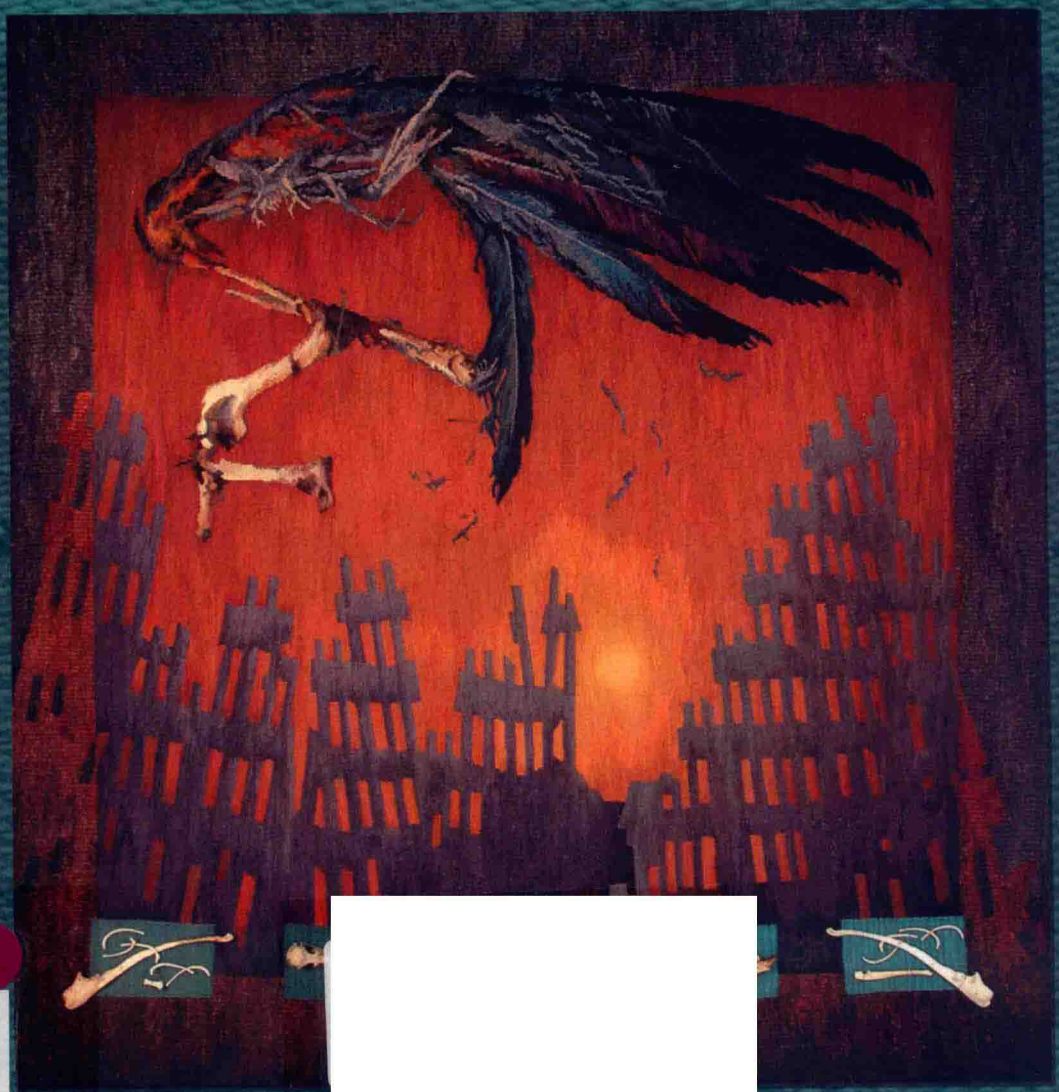
War Imagery in Women's Textiles

An International Study of Weaving, Knitting, Sewing, Quilting, Rug Making and Other Fabric Arts



Deborah A. Deacon *and* Paula E. Calvin

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To the women who have documented
the impact of war on their lives
through their textile production.
May they find peace through their work.

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Preface

This book is a continuation of the journey we began in 2001 with a graduate course on art as evidence and our personal interest in textiles. The journey first led to our 2003 exhibition *Stitches of War* at Arizona State University, which examined ways in which the impact of war is reflected in textiles, the traditional art form of women around the world, textiles often intended only for personal consumption. Our subsequent uncovering of more public art, created by American women in response to their feelings about war, resulted in our book *American Women Artists in Wartime, 1776–2010.* That book showed that, like their male counterparts, American women artists commented on war, showing their patriotic support of or opposition to a conflict, and documenting the impact of a violent event that affected their lives.

This book returns to the subject matter of *Stitches of War*, expanding the scope of that exhibition beyond its emphasis on modern American textiles, Hmong storycloths, Afghan War rugs, Latin American *arpilleras,* Navajo rugs and jewelry, and weavings from East Timor to include historical textiles produced by women in Europe, all of Latin America, Asia, Oceania and North America. The women in each of these regions have been subjected to the effects of war at various times in history, and in many cases they included images of war in the textiles they produced for their personal use, for public consumption, and for sale to help support their families whose livelihood was disrupted by the violence of war.

We are extremely grateful to the many people who have made this book possible through their kindness and generosity. The book required a significant amount of archival research, which was done with the assistance of numerous enthusiastic curators, collections managers, and archivists both in the United States and abroad, as we investigated the availability of information on textiles that were produced during times of political upheaval around the world. They include Dr. Sherry Harlacher, director of the Denison University Museum; Dr. Janet Baker, curator of Asian art at the Phoenix Art Museum; Keidra Daniels Navaroli, assistant director at the Ruth Funk Center for Textile Arts at Florida Institute of Technology; Diana Marks from RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia; Dr. Christina Lindeman from the University of South Alabama; Dr. Irina Bogoslovskaya, independent art historian; and Laurie Petrie-Rogers, independent scholar. Many of them recommended additional avenues for us to investigate in addition to sharing their expertise, for which we are very appreciative. A number of friends and colleagues generously shared their expertise, ideas and personal textiles with us, including Dr. Claudia Brown, Ms. Momoko Welch, Dr. Yasmin Saikia, and Dr. Christopher Lundry from Arizona State University; Lindsey Pedersen, Mesa Community

College; Amy Clague, Leena Ravel and Jackie Butler-Diaz from the Asian Arts Council at the Phoenix Art Museum; Marilyn Murphy at Cloth Roads, a Global Textile Marketplace; Carol James, Sash Weaver; Ramelle Gonzales; Ann Marie Moeller; Julie Kapok from Timor Treasures; and Marlys Anderson. A number of artists shared their thoughts about their own work, including Sarah Rahbar, Mary Tuma, Barbara Hunt, Barbara Heller, Barbara Todd, Frances Dorsey, Zita Plume, and Azra Aksamija. Ms. Iris Cashdan-Fishman gave us incredible encouragement throughout the entire process of writing this book and lent us a textile as well. Susan Chiaramonte provided us with invaluable emotional support and was extremely patient with our idiosyncrasies as she edited the manuscript and as always, Sam Calvin provided invaluable technical and moral support.

It is because of all of their generous support that we are able to tell a story we believe deserves to be told, that of the numerous women throughout history who recorded the impact of war on their lives through their art. We hope you are as inspired by their stories as we are.

Introduction

Feminist scholars have long agreed with the famed misquote of Virginia Woolf, who is alleged to have said, "For most of history, anonymous was a woman."[1] The axiom certainly applies to the creation of textiles by numerous women throughout history. For millennia, cloth production was an anonymous activity, seen in most cultures as the mundane work of women, part of the domestic sphere of hearth and home, not worthy of the maker's identification. Discussions of textile traditions are typically omitted from the histories of the development of art and culture in favor of the privileged painting, sculpture, and architecture. "Fine art, the 'highest' and 'purest' category, was identified with the male, the public, and the symbolic; decorative art was female, domestic and empty of deep meaning."[2] It wasn't until the Pop Art and Minimalism movements of the 1960s that textiles were seen as a medium for artistic expression. In 1962, the *Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts* in Lausanne, Switzerland, held the first International Biennial of Tapestry to promote international development in textile art.[3] Other such exhibitions followed. During the 1970s, feminist artists like Judy Chicago used textiles to examine women's roles in art, society and culture. Art textiles quickly became a political medium dominated by women. By the twenty-first century, the use of textiles to express political opinions had expanded to most areas of the globe, utilized by women in all walks of life.

The production of cloth actually played a fundamental role in the development of civilization, evolving before pottery making and sculpture. It also played a key role in the development of farming and the domestication of animals, as well as the move into permanent settlements. A significant effort is required to gather and process the materials necessary for textile production and it takes a significant amount of time to develop textile techniques and designs. Textiles established important political and social distinctions within a society, were important trade items, and even served as currency in many cultures, making them integral to the very fabric of civilized society.[4]

Warfare Traditons

War has traditionally been seen as a male activity. Men learned to hunt for food and each other to protect their territory and belongings, including their women, while women were seen as passive objects in need of protection, too weak to fight. The advent of permanent settlements resulted in farming and animal husbandry which was seen as men's work; how-

ever, man's need to fight continued. While women were responsible for child-bearing and child-rearing, men fought to protect their cities from enemies seeking to acquire territory and material goods. This division of duties according to gender is deeply rooted in most cultures—in their language, thinking, literature, mythology and art.

For millennia, men have left their homes and families to fight and die for their social group and its principles while their wives, mothers, and daughters remained safely at home, seemingly unaffected by war and violence, leading to the conclusion that war is a gendering activity. This activity also impacts the conduct of war. Prior to the second half of the twentieth century, women participated in home front activities that supported the war effort—voting for war, willingly accepting and adapting to the shortage of goods that results during wartime, rolling bandages for the wounded and assembling care packages for the troops, and joining the workforce to free men for war service. They also aligned themselves with the war effort and expressed their patriotism through their dress, by buying and wearing textiles that bore war motifs. During World War II, for instance, British and American women wore commercially produced scarves, fabric squares that featured dramatic military imagery such as aircraft, warships and the "V for victory" logo, while Japanese boys sported mass produced kimono that featured images of aircraft, weapons, and soldiers. These propaganda textiles served as public canvases that expressed the nation's political and military objectives and as ways for the wearer to show support for the cause.[5]

Modern warfare changed our ideas about the impact of war on society. In World War I, eighty percent of the casualties were military men; in World War II, only fifty percent were military men. During the Vietnam War, nearly eighty percent of the casualties were civilians, while in current conflicts around the world, it is estimated that almost ninety percent of casualties are civilian, primarily women and children.[6] Most of these conflicts involved a profusion of generalized violence that erases the safety of the "immune space" of home.

Throughout history, men experienced war, wrote about war, photographed war and painted war. Women, it was thought, did not. Yet a closer examination of the reality of war reveals that this is an incorrect assumption. Women in fact have always been directly affected by war and around the world they have expressed that impact through their art, including in traditional women's textile crafts such as weaving, quilting and knitting. This book explores the ways in which these women from around the world have expressed the impact of war on their lives using their traditional textile practices. The art they created can be seen as belonging to four broad categories: commemoration, documentation, support for a conflict, and protest art. Early American weavers created pieces with titles like *Lee's Surrender* and *Whig Rose* in support of America's position during a conflict, while in the 1980s Argentinian women wore headscarves embroidered with the names of their "disappeared" children who were murdered at the hands of the government. During World War I and World War II, British women knit scarves, hats, sweaters and socks for refugees, seeing the work as part of their patriotic duty. During the 1980s, Hmong women created embroidered pictorial cloths that documented their flight from persecution at the end of the Vietnam War. The works examined in this book are made using traditional textile techniques—sewing, embroidery, weaving, rug making and knitting, to name a few. Many of these women worked anonymously; some are famous for the art they produced while the names of others have been lost to history.

This book shows that women globally have always been affected by war and that many

women have expressed this impact in their art, but it by no means provides an exhaustive survey of all of the women who have created textiles about war. It provides a representative sample of women from across time and cultures who created art that recorded the impact of war on their lives. The contributions of those women who are not included here due to time and space limitations are in no way diminished by their exclusion. Rather, their exclusion is an indication of the depth and breadth of the impact of war on their own lives and the culture in which they lived.

Early Textile Production

While the origins of textile production are lost in the mists of the past, we do know that the first textiles produced by our Paleolithic ancestors were animal skins modified for warmth and protection. The first sewing needles, created by the European Graveltian culture (26,000–20,000 BCE) in central Europe, were used to join animal skins together. The first textile art, which dates to circa 38,000 BCE, includes decorative beaded necklaces of shells, stones and animal teeth, and the sinew cords used to hold stone axe heads and stone points to wooden handles and for hand grips on spears and other tools.[7] These earliest threads and cords were made from twisted strands of sinew and animal gut.

Wool was the first animal fiber made into cloth.[8] Sheep were domesticated in Iraq circa 9000 BCE. Based on spindle whorls, used to twist fibers into yarn and thread, and impressions of woven cloth on ceramic vessels, it appears that wool was woven into cloth by 7250–7000 BCE in Mesopotamia. In the Americas, alpaca and llama were domesticated by the third millennia BCE. Inca textiles, which date from approximately 3000 BCE and were preserved in dry sand burials, provide the longest continuous textile record.[9]

The earliest forms of vegetal weavings, which include baskets and nets made from domesticated hemp and flax, date between 6000 and 4000 BCE. During the Jomon era (10,000–300 BCE) in Japan, braided cord impressions are found on elaborate earthenware pottery.[10] Cotton was domesticated in India by 3000 BCE; at the same time, the Chinese domesticated silk worms, spinning the unwound cocoon strands into thread. By 1500 BCE, they had developed elaborate weaving techniques using multicolored silk threads to create gauze, twill, damask, brocade, and plain weave fabrics.[11] Additionally, embroidered and painted silk fabrics also became popular at this time.

Beginning in the third millennia BCE, textiles became important trade goods between Syria, Ur, the Indus Valley and Mesopotamia. During the time of the Roman Empire, cloth woven from both wild and domestic silk was exported from China to Europe using the Silk Road, which stretched from China to the eastern Mediterranean. Remnants of textiles found in Indus Valley (3300–1300 BCE) settlements feature geometric and figural woven patterns as well as embroidery.[12] Sculptural figures from the region are depicted wearing dimensional patterned clothing, most likely representations of dimensional embroidery. The Roman historian Pliny the Elder (23–79 CE) recorded that the Phrygians were the originators of embroidery, although in truth only one specific technique (the use of metal thread) can be attributed to the region.[13] Trade dispersed goods along many routes, providing evidence of metal embroidery and red-woolen embroidered cloth in the burial kurgans in the Altai Mountains which cross both Russia and Kazakhstan, both fourth century BC.[14] Findings in one kurgan included

a *shabrak*, or ornamental horse cloth appliquéd with cut up pieces of woolen tapestry, which may have adorned the horse of a warrior.

Weaving as women's work has been well documented in the historical record through art, religion, and literature. The Egyptian goddess Neith was portrayed as a weaver in Egyptian paintings and sculpture. Egyptian tomb art, both paintings and manquettes, from the Middle Kingdom (2160–1788 BCE) shows women spinning flax using distaffs and weaving on single heddle looms for their masters' use in the afterlife.[15] While women made cloth in their homes for their personal use, they also worked in weaving shops, making cloth for their armies and for commercial purposes.[16] The Greek historian Herodotus noted that by the fifth century BCE, Egyptian men were weaving in the home. By the Christian era, men were the primary commercial weavers, working on vertical looms while women continued to weave in the home.

As in Egypt, in Greece weaving was associated with women's work in art, religion and literature as well as in actuality. Greek women of all classes made textiles in the home. Wealthy women supervised the weavings of their female servants. In Greek mythology, the Fates are three crones who control destiny, said to spin the thread of life. Athena, the goddess of war, is also the goddess of weaving, combining the domestic and political spheres, a tie that proves prophetic in terms of the connection between textiles, women and war which is made in this book. She was said to weave plots as she intervened in the lives of various Greek heroes. On the island of Crete, Ariadne, the daughter of King Minos, used spun thread to help Theseus escape from her father's labyrinth and certain death from the Minotaur.

The story of Arachne, a Roman addition to Greek mythology, intimates that the origin of weaving lay in the imitation of a spider web. In the story, Arachne, a highly skilled mortal weaver famous in all of Lydia and beyond, boasts that she is a better weaver than the goddess Athena. When Athena, disguised as an old woman, tells Arachne to yield to Athena, Arachne proposes a weaving contest between herself and the goddess. Athena is offended by Arachne's cloth, which depicts the sins of the gods, and turns her into a spider. Ovid notes:

> Her usual features vanish'd from their place,
> Her body lessen'd all, but most her face.
> Her slender fingers, hanging on each side
> With many joynts, the use of legs supply'd:
> A spider's bag the rest, from which she gives
> A thread, and still by constant weaving lives.[17]

In Scandinavia, the stars in Orion's belt are said to represent the distaff with which Frigga, Odin's wife, spun the clouds.[18] In Baltic mythology, the sun goddess Saule is said to spin the sunbeams, while in Japan, Amaterasu is the Shinto goddess of both the sun and weaving.

The ties between textile production and women can also be found in more recent western literature and folk tales. The story of Vassilisa the Beautiful, a peasant who impressed the tsar so much with her needlework that he married her, is popular in Russia. Mother Goose, the teller of nursery rhymes, is often associated with spinning. In French legends, she was credited with spinning incredible tales that enraptured children. In the German fairy tale *Rumpelstiltskin*, a miller's daughter is given the impossible task of spinning straw into gold; the imp-like Rumpelstiltskin miraculously accomplishes the task on several occasions, but at a heavy price. In the fairy tale *Sleeping Beauty*, a princess falls into a deep sleep after pricking her finger on a spindle, the result of two spells cast on her as a baby.

Textiles as Communication

Feminist scholarship at the end of the twentieth century explored the definition of gender and gender roles in Western culture, positing that gender goes beyond the idea of male and female. Rather, it is a "continual, dynamic process rife with contradictory ideas."[19] An individual's role in society is often determined by the individual's gender. Throughout much of history, a woman's role has been rigidly controlled by social mores. Her work was dictated by the roles and hierarchies assigned to her by society. During the Victorian era, women's work was confined to the domestic realm, a soft, harmonious environment seen as fostering civilized moral lives for its inhabitants, a foil for the harsh external male world of business and commerce.

Textile production, spinning and needlework have been part of the woman's sphere since ancient times, overtly feminine acts that have often been considered beneath a man's dignity; however, they perform an important function within the family and the culture. A gendered activity taken on early in a girl's life, needlework has played a significant role in a woman's life for many reasons. As a vital part of a girl's education, it teaches obedience and patience. A woman's power to perform magic with a needle by transforming plain fabric into a work of art allows her to create beautiful and practical objects for her trousseau, such as linens, quilts and clothing.[20] These skills allowed her to provide herself with an economic livelihood and meet her family's needs while serving as a form of feminine performance, a way of making a personal statement. The act of creating a textile can establish a woman's place in society, provide a method of controlling social interaction and increase a woman's feeling of self-worth.

Textiles also are encoded with cultural values, reflecting history and cultural change. As Mary Beaudry noted, "Textile production and sewing of some sort have been tangled up with aspects of culture—technological, social, economic, ritual and so on—since early human history."[21] As such, they can serve as alternative forms of discourse. They can relay information about identity—social relationships, age, class, social status and religion. They can be necessities and luxuries, symbols of friendship and love, a non-verbal form of communication. They are also a form of rhetorical discourse, a coded communication which can be used as a political weapon in support of or in protest of a given event, such as war. They can document the atrocities of war and tell the stories of the participants in and victims of war, commemorating cultural heroes and their victories. The soft nature of textiles, as opposed to the "hard" subject matter of war, creates an unexpected juxtaposition that can surprise and intrigue the viewer. There is meaning in a textile and the practice used to created it. Textile production has been a vehicle used by the dominant (male) discourse for the definition of women and their roles in society. But it has also served as a vehicle for women to construct their own alternative to the dominant discourse, allowing them to expand their power and societal roles.[22] Women have traditionally used needlework as a way to build and solidify community through group activities such as quilting bees and knitting groups. Many of these groups took activist stands with the textiles they produced. For example, scholars theorize that a group of Norman women created the Bayeux Tapestry, which is discussed in Chapter One, to commemorate William the Conqueror's victory in England shortly after the conquest. During World War II, American women held quilting bees to create quilts that were raffled in support of the war effort. During most American wars, women knitted socks, sweaters and caps to keep the troops warm.

Art is a powerful tool for communication among members of a society. Art arouses emotion, identifies problems, and proposes solutions to those problems. It plays an important role in social movements, helping keep people committed to a cause or mobilize people in protest, often leading to behavioral or social change. Jacqueline Adams has noted that "art has political power that can support the status quo, act as a safety valve for discontent (and therefore be of benefit to the oppressor), or serve as an emancipatory force, challenging dominant institutions, and reinforcing subversion of existing systems."[23] And art can maintain its impact for long periods of time, eventually leading to societal change and serving as a reminder of what came before. The art of textiles links tradition to contemporary events, providing a non-threatening and easily accessible medium for transmitting ideas and opinions.

Workmanship is an important aspect of needlework and textile production. The methodology used in creating a textile is as important as the results. Tradition can also be important in textile production. The work of young women is critiqued in terms of color usage, adherence to traditional patterns and aesthetic and technical proficiency. While there is often an opportunity for creative variations in traditional patterns, color schemes or forms, significant novel variations can be accepted or rejected by a community.[24] In some cases, radical changes can be the result of contact with foreign cultures, as occurred with the Hmong development of figural embroidered story cloths in refugee camps following the Vietnam War, or as the result of conflict or conquest, as seen in the war rugs created by Baluch women during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. In many cases, it results from the clash between industrialized and non-industrialized nations. Often, women from the non-industrialized nations choose which aspects, such as the use of aniline dyes, they will adapt into their own work and which they will reject, creating new and unique pieces and traditions.[25]

In addition to giving a voice to women, textiles have been adopted as metaphors for the very fabric of society for millennia. The word weaving, meaning to bind or unite, is commonly referenced in speech, literature and art. The universe is often referred to as "a woven fabric where everyone and every thing has its place."[26] Disorder in society is seen as a tangle of matters, which must be put into its proper place. Among many cultures, the vertical warp threads on a loom are seen as masculine, while the horizontal weft is seen as feminine. Weaving unites the male and female in imitation of the life force. The phrase "distaff side" is used to refer to maternal relatives, as well as a woman's role in the household economy.

The Egyptian goddess Neith (Nit), the goddess of war, is also the goddess of weaving, said to have woven all of existence on her loom. Her symbol and part of her hieroglyph resemble a loom. The Greek Moirai, or Fates, were said to use yarn to measure out the life of a man; when the yarn was cut, life ended. The Greeks often used textiles as religious offerings, hoping for a favorable outcome from the gods. For generations, there was a dispute between the cities of Elis and Pisa for control of the Sanctuary of Zeus at Olympus, the site of the Olympic Games. In 668 BCE, the tyrant Pheidon of Argos captured the Sanctuary from Elean control for Pisa. The Olympic Truce returned the Sanctuary to Elean control and protected against military incursions that interrupted the Games, although it did not end the battle over control of the site. In the second century BCE, the traveler Pausanias documented another takeover of the Sanctuary by Pisa. As a way to heal their differences, after this battle, both sides agreed to a unique way to make peace. Each of the sixteen cities involved in the dispute selected one woman to work together to weave a robe for the statue of Hera at Olympia.[27]

In Book Three of *The Iliad,* the poet Homer uses weaving to tell of Helen's feelings about the war:

> She [Iris] came on Helen in the chamber; she was weaving a great web,
> A red folding robe, and working into it the numerous struggles
> of Trojans, breakers of horses, and bronze-armored Achaians,
> struggles that they endured for her sake at the hands of the war god.[28]

In Book Six, when the Trojans were threatened by Greek successes, Hector has his mother offer a beautiful peplos to Athena in exchange for her protection, a plea that was unsuccessful. In Homer's *Odyssey,* Penelope is depicted as a weaver who, during the day weaves a shroud for her father-in-law, and then unravels it every night to keep her suitors at bay as she waits for the return of her husband, Odysseus. Penelope seated at her loom was a popular depiction on Greek painted vases. In *The Odyssey,* both Circe, the nymph associated with magic, and Calypso, the daughter of the Titan Atlas, used weaving to enchant Odysseus and keep him from returning home.[29]

For the Greeks, the practice of weaving also served as a model for the examination of social organization. In Aristophanes' comedy *Lysistrata* (411 BCE), Lysistrata proposes a plan to correct the difficulties of the Athenian empire, which she articulates in terms of textile production, noting that the preparations for weaving are similar to the various groups who were working at opposition and must be detangled for the good of society:

> MAGISTRATE: But the international situation at present is in a hopeless muddle. How would you propose to unravel it?
> LYSISTRATA: Oh, it's dead easy.
> MAGISTRATE: Would you explain?
> LYSISTRATA: Well, take a tangled skein of wool for example. We take it so, put it to the spindle, unwind it this way, now that way [*miming with her fingers*]. That's how we'll unravel this war, if you'll let us. Send ambassadors first to Sparta, this way, then to Thebes, that way—
> MAGISTRATE: Are you such idiots as to think that you can solve serious problems with spindles and bits of wool?
> LYSISTRATA: As a matter of fact, it might not be so idiotic as you think to run the whole City entirely on the model of the way we deal with wool.
> MAGISTRATE: How'd you work that out?
> LYSISTRATA: The first thing you do with wool is wash the grease out of it; you can do the same with the City. Then you stretch out the citizen body on a bench and pick out the burrs—that is, the parasites. After that you prise apart the club-members who form themselves into knots and clots to get into power, and when you've separated them, pick them out one by one. Then you're ready for the carding: they can all go into the basket of Civil Goodwill—including the resident aliens and any foreigners who are your friends—yes, and even those who are in debt to the Treasury! Not only that. Athens has many colonies. At the moment these are lying around all over the place, like stray bits and pieces of the fleece. You should pick them up and bring them here, put them all together, and then out of all this make an enormous great ball of wool—and from that you can make the People a coat.[30]

In this case, the weaving of a garment symbolizes the end of a complicated period of war and hostilities.

During the Second Punic Wars (218–201 BCE), Rome was threatened by the armies of

Carthage under the leadership of Hannibal. After years of vicious fighting and many Roman defeats, a Roman matron dressed the cult statue of Juno in a woven cloak, seeking her help, a plea that was ultimately successful.

In the war-like Norse tradition, women and war are closely linked. In addition to Frigg being the goddess of weaving, Valkyries are depicted as women weaving on looms, using severed heads for weights, arrows for shuttles and human gut for the warp.

In the ninth century, Charles Dickens also closely linked women's production of textiles with war through his ruthless character Madame Thèrése Defarge, primary villain of his novel *A Tale of Two Cities.* She is the implacable wife of Ernest Defarge, a woman who never stops knitting. Her knitting pattern encodes the names of all of the people to be guillotined during the French Revolution.

In addition to literary references to weaving, weaving and spinning also played a role in the descriptions of warfare in the historical record. In the late fourth century CE, Theobald, the Marquis of Camerino and Spoleto, was known for his cruelty toward the Greek prisoners he had taken during the siege of a castle in support of the Byzantine Empire. As he was about to have them castrated, the proceedings were interrupted by a woman who likens the work of women to warfare. In describing the events, Edward Gibbon notes:

> The intrusion of a frantic female, who, with bleeding cheeks, disheveled hair and importunate clamours, compelled the marquis to listen to her complaint. "It is thus," she cried, "Ye magnanimous heroes, that ye wage war against women, against women who have never injured ye, and whose arms are the distaff and the loom?"
>
> Theobald denied the charge, and protested that, since the Amazons, he had never heard of a female war. "And how," she furiously exclaimed, "can you attack us more directly, how can you wound us in a more vital part, than by robbing our husbands of what we most dearly cherish, the source of our joys, and the hope of our posterity? The plunder of our flocks and herds I have endured without a murmur, but this fatal injury, this irreparable loss, subdues my patience and calls aloud on the justice of heaven and earth."[31]

George of Antioch (d. 1151/2 CE), the Admiral of Sicily, was a Greek employed by the Norman King Roger II during his conquest of the Mediterranean. Among the spoils of war taken after his capture of Corinth were weavers. Gibbon noted, "The silk weavers of both sexes, whom George transported to Sicily, composed the most valuable part of the spoil; and in comparing the skillful industry of the mechanic with the sloth and cowardice of the [Greek] soldiers, he was heard to exclaim that the distaff and loom were the only weapons which the Greeks were capable of using."[32]

Textiles and War

The twenty-first century began with images of war for millions of people around the world. War can be seen as a betrayal of a people's trust in their government, a period that transforms everyday life due to its brutality, leading to a loss of honor, family and community. It causes people to question their own humanity and the policies of their leaders. Women often take pride in their own ability to survive the destruction and violence of war, and in the actions of their friends and community. In many cases, they use textiles to provide a visual commentary on the impact of war, expressing their perspective on the events as well

as their concerns about life after the violence ends. In many cases, after the trauma of war, people are encouraged to forget about their experiences and remain silent, which allows society to create a more romantic view of the national triumph.[33] But memories do not really die. Rather they lie buried, only to resurface years later. Revelation undermines the power of trauma, making it visible, offering a vocabulary to discuss one's experiences, and eventually leading to healing. Textiles can serve as a bridge "between the internal and personal and the external and public spheres of the war," allowing those who view them to come to terms with the past, to move forward and to forge a new future.[34] They can also work as a form of resistance against the limitations of official history and present a different perspective on past events, serving as witness to events others do not want revealed.

War imagery on textiles draw out memories and stories of wartime experiences, restoring gaps in cultural history and allowing for the airing of war traumas, making them a legitimate artistic genre rather than just an erratic "blip" in textile production.[35] Women historically have been seen as guardians of cultural memory, yet they are usually relegated to a minor role in written history. These textiles provide women's perspectives of the events of war, serving as transformative spaces where a new narrative about society and humanity can begin. They provide help to their creators, telling their stories of survival. Like traditional war art, which often glorifies the winner and has typically been created by a male artist, textiles of war can also be seen as patriotic art, their visual symbols meaningful and compelling. Their use of national colors and often naïve imagery can initially distract the viewer from the seriousness of their message, although a closer look will reveal their true meaning. These memoirs in cloth can be disconcerting and disturbing, given their overt expressions of nationalism, militarism and aggression. As will be seen, these textiles take many forms, including clothing, home décor, and objects intended for sale to outsiders. As Ariel Zeitlin Cooke has noted, by wearing garments with war motifs, people are "wearing the battle on their bodies, the ultimate site of violence."[36] Decorating a home with war textiles brings the war into the domestic sphere, making it ever present in the residents' hearts and minds. The sale of textiles with war imagery can provide women with an important source of income in a time of great need. These textiles also become a form of public art, bringing details of the horrors of a specific conflict to light. Despite their public revelation, they still remain a personal, private memory for the woman who is telling her private story through her work.

Imaginary Warfare

Not all of the wars depicted by women in their textiles are historical. Women from numerous cultures have created embroidered, needlepoint, woven and quilted textiles depicting scenes of battles from fictional wars found in local mythologies and literature. This allows women to address their anxiety about warfare and express their opinions of actual war in a safe, non-threatening manner. In Europe, generations of women have embroidered scenes from epics such as the *Chanson de Roland,* the Arthurian legends and *Ivanhoe.* In China, woven *kesi* textiles depicting scenes of battles taken from popular literature and theatrical productions were made by women beginning in the Song Dynasty (960–1279 CE). In early twentieth century Bali, women in a few towns created embroidered banners that feature figures and scenes from the great Sanskrit epics, *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata,* includ-

ing some of the most important battle scenes from both stories. These are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.

In ancient Burma, the textile tradition *shwe chi doe,* also known as *kalagas,* developed during the early Pyu period (circa 500–860 CE) as gold decorated clothing worn by members of the royal family. Gold embroidered tapestries and elephant and horse accoutrements are mentioned in stone inscriptions dating between 1044 and 1167 CE at Bagan.[37] The tapestries were being made in the area around Mandalay when Europeans arrived in the region in the sixteenth century and continued to thrive under royal patronage until the British displacement of the monarchy in 1886. The focus of *shwe chi doe* production shifted to tourist items under the British administration of Burma, although over time it almost became extinct, taken up by artisans in India and Thailand who exported their products worldwide.

Shwe chi doe tapestries like the one shown in this book use appliqué, embroidery and embellishments of gold and silver thread, metal sequins and glass "jewels" to depict images from Sanskrit epics, Buddhist jataka tales and folk tales. While tapestries created prior to the twentieth century tend to feature a subdued color palette and painted imagery outlined in metallic thread, modern pieces feature bright colors and stuffed, raised figures done on velvet, decorated with hundreds of metallic sequins. Each piece contains hidden symbolism in addition to its visible image. The number of sequins in a leaf, the number of rows in a border, and the animals depicted all serve as reminders of cultural values, ethics, and the traditional code of conduct.

During the twentieth century, the tradition experienced a revival within Burma. Among the contemporary images depicted are secular scenes of court life, landscapes, the Shwedagon pagoda, and the zodiac, as well as religious scenes, celestial beings and mythological figures such as scenes from the *Yama Zatdaw* (Ramayana) (C1). Modern pieces are designed and drawn by men; the designs are implemented by young women with keen eyesight and small, nimble fingers. Large tapestries are created by groups of women working together. Large pieces of velvet are stretched taut on a frame that sits approximately eighteen inches off the floor. The design is drawn onto the fabric in chalk by the male artist. The figures to be stuffed and appliqued to the velvet are drawn, colored and embellished on separate smaller frames prior to cutting them from their fabric. Gold and silver wrapped cotton yarn is couched onto the figures which are then appliqued to the larger tapestry. Additional couching is done on the larger work, followed by the final application of sequins and glass jewels.[38] In addition to wall hangings, the technique is now used on tourist items such as purses, hats, vests and pillows made not only in Mandalay, but also in Yangong.

Shwe chi doe is not the only textile featuring imagined warfare made for the tourist industry in Asia. In Indonesia, traditional batik techniques are used to produce textiles for sale to tourists. While souvenir art is often seen as "ethno-kitsch," designed purely for profit, it actually can serve as a means of modernizing indigenous economies and cultures while ensuring the continuation of important visual artistic traditions.[39] Local artists adopt new materials and demands brought about by contact with other cultures, adjusting to the shifting cultural climate brought by globalization, while meeting with tourist expectations about "authentic" local art. The Indonesian sarong shown here is such an example. Done using aniline dyes on cotton fabric, it depicts two "primitive" warriors, remnants of colonial prejudices, playing to the romanticized ideas of the population's uncivilized nature.

This tradition of depicting imaginary wars occurs today in the west as well. Embroidered