ‘Your laughter sets me free / it gives me wings. / It takes away my solitude / pulls down my prison’ – his embroidery quotes Spanish poet Miguel Hernández.



Figure 8. ‘Your laughter sets me free’, by Jacobo, ETCR Llano Grande, Dabeiba, Antioquia, 2019. Photo by Laura Coral.

Roxani: As our conversation draws to a close, I would like to reflect on how textiles allow us to reframe some of the loaded language of transitions from violence. The identities by which our sewing interlocutors were known were themselves contested. Some resented being called *ex-guerrilleros/as* or former combatants, asserting that what made them *guerrilleros/as* was not the weapons, but the political project – and that this political project lived on even after disarmament. *Combatientes sin armas* [combatants without weapons] is a term some of them use, *firmantes de la paz* [peace signatories] another; others would prefer to be treated as ‘any other Colombians who just want to live’. Many paused before using words like “peace”, “reconciliation”, “healing”, or “co-existence”, or winced when the words came up as part of the vernacular of project-isation. This was not a pause necessarily informed by lack of faith in peace or belief in the possibility of co-existence. Rather, it was born out of scepticism at the ease with which outsiders – from government bureaucrats to international researchers and NGO workers to religious leaders – imposed the duty and language of healing on humans still implicated in the dynamics of violence in complex ways.

There is a number of conclusions one could draw from our conversation. Textiles are a form of storytelling about violence and peace, as well as a site of memory-making for the people who participate in their creation. The materiality of textiles – what Caitlin Hamilton aptly calls ‘thinginess’ (2021, chap. 2) – draws attention to peace and conflict as embodied, enacted and created, not merely theorised “about”. Textile-based fieldwork can be a creative method of research that enables different kinds of narration and different interactions between researchers and their interlocutors. At the same time, we are cautious not to reduce the value of textiles to what the researcher extracts from engaging with them. Instead, we draw attention to the multiple meanings and encounters that textiles bring to the fore and encourage fellow researchers to consider the meaning of textiles in ways that go beyond the question of what “use” they are to social scientists.

Textiles are a window to thinking and feeling otherwise about labels and experiences of violence. When I have given lectures using some of the photographs from this workshop, I have observed some uneasiness among my students: the uneasiness that comes with not quite knowing how to read a text, how to interpret a different kind of document or artefact of violence and peace. I caution them – and myself – against overreading symbolism. This is a caution that sits right alongside the risk of dismissing the stories objects tell by failing to pay attention to them. “Doing memory” is not necessarily the same as “making peace”, and believing in the possibility of peace is not the same as embracing “reconciliation” or “healing”. The quotation marks are signs that the words themselves fail us in these contexts. Perhaps, then, we need to look more closely at the images and see what stories the needlework might tell.

Berit: And, I would add, textiles also extend an invitation to their audiences to give space to those knowledges which are transmitted and received with the body, which go beyond the visual and its interpretation, and which touch us on an affective level. Our most adequate response to them, then, may well be of a creative rather than an intellectual nature.

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² For more, see: <https://bogota.gov.co/servicios/empleo/costurero-de-la-memoria-el-lugar-donde-las-victimas-de-la-violencia-t> (Accessed: 27 August 2020).

³ Instagram: @confecciones_lamontana

⁴ <https://avanzatiendaderopa.com> (Accessed: 26 March 2021).

⁵ Instagram: @fariana_confecciones

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