CRAFTING CITIZENS: MATERIAL RHETORIC, CULTURAL INTERMEDIARIES, AND THE AMAZWI ABESIFAZANE SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL QUILT PROJECT

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

Create Africa South (CAS), a South African nonprofit organization, formed in 2000 after facilitating a weeklong “memory cloth” workshop where sixty women gathered, shared their experiences and inscribed them in text and cloth together. Their narratives responded to the theme, “A Day I Will Never Forget,” and CAS founders soon realized the stories the women shared through multimodal composition provided healing for the women and archived untold histories of apartheid and the transition to a democratic South Africa. The organization has archived more than 2,500 cloths in the project they named *Amazwi Abesifazane* (Zulu for “Voices of Women,” hereafter referred to as VOW). The embroidered cloths – framed with an image of the cloth maker and her textual narrative in its original language and English translation – have traveled to exhibitions across the United States and Europe. This dissertation engages analytical and narrative forms to examine the “memory cloth” workshop initiative and a recent Parliamentary intervention that shifted the workshop theme to “What Does Democracy Mean to Me?” and positioned the project as an alternative to alphabetic English literacy for rural South African women. State and nonprofit literacy programs are critical sites of multimodal composition where literacy sponsorship exists locally and globally, directly and indirectly, and across transnational advocacy networks.

The participants of the VOW project use a range of composition technologies to represent the narratives – from needle and thread to website design and database software, depending on their position within the project. CAS and Parliament project facilitators compose texts such as grant proposals, sponsorship presentations, and project websites to scaffold the cloths for a range of audiences. In doing so, the organizations function as literacy intermediaries who exert representational power over the women cloth makers, their subjectivity, and literate ability.
These representations may work to effect political action and further project sustainability, sometimes in opposition to the cloth maker and her direct interests. I argue the concept of the “literacy intermediary” challenges and critically supplements the concepts of the “literacy sponsor” and “literacy mediator” to account for these discrete representational acts, the relationships intermediaries attempt to forge through them, and their global circulation.

As an organizational ethnography that connects the practices of South African organizations participating in two March 2008 quilt workshops to sites including the South African Parliament and an American UNESCO-sponsored art exhibition, the dissertation contributes to current critical conversations on cross-cultural rhetoric, its circulation and real or imagined connections to economic and political development. In this introductory chapter I establish the basis and significance for studying the Amazi project from a rhetoric and composition disciplinary approach as well as outline my methodology for research collection and write up. I situate the use of creative nonfiction writing forms in the discipline in order to identify precedents who articulate the value of joining (or in Eldred’s mind, re-joining) creative composition style to the academic writing our field produces. In the next section, Interchapter A, I demonstrate these creative practices with an essay, “Literacies of Difference,” that works to understand my early literate development, with a focus on my introduction to literacies about differences in race and ability, and their impact on my scholarly identity.

The first chapter, “Crafting Citizens through Contemporary Craft Rhetoric Projects” works to define craft rhetoric projects, cultural intermediaries, and the practices these intermediaries engage as craft rhetoric project facilitators. First I ground my definition and interest in craft rhetoric projects in the field’s “material turn,” or rhetoric and composition’s
interest in the material processes and economies in which rhetorical meaning is composed and received. I work to provide a robust picture of craft rhetoric projects by analyzing three relatively recent projects that have all received important critical attention: Chilean “resistance” arpilleras, the AIDS Memorial Quilt, and the Clothesline Project. Moreover, these three case studies demonstrate the varying levels of intermediation that individual organizations or project founders may apply to create rhetorical meaning. The case studies also reveal three processes of intermediation (centralizing material, framing meaning, and crafting citizenship) that I describe as both significant in terms of the work they do to accomplish rhetorical meaning for craft rhetoric projects and those who participate in them.

Interchapter B, “Mrs. Gambushe,” composes a sketch of a contemporary crafter’s life in South Africa to show at least one context in which South African craft is taking place in a community. The profile narrates my early working relationship with Mrs. Eunice Gambushe as well as some events from our trip traveling to the Mpumalanga province to co-facilitate two cloth workshops over two weeks in March 2008. Without universalizing her story, this interchapter works to show some of the typical social and economic challenges and opportunities structuring the craft industry in contemporary South Africa.

The second body chapter, “Create Africa South and the Amazwi Abesifazane Voices of Women Project,” begins an extended case study of the Amazi project that continues over two chapters. Taking up the Amazi project, I consider it within the framework of craft rhetoric projects and cultural intermediaries that I built in the first chapter. Drawing comparisons between the representational and memorial work the Chilean arpilleras, AIDS quilt panels, and the Clothesline Project t-shirts accomplished, I also embed the Amazi project within the cultural context of reconciliation and healing that is specifically characteristic of post-apartheid South
Africa. Connecting the work that CAS accomplishes as a cultural intermediary to centralize material, frame meaning, and craft citizenship for project participants and audiences, I argue that CAS consistently fails to centralize and frame the meaning they claim to for the *Amazwi* project. I work to prove this is largely due to the project exhibition format and location. CAS engages in choices that craft agentic abilities for the memory cloths, but craft a form of citizenship for South African women that suggests their understanding of themselves may always be tied to the trauma of Apartheid and the democratic transition.

Interchapter C, “Mahushu Township,” brings the questions I raise about digitally divided composition practices and about “low” technologies most saliently to bear. I describe the process of conducting a cloth workshop (the second one without PMP resources) in a rural township where my presence as a white, American researcher unloosened informal expressions of “apartheid” almost twenty years after the end of legal forms of racial segregation in South Africa. Finally, I also address difficulties of research (such as hunger and limited access to potable water) that one rarely encounters or reads advice on how to prepare for in research methodology texts.

In the third and final body chapter, “Literacy Intermediaries and the ‘Voices of Women’ South African National Quilt Project,” I analyze the role of the PMP as an intermediary for the “Voices of Women” project when they approached CAS to collaborate on a national quilt project in 2007. Recognizing the more institutionalized and therefore more powerful role of the PMP as a cultural intermediary, I demonstrate how the PMP re-framed the meaning of the “Voices of Women” workshop shifting from an emphasis on historical experience to conceptions of literacy and democracy. This shift, I argue, also crafted limited forms of citizenship available to women that not only presented the national government as the primary relationship to develop in order to
effect change and access the social goods of a new South Africa, but also suggesting that the most engaged citizens of the “new” South Africa will speak English. When the PMP crafted participation in the “Voices of Women” project as an alternative to that desirable English literacy (the PMP, after all, would take on the role of English “translation” for the project), they assumed the role of a literacy intermediary – a powerful type of literacy sponsor, particular in a postcolonial era.

If the third chapter raises ethical concerns about the practices and networks of literacy intermediation between postcolonial governments, global ideologies surrounding literacy, and “developable” subjects, then the fourth interchapter raises ethical concerns about the role as research. I call into question the role of researchers to account for those practices amidst fieldwork events that may disrupt researchers’ beliefs in the hidden motives and final ends of research. The interchapter, “Research as Atonement,” reads the film adaptation of the Ian McEwan novel, *Atonement*, against critical moments during my research trips to question the “empowerment” drive of contemporary scholarship.

My conclusion works to consider the broader significance of craft rhetoric projects as I outline critical areas of scholarship that need to be further developed to understand the critical history of these projects: how they are explicitly and implicitly connected to conceptions of citizen-making; how these projects have been involved in cross-cultural “citizenship development” for at least 150 years; how structures of intermediation form to facilitate craft rhetoric projects; and how these projects may affirm or counter conventional ideas about the identities of crafters and handcrafted items. Finally, I outline how incorporating research about craft rhetoric projects and the rhetoric of intermediaries into my pedagogy models the complex structures of citizenship and engagement they are already navigating and will continue to
navigate in their professional and personal lives. Ultimately, my conclusion advocates for community based learning pedagogy where students can write for community-based organizations at the same time they develop robust sills to identify and critique the intermediating processes that raise important ethical questions.

Overall, this dissertation argues contemporary rhetoric and composition scholarship must recognize that rhetorical practice and engagement is transnational, occurs across significant socio-economic levels, and involves organizations with significant rhetorical access. My conclusion only begins to suggest a structure for the connection between participant observation research (such as organizational ethnography) and the development of community-based and service learning opportunities that are reciprocal and ethical.
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The process of paring down my experience and focusing the myriad implications craft rhetoric projects have to a number of disciplines into a text that could contribute to my field of rhetoric and composition proved to be a significant challenge. It also proved to be a valuable challenge and one that Peter Mortensen, my dissertation chair, guided me through with tremendous knowledge, understanding, and accessibility. Since the beginning of my graduate studies his mentorship has been essential for my development and ability to conceive of the multiple genres and communities that rhetoric and composition scholars may impact.

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Introduction
Crafting Citizens: Overview of Study

“Without a bias, however, language is only words as cloth is only threads. To write is to find words that explain what can be seen from an angle of vision.”¹

The first time I saw a “memory cloth” from the Amazwi Abesifazane project, it was printed in an art exhibition catalog, Weavings of War.² Reproduced in color ink and reduced to the dimensions of a postcard on the page, the scene on the cloth grabbed me: thread and beaded flowers bloomed across the background as a white, uniformed man wields a truncheon over the back of a black man in the foreground. The black man, handcuffed, forever moves toward a police van, arrested on cloth. Nokuzola Ngidi composed this cloth in 2000 and wrote the following about the violent scene depicted in the embroidery:

The year I will never forget - it was 1986, during the times when apartheid was rife, we were not free in Odendaalsrus. At that time people who did not have the green book (ID) were arrested. My mother used to sleep on top of the house. The police and boers used to come to look for our parents at our homes, and tell us we are children of kaffirs. What I will never forget is the day when the police took my father away while he was on his way to work. They took him away and we did not know where they were taking him, my mother did not go to look for him at work in Saiplaas, because he was afraid she would also be arrested. After a whole year we heard that there was a man who was found in Kroonstad, who had been to the hospital and they found his employee card on him which had his name, Zibonele Filwane, as well as the name of the company he worked for. That man was my father; he had injuries on his spine and his legs, he could not walk anymore until the day he died.³

The traumatic subject and the everydayness of the cloth medium contrasts message and material. Ngidi expresses a private loss, her father’s disappearance and maiming, to readers of a Michigan State University Press publication and to the “Weavings of War” exhibit attendees in East Lansing. But she also thickens an historical moment, “when apartheid was rife,” that explains her loss as part of life she and other Black or “Bantu” South Africans experienced in the Orange Free State in the mid-1980s.⁴
In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes offers a theory about visually arresting images like this cloth. He describes the *punctum* of an image as “that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me).” I imagine the actions of embroidery: the needle repeatedly pricking as it pulls thread through cloth. Although all embroidery may contain thousands of these invisible punctures, it is the stark representations of experience in the *Amazwi* cloths that doubly sharpen this medium’s craft. While the catalog reproduces Ngidi’s cloth strikingly in printed paper, my training in textiles and needlework show me even more: my fingers trace the stitch lines on the page and I “feel” the soft cotton embroidery thread stitched together into a dense bundle, now a truncheon. I understand the connection a handcrafted object can create between the crafter and the object’s owner or viewer, for lack of a better term, since it is as much a tactile encounter as a visual one. This textual experience moves me to contact Create Africa South (CAS), the founders of the *Amazwi* project, and ask if it is possible to access the archive and assist in any way my skills might contribute.

The following dissertation stems from an ongoing research relationship that started with that textual experience and subsequent email. At a moment when I was developing a commitment to materialist conceptions of rhetoric and composition, the *Amazwi* project presented a critical complement to existing materialist scholarship in the field, and one of its most analyzed objects of study, the AIDS Memorial Quilt. While the field was raising critical questions about the reception and function of projects like the AIDS Quilt and the Clothesline Project that invited participation from “everyday” people to engage in acts of collective remembering, there was little to no research on these participants, their composing processes, or the organizations that formally structured those composing processes. The lack of research on participants may be in part to the anonymity on which these projects are based: The NAMES
Project Foundation, the organization that coordinates the AIDS Quilt, retains panel contributor’s information confidentially and the Clothesline Project is a geographically scattered, self-described “network” where most chapters maintain an anonymous archive or none at all.⁸ Although the Amazwi cloths also revealed experience with HIV/AIDS and violence towards women (the two foci of the AIDS Quilt and the Clothesline Project, respectively), the practice of recognizing the composers of the cloths is distinctive and opened up the possibility for access into the composition process without breaching an anonymity that is organizationally embedded in the AIDS Quilt and the Clothesline Project. This distinction of recognizing composers would soon come to raise questions of ethical organizational practice and these questions would come to shape my research. Moreover, the Amazwi project’s location in South Africa yet extensive online and international exhibition raised important questions about the movement of material rhetoric across socio-economic and cultural borders.

Considering these three projects together and within a long history of rhetoric involving craft-based projects, my research moved me to identify a type of rhetorical intervention, craft rhetoric: a rhetorical intervention that positions, even juxtaposes, handcrafted items in the public sphere. The AIDS Quilt, for example, juxtaposes a domestic symbol, a bed quilt, onto a civic one every time that it displays its panels on the National Mall in Washington D.C. Larger craft rhetoric projects featuring a number of handcrafted contributions are often sponsored by organizations that function as intermediaries, who instill meaning as they structure participation and exhibition of the craft rhetoric projects. I set up an IRB-approved relationship with CAS to understand the work of an intermediary organization based on participant observation research. I wanted to understand the Amazwi memory cloth workshop process and the project’s archive and exhibition history that has worked to collect experiences like Ngidi’s above.⁹ My ongoing work
with CAS that began in 2008 continually reveals to me how consequential – and yet often invisible – the organizational and representational work that nonprofit and governmental groups perform. This work promotes cultural literacy experiences like the Amazwi project, economic literacies such as those created by social microfinance lender Kiva, or handicraft literacies where Mennonite Central Committee volunteers may advise an artisan to develop a fair-trade product to be sold at 10,000 Villages. Moreover, this work frequently takes place in postcolonial, or periphery, spaces where the organizations possess extensive access to transnational advocacy networks and therefore knowledge production about craft, literacies, and cultures.

Both John Trimbur and Jacqueline Jones Royster have recently shifted to examine the organizational context of postcolonial South African literacy and rhetoric about literacies (such as HIV/AIDS in Royster’s case study). Interestingly, both scholars invoke the word “public” in the titles of their analyses of organizations: for Trimbur, the South African Committee for Higher Education (SACHED) and for Royster, the loveLife initiative. A limitation in their scholarship and the field more broadly is largely one of paucity – a lack of a monograph-length study such as this one that offers an organizational ethnography of the institutions working to create opportunities for civic participation and the development of a range of literacies. Without more extensive examinations of these organizations, then the scholarship remains limited to highlighting examples of individual organizations (SACHED) or campaigns (loveLife billboards). More importantly, this limited focus risks flattening a sense of publics and rhetors just as rhetoric and composition research opens itself up to transnational rhetorics and the spaces outside of the West that are marshaling “strategic action in the face of complex contemporary challenges and problems.” At the same time Royster wants to celebrate a public literacy originating in South Africa, she briefly footnotes the campaign’s primary sponsor, an American
health nonprofit organization, without acknowledging the influence they may exert on the
loveLife campaign’s development. These organizational connections that cross geographic and
governmental boundaries to sponsor rhetoric projects are critical and remain less studied in the
field where the “limits of the local” interfere: as Brandt and Clinton articulate, limits “when, as
researchers, we fail to… consider [the objects in a literacy event] only in terms of their function
in the local.”

Mary Sheridan-Rabideau’s *Girls, Feminism, and Grassroots Literacies* is an important
example of an organizational ethnography that reveals the activist literacies an organization
created for girls and women in a Midwestern town. Her focus on the organizational aspects,
such as how funding “occasionally limit[ed] what activities GirlZone would offer, an unintended
consequence to be sure” begins to consider the impact of organizational intermediation, but
remains focused on the local to the point here of considering influential ideology as “an
unintended consequence.” The study situates “local praxis” against “a cultural studies approach
that examines large-scale political understandings of praxis” but may miss an opportunity to
consider a multiple organization, cultural studies approach that could show how ideology
becomes reified through more powerful organizations. This could further the impact the text, and
more largely the field, can have on literacy advocacy in public policy.

With a theoretical sketch of transnational organizations and their influence on
community-based craft rhetoric projects in place, I traveled to Durban, South Africa to research
CAS for a first trip from late January through April 2008. In March 2008 I participated in two
memory cloth workshops. Both were held in the Mpumalanga Province of South Africa, with the
first sponsored by the South African Parliamentary Millennium Programme (PMP), a recent
collaborator with CAS on a national quilt project on the theme “What Does Democracy Mean to
Me.” After maintaining communication with CAS staff over 2008, I returned to Durban for another 3 months from February through April 2009. During that trip I observed tense progress on the CAS and PMP collaboration as I traveled to Cape Town to interview PMP staff and visit their organization offices. During that trip I cemented the connections and commitments with CAS and individuals that remain valuable to me today. The following section explores the methodological approach I employed to establish those connections and collect research. Finally I position the compositional choices for the dissertation, specifically its creative nonfiction interchapters, within a collage of texts from the field of rhetoric and composition to recognize its longstanding investment in personal essay and narrative genres.

**Methodology: The Research Project From Data Collection to Write Up**

The dissertation draws on two significant sources of research – archival and ethnographic data – and examines the tensions between the two and the public representations they challenge. In this section, I outline the methodology I used to make decisions about the scope of the research project, the data collected for the dissertation, the research relationships I formed, research limitations, and the format I selected for writing up the research. Each chapter and interchapter draws upon observations, correspondence, interviews and documents I have collected from research participants, public sites, and organizational archives from January 2008 through to the present and this section explains the research collection and composition process that helped me organize these disparate texts and experiences.

I prepared for my 2008 research trip by developing ethical and grounded ethnographic methods (with a focus on observation and interview-based methods) without forming larger expectations that I would complete a comprehensive ethnography of the organizations or individuals involved in the *Amazwi* quilt project. An organizational ethnography of sponsoring
organizations would reveal what existing rhetorical analyses of craft rhetoric projects alone were simply not uncovering – how “behind the scenes” decisions, constraints, and the competing interests of participants impacted the craft rhetoric project and its representation significantly. \(^1\)

In the first chapter I look at two case studies of craft rhetoric projects, the AIDS Quilt and the Clothesline Project, where existing scholarship lacks an ethnographic component that could enrich the claims scholars make about craft rhetoric and how it may effect change on composers and viewers of it. Because I could not anticipate the extent of the access I would be granted, the activities that would occur during the duration of my stay in Durban, or even my ability to return in 2009, my initial research design focused on developing a dissertation argument based on the existing *Amazwi* cloth archive and conceived of qualitative observations and interviews as contingent and possible. In fact, before my trip in 2008 I was unaware of the national quilt project collaboration between CAS and the PMP and I did not know I would have an opportunity to co-facilitate two workshops in March of that year in the Mpumalanga province. At a 2011 public lecture on her book *Microfinance and Its Discontents*, anthropologist Lamia Karim argued for the necessity of the participant observer to shift research focus based on the opportunities and experiences presented to her, citing her own shift from a focus on religious to micro-lending practices in Bangladesh when she failed to make a connection with her initial research participants. \(^1\) I prepared for the possibility of shifts in research direction surrounding the *Amazwi* cloth archive by researching theories of ethnographic engagement and developing ethnographic methods with which to approach people, situations, and texts. At the same time, these shifts had to be managed within an ethical framework determined by myself, those participating in my research, and the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board. \(^1\)
Over time these ethnographic methods have developed into an organizational ethnography of CAS and a continuing relationship with the organization. Theresa Lillis makes the distinction between ethnography as a methodology and not a method - one whose “distinguishing feature” is “sustained engagement in research sites using multiple data sources” including “virtual ethnography” through e-communication.\textsuperscript{20} Sustained and continuing engagement with the organization, even though it has been almost exclusively through email since May 2009, allows me to feel more confident in the arguments I present about the organization and the possibility of their impact on the organization, as I explore in in the second chapter and conclusion. Organizational ethnographies within the field of rhetoric and composition, such as Mary Sheridan-Rabideau’s that I discuss above, have started to contribute to our understanding of literacy and technical communication.\textsuperscript{21} In a recent article for \textit{College Composition and Communication}, Michelle LaFrance and Melissa Nicolas introduce institutional ethnography methodologies (a specialized form of organizational ethnography developed by sociologist Dorothy Smith) to writing program research.\textsuperscript{22}

My commitment to CAS spans five years and includes a range of activities I have observed and performed with the organization. In November 2006 I contacted the Executive Director of CAS, Janine Zagel, shortly after encountering the quilt project in the art exhibition catalog \textit{Weavings of War: Fabrics of Memory}. She granted me access to the CAS offices and \textit{Amazwi Abesifazane} memory cloth archive provided I could support my travel to Durban and I did so for a total of six months over 2008 and 2009. My activities in Durban included composing documents with staff, working with the archive, and researching funding resources for the organization. During that time and up through the present day, I collaborate with CAS primarily via email, but also through telephone and online video calls. Our current collaboration is working
to develop funding for a physical and online museum to exhibit the *Amazwi Abesifazane* “A Day I Will Never Forget” cloth archive.

In 2011 CAS, Phansi Museum, and the Learning in Community program at the University of Illinois offered a service-learning course open to University of Illinois students over the spring and fall semesters of that year where I served as Project Manager. Students composed brochures and fundraising documents and also created website and database prototypes for an online space to exhibit the *Amazwi* and Phansi Museum archives. Currently I serve an occasional researcher and fundraising document composer with CAS until I find a permanent situation at an educational institution that can sponsor organizational collaboration for future projects.23 Over the last five years these different capacities I have performed with the organization – as educator, project manager, advisor, researcher, observer – inform the composition of this text and the organizational ethnography I offer in the second chapter. Instead of focusing on the genealogy of the *Amazwi* project as it has developed from 2000, this dissertation closely examines the national quilt project collaboration between CAS and PMP. Although I reference organizational history, this text focuses most on the events connected to this collaboration between organizations and South African women project participants from 2008 to 2012.24

The dissertation is based on archival and qualitative data I collected over the time period I outlined above. All of the qualitative research I conducted was covered by two IRB applications approved through the University of Illinois in 2008 and 2009. Interestingly, the review board determined research in 2008 involving the quilt participants exempt because of the public nature of their participation in the project and inclusion of their names on the cloths and narratives they produced. The second year I had to refine language over two cycles of revisions
about two key issues: 1) a discussion about the difference between South African nationality and ethnicity in terms of vulnerable populations and 2) ensuring protections for CAS and PMP employees I interviewed about their organizations as my research focused further into organizational ethnography.

CAS granted me unexpectedly broad access to their organization, both in terms of archival data and participation in qualitative material. The dissertation reflects the extensive time I have spent with the Amazwi memory cloth archive (and its unit of cloth, narrative, and clothmaker’s image) as well as key supporting materials including the privately published book of Florence Mdlolo’s memory cloths, Ngiyalizwa Izwi Lonntanami / I could hear the voice of my child.25 I currently possess a backup of the digital cloth database and assisted with the data entry process in the office. Supporting archival materials include the coverage the project has received at United Nations and other cultural organization sponsoring events as well as extensive internal documents regarding fundraising and development for the project since the first memory cloth workshop in 2000. These archival documents connected intimately to the qualitative research I conducted with the organization – both as I turned to writing up research but also using archival documents in projective interviews, which I explain below.

The CAS offices served as my primary qualitative research site in both 2008 and 2009 and my observations and interviews were possible because of the close relationships I established with CAS’s small staff. My observations include the daily office routine of the organization’s sole staff member, co-facilitating, and participating in planning with the organization’s Founder and Executive Director. Throughout these activities, I composed field notes as well as recorded initial impressions with fellow research participants on an audio digital recorder. I videotaped public events of the workshop process as well as workshop planning
procedures. I conducted few “formal” interviews with co-worker Morongoe Tsoaeli and workshop co-facilitator Eunice Gambushe, preferring to interview them as events occurred so we could reflect upon them more immediately. I conducted two separate, formal interviews with the organization’s founder, Andries Botha, and the Executive Director, Janine Zagel. My interviews all make use of projective techniques, asking CAS staff members to interact with organizational documents and memory cloths from the archive as they discuss their connection to the project.26

My relationship with the PMP was more removed in terms of distance and communication access than the reciprocal connection I was able to make with CAS. The archival materials I have of the PMP include documents that were available for public download on their organizational website or printed about the “Voices of Women” national quilt and shared with me. These include a 2007 annual organizational report; 3 “Voices of Women” project reports covering all 9 quilt workshops, and a provincial collaboration proposal for the “Voices of Women” project. I rely upon these documents as well as others the PMP produced in Chapter Three to explore the ideologies of literacy they rely upon and the representation of civic participation and South African women they promote. At the same time, my access to a “complete” record of organizational documents from the PMP, including more recent Annual Reports and the quilt project report that included the Mpumalanga province workshop was limited until the summer of 2012.27 I conducted an hour-long interview with PMP Mpumalanga workshop coordinators at the conclusion of the workshop and visited the PMP offices in Cape Town in 2009 for follow-up interviews with both coordinators (Ilana-Lloren van Louw and Thsephiso Masenya) as well as the art director for the project (Ernestine White). PMP Director, Zubeida Shaik, did not commit to an interview although I extended the opportunity for her to do so in 2009 after observing her open the 2008 Mpumalanga quilt workshop opening night
banquet. The 4 total interviews with three PMP employees, in conjunction with the official and
corporate documents I have access to, inform the argument I create in Chapter Three, identifying the
PMP as a literacy intermediary.

My access to women participating in the quilt workshops was more limited than I hoped
for two significant reasons that I discuss below. The qualitative research I collected of women
participating in the workshop consists primarily of field notes and video taken during key public
events over the course of the five days. Amongst Mpumalanga workshop project participants, I
conducted one interview with a participant who spoke fluent English and two additional
interviews with the help of workshop co-facilitator Morongoe Tsoaeli.

My interviews rely heavily on projective techniques where interview subjects interact
with material objects that may prompt them to make discrete observations, narrate stories about
the object, or respond to questions I pose about the object.28 The handwritten narratives, pencil
sketches, and embroidered cloths that workshop participants produce over the course of the five
days serve as obvious and rich projective material within the workshop to gauge participants’
and facilitators relationships to the cloths. For example, a woman whose story I focus on in the
final interchapter discussed her strategy (“to sew quickly”) for embroidering a section of her
cloth’s design as she ran her fingers over the section. At the same time having the cloth there
allows me to point to parts of her cloth as she explains her compositional choices, it also
materially reminds her of the particular person this figure on the cloth evokes. Project planning
and exhibition documents – such as workshop schedules, budgets, and provincial proposals –also
served to inspire reaction and feedback from organizational employees as they moved between
identifying individual positions, larger organizational goals, and how the two intersect.
Finally, I also use theoretical and archival texts to create interactions with ideas that I entertain in my dissertation to develop interview questions. In my interview with Andries Botha, for example, I cite nineteenth century missionary journals where sewing instruction intertwines with a Christian civilizing mission as both a challenge and an opportunity for Botha to respond after he positions needlework as a “natural” medium for women. Projective interview techniques can elicit moments of dialogue between interview subject and material objects that possess meaning or exchange outside of the researcher, her questions, and the research interview. In this case, I ask the project founder to account for the civilizing history of what he perceives to be a naturally expressive medium for memory cloth makers. Material texts evoke a symbolic and dialogic space outside of the research project for interview subjects to narrate meaning.

I was able to engage as deeply as a participant observer in large part because of my willingness to narrate meaning about myself (often through stories) even if my transmission was not always successful in shifting multi-lingual situations in South Africa. This willingness was paired with two skills that I brought with me that proved to be useful for participation: my sewing and writing abilities. I developed hand and machine sewing skills starting at a young age, learning from my mother and later at summer camp and Girl Scout activities. Upon graduating high school I professionalized these skills, earning a 1200-hour certificate in Industrial Garment Technologies Operation at an occupational center and later an Associate of Arts degree in fashion design. I have been developing my writing abilities for as long as my sewing skills and they ultimately proved both the first skill CAS employee Morongoe Tsoaeli looked to me for as well as the skill they have asked me to perform the most on their behalf. I return to my early literacy learning in the interchapter following this introduction to exemplify some of the stories I
shared with research participants and that I position theoretically below as important to maintain and represent in rhetoric and composition research.

“At this time, I wonder how carefully Janine considered her answer of ‘no’ when she said that my only speaking English would not be a problem – of course she couldn’t have imagined I would have gone on these workshops at the time she said so.” I wrote these words in my field notes at the conclusion of two weeks in the rural Mpumalanga province where my language deficiencies I identified above proved to be a challenge. The research limitations I encountered shaped the focus of the dissertation project fundamentally: my abilities encouraged me to focus on the organizations sponsoring the craft rhetoric projects instead of a broad interview base with participants about their composing processes and project impact post-workshop as I initially desired. This was a hard but ultimately important compromise – as I explore in the next chapter when I theorize intermediaries, I recognize fully the discursive constraints and affordances their actions pose for the composing process of participants. In future research I anticipate continuing my language development in Zulu, cultivating research resources for research assistants and translation work, and selecting American-based, English-speaking sites of craft rhetoric production to gain perspective on craft composing processes from the perspective of project participants as well as my own cross-cultural research abilities. In other words, the research here focuses on the “meta-rhetors” – the civic and nonprofit organizations that coordinate projects gathering together a range of rhetors – and my research trajectory includes understanding further both the participating rhetors and audiences impacted by these projects.

It is important for me to describe my position in my daily experience in the Durban area, in particular to acknowledge my identity and hypothesize its effects on events. Where I come from, what I look like, and the cultural attachments I bring matters in the research I engage as it
does for any researcher who embraces qualitative methods. It matters even more significantly at postcolonial and colonial sites, especially when the researcher is fluent exclusively in a colonizing language of the area.

The primary marker of my Americanness was my accented speech and until or unless I did speak, I typically appeared as an adult, white South African woman. Frequently people admitted to presuming I was South African until I spoke or was introduced as American. Although on two occasions I was greeted in Afrikaans, English remained the predominant public language spoken by whites in Durban’s recreational and commercial spaces. In part because of Durban’s English colonial past (in distinction to Dutch in the Western Cape and inland) and large Asian population (22%), nearly all commercial or service employees will speak English in the suburbs, Howard College, and town shopping centers despite their ethnic identity. My initial appearance to people was likely that of a white South African, one of the approximately 11% living in Durban. If my appearance created impressions, my Americanness frequently opened up opportunities where my race created challenging moments because of the indelible violence whiteness and colonialism left on the area since 1824 and southern Africa for over 350 years.

Entering the environments of the two workshops (each gathering 50-60 women over a period of 5-6 days to create stories, sketches, and cloths documenting their life experience and perceptions of democracy), I certainly knew that I would not function as an invisible observer of events. I knew that workshop participants would notice my presence and that it would have to be framed. However, the particular framing of my presence that CAS and PMP created – as a representative of the United States - was both a surprise to me and functioned in a couple of interesting ways. Although the two workshops differed widely in terms of setting and available
material resources (something I discuss in upcoming chapters), my presence was explained at these workshops in the same, two ways: 1) as a researcher from the United States researching the project and therefore attributing it value, 2) and as a potential contact of United States-based assistance for participants involved in the project.

The most exaggerated instance of the first framing occurred on the third day of the PMP/CAS Workshop, when I approached Selma Theron, one of the several journalists that visited the workshop, to ask for her contact information in the hope that I would be able to obtain her publication's (*Hazyview Herald*) coverage of the workshop. She was immediately interested in my presence and took my name and information and asked to take a photograph of me. I was surprised that Friday to find that she published the photograph in the article with the caption beneath reading, "Ms Martha Webber, a student at the University of Illinois, was part of the project." In a moment of almost silly self-reflexivity for me, I found myself a "part" of my research and being reported on in a text that was part of my research corpus. With only three images accompanying the story, Theron (perhaps in conjunction with her editorial staff) decided my presence, even as a “student” from the United States, constituted an important element of the memory cloth workshop.

Speakers at both workshops used this first framing - as a researcher from the US attributing importance to the project – for various purposes. At each closing ceremony (the first on 20 March 2008 and the second on 29 April 2008), motivational speakers referenced me in their speeches and suggested that the project the women had just participated in possessed importance since I was from the United States and had come to research it.

Perhaps even more challenging, however, was how in both closing ceremonies, motivational speakers (in the case of the first workshop, a different speaker than the first) framed
me as a potential contact of United States-based assistance. At the first workshop, this was Cathy Dlamini, Chairperson of the Ehlanzani Women's Council, who suggested to the audience that, now that I had met "marginalized" women from the rural areas of the Mpumalanga province, I could serve as a potential resource in identifying NGOs or other groups based in the United States to assist them. Implicit in this suggestion is an understanding of the distribution of the "wealth" of NGOs that many critics have identified - the majority of NGOs and their economic power tend to be based in the "North" yet look towards the "South" as sites to distribute aid/assistance. Dlamini's suggestion was set within a speech that thoughtfully criticized the PMP/CAS Mpumalanga Province Workshop as a superficial engagement with the citizens and concerns of the community; she cited weaknesses in both the short duration of the governmental intervention and the value of the products produced (the cloths).

Both of these positions I was given - often by people who had only met me for a moment - fascinated me and in some respects made me uncomfortable in the sense of the amount of responsibility I was given and the inflation of my importance. My concern was that participants of these two workshops (both facilitators and cloth producers) were asked to view the US (in which I functioned as a tangible stand-in or synecdoche) as a place that can offer funding, assistance, and opportunity. The women participating in the PMP/CAS workshop possess strong civic literacies that demonstrate an understanding of South African social services that are or should be available to them – my conversations suggest this savvy extends beyond national borders as many women expressed familiarity with development terminology like “NGOs” and organizations like USAID frequently, even if they merely desired greater contact with these organizations and were unsure about next steps.

I worked to challenge these two framings of my position as a researcher by cultivating an
ethic of reciprocity in research that remained committed to the honest expression of my interest in the project and abilities to contribute to it. It was important for me to disinvest some of the power or status attached to my Americanness by observing South African forms of cultural respect. A small example of this included demonstrating my respect for any woman elder to me by preparing and serving meals and beverages for her, such as I did for Eunice Gambushe during our two weeks of travel together. Beyond observing cultural values, I worked with CAS staff from my first communication to define more concretely how I could reciprocate the openness and resources (including a tremendous amount of staff time) they had shared with me. Mary Sheridan-Rabideau identifies multiple roles for herself as ethnographer of local community organization GirlZone in her study *Girls, Feminism, and Grassroots Literacies*, but recognizes in all of them that she “was guided by calls for praxis-oriented research and for giving back to the people (and organizations) that support our academic labor.”

In the initial contact I made with the Executive Director Janine Zagel, I explained my interest in the Voices of Women project and its archive and offered my sewing instruction services in hopes of convincing Zagel that I had experience and skills which could work with their project, rather than in distraction to it of it. Also, despite her email assurance that it was fine that I did not know any of the other official languages of South Africa fluently outside of English, I hoped the gestural movement and visuality involved with sewing instruction would mitigate the language deficiencies I possessed approaching the site. Most would agree we could understand this offering of mine to CAS as a form of reciprocity – an offer to create a research relationship based on mutual exchange and dependence. My first day at the CAS office served as an important challenge for me to negotiate what reciprocity could look like when I was asked to perform an action that gave me pause because of the pedagogical values I have developed.
When I entered the CAS office for the first time, armed with my "stitcher's dictionary," a small kit of sewing tools, and my own research tools (paper, pen, camera, digital audio recorder) I looked around for the sewing space and sewers depicted on the website and found an economically challenged organization and warehouse space. I soon learned from Morongoe Tsoaeli, the solitary salaried employee working on the Amazwi project at the time that my "fieldsite of research", the CAS offices, had its own "field" where craft workshops were held (and only when the organization has money to conduct them). On this day Tsoaeli was working with the archive of cloths to enter the most recent stories and images that had been completed about a month prior at a December 2007 workshop sponsored by the PMP in the Western Cape Province.

She offered me access to the small closet that contains the couple of thousand of cloths they have already recorded – dating back to the project's inception in 2000 – and then went back to reading the women's stories on the ancient desktop in the office. I told her I was fascinated by the process of "recording" these cloths into the archive and asked if I could observe. Pretty quickly she explained to me that she was looking at women's stories that had been handwritten by the women in their first language during the workshop. CAS receives these narratives in document files that Parliament includes a transcription of the original language narrative with an English translation. Morongoe formats the files and compiles them according to framing specifications (the final, framed presentation of cloths presents the cloth above the woman's story in her first language, a headshot, and then the English translation of the story). After a few moments, I realized that she was altering these translations to make them "read better" for the final framed version and very shortly she asked if I wanted to help since I had identified myself as an instructor of English. Their website, with its gallery of cloths containing narratives and
brief description of the workshop process, discussed the archival process very little, but in particular failed to mention the translation and intense editing phase to prepare the narratives for framing.

I questioned my initial discomfort in the practice, recognizing my commitment to honor my writing students’ language use may be in conflict with CAS organizational and even participant goals about the public presentation of a translation of an original narrative. I posed a few questions and comments that I felt would lead her to understand why these acts of translation and "correction" were entirely problematic. I knew nothing about the cloth’s makers or the workshop environment to conclude they would find this practice as problematic as I did. Tsoaeli listened, posed some of her own, and communicated clearly the expectations – both from PMP sponsors and CAS Executive Director Zagel – for the framed text to be a polished text even if the author was not present and had produced the original text months ago, thousands of kilometers to the west. In the barest of possible ways to explain it: CAS and PMP firmly believed the "quality" of the English on the framed project meant the possibility for respect, esteem, and continued financial support for the program. After asking permission to copy the files prior to this final "polish," I sat quietly for a while, watching Tsoaeli correct a misspelled word, change the order of a sentence, and pretty soon I found myself joining my language abilities to hers and this project of "correction" that was initially so strange to me. This account of one way that I engaged with CAS in a reciprocal research activity illustrates more largely how reciprocity can develop in research settings.

The experience shows me reciprocity is often spontaneous, informal, and works best when communication identifies the needs and skills of each. What you are best able to offer as a collaborator may be much different from what you initially valued about yourself. Within
ethnographic research, the concept of reciprocity proves to be one that remains radically open for interpretation and understanding of its purpose. The earliest explicit formulation I came across is from Wax who argues for reciprocity in field research "to create conditions that will generate rich data." This focus on reciprocity’s research “fruits” over its ethical characteristics remains somewhat static, with Everhart describing it as "an excellent data gathering technique" because the researcher "moves from the status of stranger to friend and thus is able to gather personal knowledge from subjects more easily” about twenty years after Wax. While Oakley also avoids defining the concept through its characteristics, she offers a less manipulative and more consequential definition of the concept when she argues simply that there is no intimacy without reciprocity. A quality of reciprocity that seems to span ethnographic descriptions of it is its informal nature – the sense that the individuals involved come to their own understandings – or not – about how and what exchanges will come about forging a particular research relationship. It is this adaptability and situatedness of reciprocity that makes it a difficult concept to capture and one that may be unrecognized because of its openness. The interchapters (specifically B-D, whose format I describe below) work to represent small moments and negotiations of reciprocity over 2008 and 2009. My intention is for these narratives to render visible these important but frequently unrepresented moments of negotiation that reveal the expectations researchers and participants hold for each other and often the cultural values shaping those expectations.

Questions of diction and formatting are vexed when it comes to writing up research that is deeply critical of representational choices made by those occupying positions within powerful institutions. Identifying intermediaries and the sometimes manipulative representational methods they employ helped me recognize that I too was an intermediary in the process of research
creation at the same time I did not want to let this recognition become too frequent or insistent that it worked to negate the text’s value. Moreover, I wanted to create a dissertation format that fulfilled the academic expectations within my field to contribute original research embedded within the discipline at the same time that I wanted to compose a document that I could share with my research participants and the organizations I ultimately critique to foster dialogue and ethical movement forward with the Amazwi craft rhetoric project. As I identified earlier in the methodology section, I shared stories and information about myself that helped establish and solidify the relationships I made with research participants. I wanted to create a format that would allow me to represent this important element of my research process.

Inspired in part by the narrative form the Amazwi project asks its participants to engage, the dissertation includes interchapter narratives that contribute to narrative scholarship in rhetoric and composition that challenges traditional understandings academic writing forms. Although personal essay forms may be atypical for a dissertation within the field, there are key texts that have encouraged my formatting decisions and work to substantiate the value of the interchapters as academic texts within the field independent of the more “traditional” academic chapters that surround them. The most influential include Mike Rose’s Lives on the Boundary (1989), Linda Brodkey’s “Writing on the Bias” (1994), Patti Lather and Chris Smithies’ Troubling the Angels: Women Living with HIV/AIDS (1997), and Janet Carey Eldred’s Sentimental Attachments: Essays, Creative Nonfiction, and Other Experiments in Composition (2005). These texts provide arguments for how narrative experience functions as critical and persuasive evidence as well as offer concrete examples of how to incorporate personal experience into academic research. This introduction strives to accomplish the same for a narrative that begins in the next interchapter. The narrative and the other subsequent interchapters traverse experience across time.
and location from an early 1980s working class neighborhood in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia to an American-themed steakhouse at a suburban South African mall. The foundational texts I explore below provided generic and thematic examples that figured significantly in developing the interchapters of my dissertation and my continuing commitment to composing in and teaching “non-academic” essay forms.

Mike Rose’s *Lives on the Boundary* engages the broad question of the American education system - particularly for members of lower economic classes - through an autobiographical account of Rose’s own educational path “from the high school vocational track up through the latticework of the American university.” Although he describes his initial intention for the text to include only “brief sketches” of his own educational experience, Rose soon found these scenes of personal experience grow larger and intersect with his professional encounters as a primary school, college, and adult educator. He describes the finished product as a book that required the mixed genres of “autobiography, case study, [and] commentary” to communicate the larger story of the contemporary American education system.

However, Rose recognizes a particular pitfall in centering one’s individual experience at the center of an academic text when he assures readers he does not see his life as emblematic: “representative men are often overblown characters; they end up distorting their own lives and reducing the complexity of the lives they claim to represent.” Rather than sharing his educational narrative to function as the exemplar of its kind, then, Rose suggests that within these particular moments readers will find broader applicability for understanding “working-class lives” and their informal and formal relationships with education. Janet Carey Eldred identifies a similar critique against the use of personal experience in academic research: personal essays “argue a ‘case of one’ under the vexed claim of ‘universal truth’.” But she contends this
critique is “predicated on the idea of a single… authentic voice… rather than on the idea of an array of socialized voices that writers compose out of.”44 In other words, personal essays that recognize the socio-cultural influences that structure meaning of life events evade this particular critique of personal essays (this may be true in some examples, but is not true that the entire genre intrinsically makes claims of universality). The popularity of Lives on the Boundary across a range of education fields as well as its recognition by the National Council of Teachers of English with the David H. Russell Award for Distinguished Research in the Teaching of English unequivocally suggests its significance and the efficacy of this mixed genre style as argument.

In 1994 College English published Linda Brodkey’s essay, “Writing on the Bias,” where, like Rose, she explores her literacy narrative set against the backdrop of the “literacy debates” that seem to plague public education discussion. Without referencing Lives on the Boundary, Brodkey makes an argument for the valuable function of Rose’s texts and her own:

That this country has historically substituted tokens of literacy for literacy practices and then cloaked its anti-intellectualism in alarming statistics about illiteracy and illiterates makes it all the more important that those of us who have learned to write teach ourselves to remember how and where it happened, what it was we learned, and especially how the lessons learned from an unofficial curriculum protected us from the proscriptions that have ruthlessly dominated the official curriculum from the outset.45

Despite publishing significantly in composition theory from the mid-1980s and serving as the director of the Warren College Writing Program at the University of California at San Diego, Brodkey begins her essay with a two-paragraph justification for the “experiment” of an essay she presents the College English readership. Printed entirely in italics, this preface attempts to scaffold the personal narrative that unfolds and explain its presence in an academic journal with a reference to textual influence and research:

One of the pleasures of writing that academics rarely give themselves is permission to experiment. I have broken with tradition here because I wanted to document the experience of being my own informant as well as tell a story about a white working-class girl’s sorties
into white middle-class culture.... Yet none of the thousands of texts that have influenced me is appended in a list of works cited, since no textual authority was summoned to underwrite the telling of the narrative. While I may not have depended on published texts, I prevailed mercilessly on the generosity of family and friends...

She identifies her choice to compose a personal narrative where she occupies the status of her “own informant” as a break with traditional scholarship in the field. What she arrives at by the essay’s conclusion is a definition of writing and its significance based on her formative experience with her mother’s sewing and not the years of formal education and writing research she has both created and engaged with as a scholar. In fact, her essay highlights moments from primary school where formal literacy instruction actively tries to hold her back, taking the form of a teacher who commands her to stop reading ahead. The essay presents the narrative form it argues for, with only the introduction to scaffold the indirect argument for the importance of personal essay in rhetoric and composition research.

Brodkey’s use of the word “bias” has double meaning for the essay: she recognizes a personal essay is written with bias but also that her first encounter with literacy was introduced to her through her mother’s sewing practices where the raw stuff of sewing – the fabric – is frequently cut on a bias. Although Brodkey doesn’t explain this in her essay, the reason garment makers cut fabric on the bias (at a 45 degree angle) is because of the flexibility “or ease” this cut creates in woven cloth that allows it to mold to the contours of the human form. In other words, cutting on the bias is cutting fabric with a very specific project (clothing) and audience (the body) in mind. As an extension of Brodkey’s recognition of sewing’s connection to literate practices, this dissertation takes seriously the literate practices that occur around the cutting, joining, and embellishing of fabric. Moving from her mother’s sewing space into public spaces where sewing becomes a government sponsored multimodal literacy project with a global reach, however, introduces new complications in the relationship between sewing practice and literacy.
Rose and Brodkey cast themselves and the people influential in their literacy development in their writing, but invoking personal essay writing methods to represent others (especially if they occupy marginalized subject positions) demands ethical responsibility and critical self-reflection.

Perhaps the most direct to address the concern of representing others, Patti Lather and Chris Smithies’ 1997 *Troubling the Angels: Women Living with HIV/AIDS*, challenges readers both visually with its formatting but also rhetorically, with its searing account of American women living with HIV and AIDS in the early 1990s. Lather and Smithies chose a divided page book format where the body paragraphs of most chapters fill the top two-thirds of the page and the footnotes the bottom third. The body contains edited transcripts of HIV/AIDS support group meetings and the footnotes contain the authors’ response (from personal reaction to theorization). Writing about the book’s form in their introduction, Lather and Smithies say “while this book is not so much planned confusion as it might at first appear, it is, at some level, about what we see as a breakdown of clear interpretation and confidence of the ability/warrant to tell such stories in uncomplicated, non-messy ways.” Their form becomes an indirect argument about how to tell stories about women living with HIV/AIDS and other subjects that traumatize or disrupt “easy” narrative strategies. Despite their desire to present the support group members’ voices as unmediated as possible, the authors recognize that *Troubling the Angels* “is also a book about researchers both getting out of the way and getting in the way” of the lives of their research participants. Unfortunately the strictly enforced divided presentation of transcript and analysis (the latter presented entirely in the footnotes section in small type) often worked to “get in the way” of the text’s impact – confusing my reading of the text and often contributing to a choppy reading if a reader wants a vision of both “voices” from the divide at the same time. Nevertheless Lather and Smithies’ transcript style presents an ethical approach to intermediation that isn’t
always possible or employed by researchers like Rose, Brodkey, or myself. This is particularly true when writing about recollections in literacy narratives, such as the first interchapter, “Literacies of Difference,” explores or when Rose and Brodkey describe their early literacy experiences.

This question of ethics is especially important when, as scholars, we write about family members and when our narratives invoke the socio-economic and medical histories that impacted our development alongside our relatives. Rose and Brodkey reveal much about their families, including their parents’ literate abilities, when they narrate their own early understandings of literacy and education. My first interchapter, “Literacies of Difference,” also reveals much about my family in terms of socio-economic as well as medical background that came to influence my early literate development and subsequent research interests. The question of the inclusion of family members and the representational ethics in composing the first interchapter have been raised by a number of disability studies scholars, but it was Michael Bérubé’s *Life As We Know It* that introduced me to the genre of disability narratives that strove to move past “ableist” representations that were, in Wendy Christmas’s words, “antithetical (or, at least, impede) the idea of viewing disability as a socially constructed site for analysis.” In Bérubé’s account of his son Jamie and the family’s experience with Jamie’s Down Syndrome he weaves broad disability policy against his representations of his son, recognizing throughout these representations are projections he holds for Jamie, who is only three. *Life as We Know It* concludes with the vision of his “job… to represent my son, to set his place at our collective table” so that “Jamie will someday be his own advocate, his own author, his best representative.” He recognizes the important space that his narrative creates in cultural conversations about disability in the United States at the close of the twentieth century at the same time he is self-reflexive about its
perspectival limitations. My first interchapter represents my mother’s disability in a similarly limited fashion, but with the recognition the narrative can be a part of multiple perspectives of disability, an area that future research will explore even more greatly.

Similar to Rose’s embrace of a “mixed genre”, Janet Carey Eldred describes the “central premise” of her essay collection, Sentimental Attachments to explore a “hybrid form of composition [that] can fuse the personal and the academic.”

The subject matter she ultimately explores through this mixed form is not one of education and literacy development or HIV/AIDS, but an exploration of “post-modern academics” and their ability to “create and re-create family” using her own experience as both daughter, granddaughter, adoptive mother, and academic.

Rather than situate her writing style on the forefront of composition studies, she argues it is a return to the personal essay form and our historical connection as composition scholars to this traditional form. The strength of this text, compared to its contemporaries (such as Candace Spigelman’s 2004 Personally Speaking: Experience as Evidence in Academic Discourse), is its ability to place imaginative and compelling personal experience at its center.

In other words, where Spigelman’s text draws on others’ experiences (ranging from professional to undergraduate student writers) to present arguments and strategies for engaging with personal experience, she never moves past posing “traditionally formed” arguments. To fall back on media scholar Marshall McLuhan’s maxim, if “the medium is the message,” then Spigelman’s medium - traditional academic argument form - fails to match up with her message about the validity of personal experience in academic writing. While Eldred may not present as historically researched a justification as Spigelman does about the validity of personal experience over time in our field, her writing style performs this justification more effectively. In researching a craft rhetoric project that placed personal narrative at its center, I found myself
placing personal narrative at the center of my research methodology and represented in my research.

This dissertation assumes a mixed genre format following these compelling examples from the field of rhetoric and composition to enact what Eldred describes as a “beautiful form through which to explore our deep-seated, dappled, disciplinary thoughts.”56 The primary writing genres I engage with are memoir and narrative essay. Like Rose, Brodkey, and Eldred I engage with the flexible genre of memoir and recall my own memories and past experiences that brought significance to the field research I conducted while in South Africa. In distinction to autobiography, where the author’s life forms the center of study and he or she provides chronological accounts of extended periods of that life, memoirs engage with strategic description of an event or events that evoke broad significance. The memoir genre abounds in *Lives on the Boundary* as Rose shares memories of his neighborhood, the media influences of his youth, and the function of his imagination to both escape and feel the misery of the poverty in which he grew up:

Growing up in South L.A. was certainly not a conscious misery. My neighborhood had its diversions and its mysteries, and I felt loved and needed at home. But all in all there was a dreary impotence to the years, and isolation, and a deep sadness about my father. I protected myself from the harsher side of it all through a life of the mind.57

Rose’s account of how people from decimated neighborhoods come to education - including the perceptions, influences, and internal challenges they perceive - could never communicate the same resonance or construct the same ability for identification in readers if he didn’t share these memories of personal experience. However, the use of memoir - memories of personal experience recollected - in academic writing must be relevant and strategic. As Rose himself acknowledged, he invokes his memories not to make himself *the* representative man but to
manifest his deep connection to the subjects - educational access and socialization - that he writes about. Writing in the field of anthropology, a discipline rhetoric and composition has borrowed from immeasurably (especially in terms of research methodology), Ruth Behar warns that making oneself “vulnerable” through the use of the personal in academic writing “doesn’t mean that anything personal goes.” Instead, “the exposure of the self who is also a spectator has to take us somewhere we couldn’t otherwise get to. It has to be essential to the argument, not a decorative flourish, not exposure for its own sake.” For Behar, the burden on the ethnographic writer is to create a text where her experiences become integral research and subject to the same critical examination as her other research subjects and texts.

Academic researchers in the humanities have many representational choices to explain our research and its significance to audiences. The ability to use experimental genres to present compelling research unites the academic writers above. I blend memoir and narrative writing forms I have described above in the interchapters that follow. In addition to memoir and ethnography, forms of writing composed for general audiences have also influenced my style and juxtaposition of personal memory with participant observation and historical event in the interchapters. I compose using craft elements of narrative journalism, a form of journalism that Walt Harrington describes as “intimate journalism” because of its focus on “the acts of ordinary people and their everyday lives” in order to depict “behaviors, motives, feelings, faiths, attitudes, grievances, hopes, fears, accomplishments, and aspirations of people as they seek meaning and purpose in their own lives.” Like ethnographic and historiographical methods, narrative journalism uses sustained oral interviewing techniques and observes the actions of the “everyday” to compare with larger cultural and historical beliefs and events. Isabel Wilkerson’s *The Warmth of Other Suns* (2010) represents a stunning example of this form when she threads the story of
three African Americans who participated in the Great Migration with the story of her own family and theories and events of the Migration. In similar fashion, I work to share the stories of the Amazwi project and the people involved (including myself) against a landscape of global nonprofit structures, political participation, and histories of profound segregation and discrimination in South Africa and the United States.

The form of this dissertation – a hybrid genre document formatted to Graduate College Theses requirements - differs from a serialized representation of fieldwork that I presented to online readers in the form of a travel/research blog. I have “translated” the participant observation and archival research I have collected into transnational service-learning curriculum, conference presentations, and even quilt panels invoking my experience and connection to the Amazwi project. Each of these representational strategies reaches toward an understanding of this project, the organizations behind it, and the women’s stories that form its center, but rich possibilities remain for the project’s reach and critical examination.

Project Significance and Chapter Outline

This chapter began by introducing a description and translated narrative from the Amazwi “memory cloth” project. I insisted that each cloth like Ngidi’s possesses its own punctum, what Roland Barthes identified as the “sharp” appeal of an image that works to establish identification with its viewers. But together the Amazwi cloths function as an historical archive that collectively possesses what Barthes called the noeme punctum. The cloths engage the viewer with its appeal to noeme, what Barthes defines as “that-has-been.” Unlike the “intensity” of the first punctum - the instant reaction inspired in the viewer - the noeme punctum cuts viewers with its “lacerating emphasis” of events past. The Amazwi project’s impact rests in the patchwork of voices that communicate a collective history: voices from women long silenced under Apartheid.
and struggling to access new opportunities in their democratic nation. CAS argues their project operates “in the spirit of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission” to focus on healing and honoring individual history. The project also importantly supplements and extends the mission of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), as it creates opportunities for women to testify who were limited by travel, the TRC’s narrow scope, and its masculinist judicial structures.64

Within these specific contexts and the particular materiality of the Amazwi project, I saw broader significance for the field of rhetoric and composition as it moves toward an increasing interest in cross-cultural and global rhetorics. The field’s increasing interest in multimodal composition and design, alternative sites of rhetorical education, and alternative forms of rhetoric offer compelling theoretical and methodological frameworks to examine the Amazwi project and what it can reveal about composition, global English, the digital divide, and social action.65 Here is a handicrafts project that asks women – regardless of their alphabetic or handicraft literacy– to create a narrative and "memory" cloth for an archive that is slowly amassing a women's history of South Africa from the perspective of Black African and Coloured women who were long barred from participating in public spheres of representation in South Africa.

The project's location in South Africa speaks to an interesting problematic in the field of rhetoric and composition studies today – just as some of our field engages itself with the descriptive project of analyzing the new and historical media of multimodal rhetoric and composition (albeit primarily within a North American or digitally networked context), others in the field articulate the growing hegemony of English, the difficulty of access abroad for scholarly and media production, and economic ideologies taught through "Global Englishes" in concentrated nodes of "developing" areas around the world.66 Considered together, these two theoretical directions seem to diverge in terms of primary texts, locations, and priorities. The
subfield of new media must always presuppose access to the Internet in order to focus on analysis, whereas the new focus on global English academic production reminds us through compelling direct observations that many scholars live in areas with no or limited Internet, some only able to compose on scarce paper supplies. Where the first theoretical direction has remained largely limited to North America or the Global North, then the second has had scholars like Suresh Canagarajah argue forcefully about the impact of knowledge production in center and periphery institutional relationships.

But these two research areas converge crucially with their investment in materiality and its determining properties. If the first emphasizes a materiality rooted in media and cultural studies theories, then the second draws on theories of globalization and Western Marxism to highlight the material-economic relationships, identities, and life opportunities that emerge through engagement with global English communication and instruction. The Amazwi project challenges these two material emphases as it problematically straddles them: it translates and disseminates women’s experiences through digital, artistic, and legislative exhibition despite the women’s limited access to Internet and travel opportunities. It embraces the “low” technology of sewing but presents compositions through the “high” technologies of digital photography and the Internet. The material relationships between the project participants, nonprofit organizational staff, and governmental representatives during this project and its representation raise critical questions about “digitally divided” multimodal composition sponsorship.

As much as this dissertation is heavily invested in participating in the disciplinary conversations I describe above in rhetoric and composition, its design and intended reach is more broadly interdisciplinarity. Most importantly I draw from the interdisciplinary field of critical nonprofit studies because of the explicit and significant connections I see between the work of
these scholars and literacy scholars to undercover the transformative and even dangerous ideologies that institutions transmit to individuals, often for bodies and locations marked as ripe for development. Making intermediaries such an intense focus of my research revealed to me that the most powerful literacy sponsors (such as governments) don’t focus on one area of development in terms of sponsorship. In other words, governmental and nongovernmental organizations typically promote a range of connected services or programs that work to “develop” the whole person and frequently make claims how the core activity of the project (in the case of Amazwi, creating a multimedia “narrative cloth”) will support and enhance literacies and development beyond the specific literacies used for the project. A typical claim of fair trade craft distributors like 10,000 Villages might be to connect the development of craft making skills indirectly to an increase in funding for educational resources and therefore literacy in communities where craft occurs. My research contends that rhetoric and composition scholars studying rhetoric and literacy initiatives across the globe (especially those with government or international sponsorship) must acknowledge the broad development context in which these claims are being made. Recognizing this larger context reveals the ideologies that work to craft citizens, a process I discuss in this dissertation, and shape ideas about the neoliberal “developable” subject.

The concepts this dissertation works to define and explore asks rhetoric and composition scholars to expand their recognition of literacy sponsors and the significant role of intermediary organizations on literacy production. At the same time, the format of my dissertation project asks scholars to further embrace creative composition strategies to represent their research. The hybrid form was inspired by the defiance of Linda Brodkey’s words in “Writing on the Bias” when she insists, “I was not ready to give up stories.” As an organizational ethnography that
connects the practices of South African organizations participating in two March 2008 quilt workshops to sites including the South African Parliament and an American UNESCO-sponsored art exhibition, the dissertation contributes to current critical conversations on cross-cultural rhetoric, its circulation and real or imagined connections to economic and political development.

**Chapter Outline**

The dissertation can be divided into the creative nonfiction interchapters I describe above and more traditional academic chapters that present my research analysis and findings on the CAS and PMP national quilt project collaboration. In this introductory chapter I establish the basis and significance for studying the Amazi project from a rhetoric and composition disciplinary approach as well as outline my methodology for research collection and write up. I situate the use of creative nonfiction writing forms in the discipline in order to identify precedents who articulate the value of joining (or in Eldred’s mind, re-joining) creative composition style to the academic writing our field produces. In the next section, Interchapter A, I demonstrate these creative practices with an essay, “Literacies of Difference,” that works to understand my early literate development, with a focus on my introduction to literacies about differences in race and ability, and their impact on my scholarly identity.

The first chapter, “Crafting Citizens through Contemporary Craft Rhetoric Projects” works to define craft rhetoric projects, cultural intermediaries, and the practices these intermediaries engage as craft rhetoric project facilitators. First I ground my definition and interest in craft rhetoric projects in the field’s “material turn,” or rhetoric and composition’s interest in the material processes and economies in which rhetorical meaning is composed and received. I work to provide a robust picture of craft rhetoric projects by analyzing three relatively
recent projects that have all received important critical attention: Chilean “resistance” arpilleras, the AIDS Memorial Quilt, and the Clothesline Project. Moreover, these three case studies demonstrate the varying levels of intermediation that individual organizations or project founders may apply to create rhetorical meaning. The case studies also reveal three processes of intermediation (centralizing material, framing meaning, and crafting citizenship) that I describe as both significant in terms of the work they do to accomplish rhetorical meaning for craft rhetoric projects and those who participate in them.

Interchapter B, “Mrs. Gambushe,” composes a sketch of a contemporary crafter’s life in South Africa to show at least one context in which South African craft is taking place in a community. The profile narrates my early working relationship with Mrs. Eunice Gambushe as well as some events from our trip traveling to the Mpumalanga province to co-facilitate two cloth workshops over two weeks in March 2008. Without universalizing her story, this interchapter works to show some of the typical social and economic challenges and opportunities structuring the craft industry in contemporary South Africa.

The second body chapter, “Create Africa South and the Amazwi Abesifazane Voices of Women Project,” begins an extended case study of the Amazi project that continues over two chapters. Taking up the Amazi project, I consider it within the framework of craft rhetoric projects and cultural intermediaries that I built in the first chapter. Drawing comparisons between the representational and memorial work the Chilean arpilleras, AIDS quilt panels, and the Clothesline Project t-shirts accomplished, I also embed the Amazi project within the cultural context of reconciliation and healing that is specifically characteristic of post-apartheid South Africa. Connecting the work that CAS accomplishes as a cultural intermediary to centralize material, frame meaning, and craft citizenship for project participants and audiences, I argue that
CAS consistently fails to centralize and frame the meaning they claim to for the *Amazwi* project. I work to prove this is largely due to the project exhibition format and location. CAS engages in choices that craft agentic abilities for the memory cloths, but craft a form of citizenship for South African women that suggests their understanding of themselves may always be tied to the trauma of Apartheid and the democratic transition.

Interchapter C, “Mahushu Township,” brings the questions I raise about digitally divided composition practices and about “low” technologies most saliently to bear. I describe the process of conducting a cloth workshop (the second one without PMP resources) in a rural township where my presence as a white, American researcher unloosened informal expressions of “apartheid” almost twenty years after the end of legal forms of racial segregation in South Africa. Finally, I also address difficulties of research (such as hunger and limited access to potable water) that one rarely encounters or reads advice on how to prepare for in research methodology texts.

In the third and final body chapter, “Literacy Intermediaries and the ‘Voices of Women’ South African National Quilt Project,” I analyze the role of the PMP as an intermediary for the “Voices of Women” project when they approached CAS to collaborate on a national quilt project in 2007. Recognizing the more institutionalized and therefore more powerful role of the PMP as a cultural intermediary, I demonstrate how the PMP re-framed the meaning of the “Voices of Women” workshop shifting from an emphasis on historical experience to conceptions of literacy and democracy. This shift, I argue, also crafted limited forms of citizenship available to women that not only presented the national government as the primary relationship to develop in order to effect change and access the social goods of a new South Africa, but also suggesting that the most engaged citizens of the “new” South Africa will speak English. When the PMP crafted
participation in the “Voices of Women” project as an alternative to that desirable English literacy (the PMP, after all, would take on the role of English “translation” for the project), they assumed the role of a literacy intermediary – a powerful type of literacy sponsor, particular in a postcolonial era.

If the third chapter raises ethical concerns about the practices and networks of literacy intermediation between postcolonial governments, global ideologies surrounding literacy, and “developable” subjects, then the fourth interchapter raises ethical concerns about the role as research. I call into question the role of researchers to account for those practices amidst fieldwork events that may disrupt researchers’ beliefs in the hidden motives and final ends of research. The interchapter, “Research as Atonement,” reads the film adaptation of the Ian McEwan novel, *Atonement,* against critical moments during my research trips to question the “empowerment” drive of contemporary scholarship.

My conclusion works to consider the broader significance of craft rhetoric projects as I outline critical areas of scholarship that need to be further developed to understand the critical history of these projects: how they are explicitly and implicitly connected to conceptions of citizen-making; how these projects have been involved in cross-cultural “citizenship development” for at least 150 years; how structures of intermediation form to facilitate craft rhetoric projects; and how these projects may affirm or counter conventional ideas about the identities of crafters and handcrafted items. Finally, I outline how incorporating research about craft rhetoric projects and the rhetoric of intermediaries into my pedagogy models the complex structures of citizenship and engagement they are already navigating and will continue to navigate in their professional and personal lives. Ultimately, my conclusion advocates for community based learning pedagogy where students can write for community-based
organizations at the same time they develop robust skills to identify and critique the intermediating processes that raise important ethical questions.

Overall, this dissertation argues contemporary rhetoric and composition scholarship must recognize that rhetorical practice and engagement is transnational, occurs across significant socio-economic levels, and involves organizations with significant rhetorical access. My conclusion only begins to suggest a structure for the connection between participant observation research (such as organizational ethnography) and the development of community-based and service learning opportunities that are reciprocal and ethical.

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2 *Weavings of War*, ed. by Ariel Zeitlin Cooke and Marsha MacDowell (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State UP, 2005). This chapter and others will refer to the *Amazwi Abesifazane* project as the *Amazwi* project for short. The phrase means “voices of women” in isiZulu and will often be referred to as the *Voices of Women* project when it has exhibited in Europe and the United States.

3 Ibid., 79.

4 “Bantu” was the racial classification employed by the National Party-led South African government to systematically deny democratic and human rights to citizens of South Africa. The four racial classifications officially used by the government from 1950 onward until 1994 were: Bantu, White, Coloured, and Asian. The current democratic government changed “Bantu” to “Black” and uses racial categories today to determine redress and affirmative action initiatives. I will use “Black African” where appropriate in the text, adding “African” to make a distinction for my predominately North American readership.
In the next chapter I explore contemporary material rhetoric scholarship, including key rhetorical scholars of the AIDS Quilt.

In the next chapter I also explore the Clothesline Project at length and the solitary article (Laura Julier, “Voices from the Line,” in Writing & Healing, eds. Anderson and MacCurdy, Urbana: NCTE, 2000) that has emerged on it with a short section on composition process. However, the majority of the article is devoted to a reading of several shirts on the line.


In terms of the long history of craft as rhetorical intervention, my research has collected examples as far-reaching as Penelope’s weaving and unweaving in Homer’s Odyssey to contemporary fair trade retailers like SERVV International. The next chapter offers more examples.


Royster, 140.

Ibid., 149.

Ralph Cintron’s research has been the most influential on my development of a conception of “rhetorical ethnography.” In particular Ralph Cintron, “‘Gates Locked’ and the Violence of Fixation,” in *Towards a Rhetoric of Everyday Life: New Directions in Research on Writing, Text, and Discourse*, ed. by Martin Nystrand and John Duffy (Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 5-37.


Later in the chapter I discuss the 2008 and 2009 IRB process.


See Clay Spinuzzi’s *Tracing Genres Through Organizations* (Boston: MIT Press, 2003) for an important ethnography focused on a business organization.


In particular I would like to develop a major or senior capstone class that would include undergraduate students in class prior to and after winter intersession in South Africa working with cultural organizations to develop mutually beneficial educational projects.
This somewhat fraught relationship continues, as both CAS and PMP have recently launched new websites with the titles of “Voices of Women” and “Amazwi Abesifazane” figuring prominently although it is unclear that either organization is aware. The CAS Voices of Women Museum site, http://amazwi-voicesofwomen.com; the PMP “Voices of Women” Project, http://voicesofwomenproject.wordpress.com.

Florence Mdlolo, Ngiyalizwa Izwi Lomntanami / I could hear the voice of my child (Durban, South Africa: CAS, 2003).


It was over this that the PMP seemed to reinvest critical staff energies into the “Voices of Women” project again after an intense focus on youth that I discuss in the third chapter as well.

See Fetterman, 55 for a basic description of projective interview techniques.

Andries Botha, interview by Martha Webber, Create Africa South Offices, April 8, 2008.

Martha Webber, field notes, March 27, 2008.

The observation about English fluency in the service industry is my own. For recent information on Durban’s demographics, visit the city government website, eThekwini Municipality, www.durban.gov.za.

Of particular note in the field of study on the global North and South economic divide includes James Ferguson’s important work, *Global Shadows* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2006), where he identifies the development of securitized and corporatized spaces through neo-liberal
economic policy as paradigmatic of development in Africa and neoliberal development writ large.

33 Sheridan-Rabideau, 34.


37 See Brodkey above. Mike Rose, *Lives on the Boundary: A Moving Account of the Struggles and Achievements of America’s Educationally Underprepared* (New York: Penguin, 1989); Patti Lather and Chris Smithies, *Troubling the Angels: Women Living With HIV/AIDS* (New York: Westview Press, 1997); Janet Carey Eldred, *Sentimental Attachments: Essays, Creative Nonfiction, and Other Experiments in Composition* (New York: Boynton Cook, 2005). I identify *Troubling the Angels* as a text within the field of rhetoric and composition but this is far more of a stretch than my recognition of Brodkey, Rose, and Eldred’s texts. At the same time, the work has influenced the field so I feel its inclusion here is not problematic. Also see Caroline Heller’s *Until We Are Strong Together: Women Writers in the Tenderloin* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997) for a text I encountered later in the writing process that helped me think about structural considerations.

38 Rose, 8.

39 Ibid., 8.

40 Ibid., 8.
41 Ibid., 8-9.

42 Ibid., 9.

43 Eldred, 5.

44 Ibid., 6.

45 Brodkey, 547.

46 Ibid., 527.

47 Lather and Smithies, xvi.

48 Ibid., xiii.


50 Michael Bérubé, *Life As We Know It* (New York: Pantheon, 1996), 264.

51 Eldred, vii.

52 Ibid., 2.

53 Ibid., 2.


56 Eldred, 104.

57 Rose, 44.

59 Ibid., 14.


63 Barthes, 96.


66 Scholars representing these two poles might include the multimodal composition scholars referenced above in contrast to scholars working on “global English” projects including Selma K. Sonntag’s *The Local Politics of Global English: Case Studies in Linguistic*


68 Ibid.

69 I explore this idea in Chapter 3 when I discuss how PMP crafted and disseminated the type of woman who would participate in the national quilt project. In this case, it was the rural South African in need of literate development and access to governmental structures.

70 Brodkey, 533.
Interchapter A: Literacies of Difference

This interchapter narrative follows the introduction, where I position the use of narratives in the fields of writing studies and critical nonprofit studies. In the narrative I present important literacy events and sponsors from my literate development that exemplify the values, considerations, and commitments that I bring to the research methods I outlined in the introduction. The cultural attachments I possess matters in the ethnographic research methods I engage, as they do for any researcher. That I shared many of the experiences represented in this interchapter with many of my research participants matters as well. This narrative and the three that follow it argue against a one-sided representation of research about individuals and organizations as opposed to the reciprocal relationship I describe in the methodology section. This interchapter marks the first of four that work to narrate the experiences of research participants as well as my own. I place these interchapters in tension to the body chapters, whose important work is to situate my arguments and research disciplinarily, where these narratives work to exemplify feminist ethnography that implicitly argues for methods and representations of research that both enrich and are independent of disciplinary knowledge.

As Linda Brodkey insists in her preface for “Writing on the Bias,” I cite few of my influences directly in this narrative essay. Instead she asks “those of us who have learned to write teach ourselves to remember how and where that happened, what it was we learned, and especially how the lessons learned from an unofficial curriculum protected us from the proscriptions that have ruthlessly dominated the official curriculum from the outset.” At the same time, Brodkey’s literacy narrative and other key texts in the field of Writing Studies and Disability Studies that I explored in the introduction make the existence of this narrative, particularly in an academic text, possible.
Several years into my graduate studies at the University of Illinois, my father gives me a CD with audio recordings that my mother, Mary, made of my brother and me when we were growing up in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia in the 1980s. As he hands me the CD he admits the discovery of these audio-cassette tapes almost thirty years later – and the content on them – genuinely surprises him:

Mary: Martha come here… how do you spell blue? Say it.
Martha: Hmmm
Mary: Say it.
Martha: Can I say something different? Like red. R – E – D. And THAT’S RED!
Mary: How about – what’s this color? How about that color?
Martha: Green.
Mary: Yes, spell that.
Martha: I don’t know HOW to.
Mary: Look at me – look at me – look at my lips.
Martha: Ihhdunno.
Mary: G… G… say it. G…
Martha: G
Mary: R
Martha: R
Mary: E
Martha: E
Mary: Another-
Martha: E… Ahhh
Mary: What’s this?
Martha: Rrrr?
Mary: No. What’s that word?
Martha: Blue
Mary: Uh uh. What’s that word I’m - letter I’m pointing at? What’s this word - what’s this letter I’m pointing at?
Martha: N
Mary: Yeah, so how do you spell green? How do you spell green?

The recording continues for several more minutes as my mother leads me through spelling a handful of colors and words, asking me to see the shape of the letter on her lips or repeat the letters after her if I can’t understand her lip’s letter shape. At the end of listening to this moment
on tape from nearly thirty years before, I too find myself surprised – while my memories of early childhood are vivid, they are also episodic – I have no memory of this occasion or ones like this that I can only assume occurred without recording. But why would the discovery of this moment of preschool literacy development – arguably one that may occur amongst many parents and children – surprise my father and me so much?

Likely because when my mother writes it usually looks something like this:

“merry chirtmas to all will be at gandmom kittyhouse and ucla six finers.” Terse phrases, frequent misspellings, and puzzling configurations of words populate the spare lines of writing she produces. I may never figure out what “ucla six finers” refers to – I’ve got some ideas - but it will only take a few years of formal schooling for me to realize my mother is limited in her alphabetic literacy skills. Although it won’t be until I am eleven that I learn the explanation, this realization early in life instills in me an acute awareness of difference. Intense shame fuels this awareness, but so does intense curiosity, to understand this difference.

My mom sits on the couch with a copy of Stephen King’s Pet Sematary frequently in my youth, turning the pages for a while and then sticking her bookmark in her place. The bookmark moves forward and backward in place each time she finishes reading. This act of literacy improvisation seems to span several years. Over time the edges of the cover curl and the ink on the paper whiskers to white. A dark grey cat head scowls at me from the cover when my mother holds the book up to read, hissing its contents are too scary, but I will try to read it anyway. For weeks after I will clutch my sheet up to my neck at night and imagine fearfully what will happen when Bitsy, the family dog, dies.

By third grade I’m absolutely convinced people don’t read the way my mother does: a few years into reading and writing and I’m certain things move left to right, in a sequence that
goes forward. In the silence of trying to understand her difference from those other readers, I start reading anything I can find. I read signs in stores and letters from school out loud and we pantomime these readings are for my learning and not crucial moments in a cover up. Later, in my teens and twenties, I will encourage these performances: each birthday presenting her with a paperback mystery or a book about animal behavior that provides a new script for our literacy improvisation. Like Michael Bérubé, I will have moments where I doubt and ascribe much to these literacy performances. After describing his 3 year-old son’s form of play in the introduction to *Life As We Know It*, Bérubé begins to question his perception of his son’s abilities because of Jamie’s age and Down syndrome: “‘Tuna!’ [Jamie] half-shouts in a hoarse little voice, and heads back to the fireplace. Did I imagine him pretending to write that down? I must have imagined it.”

Outside of the literacy performances my mother and I come to rehearse each year, though, there are moments of discovery. My mother has a sewing machine and she shows me how to sew clothes for my dolls – I can still feel the stiff starch of the cotton as my mind runs over the pink stripes with roses design we used to make Barbie a pair of culottes. She is a visual artist who wants to teach me colors and show me how a cardboard box for an appliance can transform into a container that gives shape to your imaginative fantasies (or at least the squarish ones). She paints in acrylic and watercolor and the animals she paints wear expressions that reveal a complexity that eludes her words.

Outside of our family, my difference marks itself on a daily basis growing up, as my brother and I are two of a handful of white students at Cesar Tarrant Elementary School, a school named in honor of a Revolutionary War hero who had to return to slavery for six years after the war before he is granted his freedom (he will buy his wife and one child out of bondage, but will
pass away before he is able to free his two other children). During my time there (from first
grade to the beginning of fourth), I will be the only white student in my class each year. While
my working class neighborhood was more evenly populated amongst whites and African
Americans and (I would later learn) more reflective of the demographics of the region, I suspect
now that most of the other white families in the neighborhood sent their children elsewhere
(likely to private parochial schools), to reinforce the unofficial but pernicious forms of
segregation that continue to manifest itself in this area.

Less than five years after I move, this is the same city that would become bitterly divided
over high school basketball star Allen Iverson when he would ultimately be arrested, charged,
and convicted of felony “maiming by mob.” He is a young African American man charged with
an archaic law originally established to combat lynching for his alleged participation in a fight
between a group of white and a group of African American teenagers at a bowling alley where
only Iverson and two of his friends would be prosecuted. Although he would be granted
clemency and the conviction was ultimately overturned by a court of appeals in 1995, the
incident speaks to the racial divisions deeply engrained in the area and during the time I was
growing up there.

At Cesar Tarrant Elementary School I explore difference from myself without prejudice
and with a curiosity that approaches envy. Memories of lining up in second grade to go to
assembly and playing with the hair of the girl standing in front of me and the girl behind me
playing with mine remain vivid. My straighter, sometimes uncombed hair can’t compare in my
mind to the carefully attended hair of my female classmates – small braids threading plastic
beads or thicker braids tied up with elastics decorated with plastic gumballs or clipped with
colorful, tiny barrettes with cheerful ducks and flowers standing in raised relief. Sleeping over at
my best friend Valerie’s house, I wake up early to help her mom make breakfast for her eight children and husband. Mrs. Goodman introduces me to grits (my parents were California transplants to Virginia), taking the time to teach me how to prepare them sweet or savory, but never stuck to the pan. In those movements of the spoon, during those quiet Saturday mornings, in the bottom of that bowl, I find warmth. My weekday mornings frequently bring me donuts with soda, maybe cold cereal with milk, and sometimes nothing to eat. It isn’t that our cupboards are ever bare – just that some mornings my mother won’t get up to prepare us for school or stocks the house with mostly junk food that my brother and I are more than happy to eat without complaint.

Instead of finding stultifying discipline in school, I find a space of encouragement and warm to its worksheets, which seem to promise that information about the world can be ordered and is often peppered with brightly colored illustrations. Our smiling principal, Mr. Luck, keeps a paddle on the wall of his office but my one visit there was not for reasons warranting its removal. During Black History Month one February I am invited to read from my report about George Washington Carver over the school’s loudspeaker and I tell my school about this extraordinary inventor, thrilling that my words are reaching each classroom as I speak through a taupe plastic telephone. This was likely my first experience with public literacy and I like the feeling of reward that special trip to the principal’s office brings. I remember laboring over the report, it requiring hours of preparation at home, in the library, and in conversations with Mrs. Williams, Cesar Tarrant’s librarian.

It is Mrs. Williams who figures centrally in my first experience understanding how difference creates racism. One day our class goes to the library to watch a filmstrip on the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement. Grainy riot footage shows dogs
being turned on protestors and how quickly state control can appear and manifest itself with crushing violence. After the film strip ends our class joins arms and sings “We Shall Overcome Together” and I am physically sick to my stomach – sick at the thought that I possess membership within this reactive group obsessed with control based on skin color. Mrs. Williams must see this sickness written across my face – she comes to me and I am crying and saying I shouldn’t be allowed to sing this song with my class and that my classmates should hate me. She tells me that they know I’m not responsible for what we watched and that every person has a choice about how they will treat others in the world. We develop a close relationship, fueled by my growing love of books, and by the time I have to move in fourth grade because of my parents’ divorce, Mrs. Williams gives me a family bible as a present on my last day at school.

I think about this moment frequently over the years and the gravity of Mrs. Williams’ actions grows with my increasing understanding of racism in the United States. In other words, I realize over the years more and more how large her gesture is – as an African American woman she had no obligation to recognize my white guilt and relieve me of it – and an adult me feels deep embarrassment sometimes that my actions may have asked her to. But I remember her lesson to me – that we can choose how we treat others (even if the filmstrip that day reminds us of the larger forces that may subvert or authorize these choices) – and I am grateful to this woman who shows me what an individual moment of connection can transform.

After the divorce, my mother moves us across the country to live with our maternal grandmother in California. Suburban Sonoma sets itself apart immediately – Prestwood Elementary is almost exclusively Caucasian with only a small group of Latino students, many whose parents work in the area vineyards. Unlike my experience at Cesar Tarrant, these two groups of students rarely interact, and one day on the school bus I am punished for speaking
animatedly with a group of Spanish speaking students near me and forced to sit at the front of the bus. Although we are just reciting the words for different animals in English and Spanish as we act out the animal’s actions, in his small rearview mirror the bus driver could conceive of only one possible interpretation: that I was mocking my classmates. My face flushes and my eyes drill into the floor of the bus as I sit in the front seat – glancing back once or twice to catch eyes with Yolanda in mutual confusion. The bus driver can’t conceive that we can be friends.

At home my grandmother Kitty’s house has bookshelves stuffed with books and I spend days that added together become months working through whole sections of the shelves, moving from L. Frank Baum to E.F. Benson and his Tilling garden parties. Despite the meters of books in front of me, it is a ten-page letter I find in a hatbox in my grandmother’s bedroom that will sear me as deeply as my interaction with Mrs. Williams and explain the catalogue of differences I have silently observed about my family but can not put into words. Like the newsprint pages of *Pet Sematary* for my mother, I can only understand a few words of this letter, but the document changes everything.

The hatbox is on top of a light wood wardrobe that I climb to reach. The return address is for a laboratory and the envelope is postmarked in the mid-1970s, a couple of years before my brother and I are born. The paper is yellowed but was probably off-white at first printing. Thin, typed sheets of paper are inside: their smell suggests a duplicate exists somewhere in time, perhaps with the carbon paper that contains the negative images of the letters on the page. Together these letters form pronouncements about my parents and their fitness to reproduce. At the time I don’t understand “Rh Factor” or “hemolytic disease” - but I do understand “abortion” and “potential for defect in the fetus.” I understand for the first time that my mother has something – a condition no one has told me about – but one I have always felt.
I worry quietly. I put the letter back in the box and hide my tracks. The cloud of generalized fear hovering above me for years finally manifests itself into the question: will this happen to me? Am I “potentially” defected? It is the early 1990s, even before Internet searches on AltaVista, and I return to that comforting space that I know can change perspectives, my school library.

I learn that 1968 is the year the Food and Drug Administration approves the release of the vaccine for hemolytic disease of the fetus and newborn in the United States. The disease may develop directly prior to birth or within the first few days. The mother’s blood (usually negative) possesses antibodies incompatible to the fetus’ blood (usually positive) and these antibodies attach themselves to red blood cells and begin their rupture. The vaccine for the disease requires an injection of a small number of Rh antibodies into the bloodstream for pregnant women who have Rh- blood, especially from second pregnancies forward. *Time* magazine names it one of the top ten medical achievements of the 1960s and RhD hemolytic disease of the newborn is virtually eradicated in the developed world. In the years leading up to its approval, three doctors will test the vaccine on rabbits and a group of male prisoners at Sing Sing Correctional Facility.

None of this is of consequence for my family. A matter of fourteen years, an adolescence of time between 1954 when my mother is born and the introduction of the vaccine in 1968, creates chasms of denial for a family. I contribute to this denial by not revealing the knowledge of this letter to anyone, not even to my brother, for at least a decade. Instead I feel guilty relief that I will not develop this disease only possible in birth.

There will be a time when I finally reveal this knowledge – I can’t say what unlooses it from me, but sometime after high school I start talking about it. Even when I do, I will frequently
focus on what I lacked, and I will not remember these moments of a mother initiating her
daughter’s literacy until the recording of us spelling colors recovers the moment from time.

The traces we may follow in writing studies – imprints on digital files, letters in hatboxes,
stitches on cloth – are often inspired by the traces of literacy that have been foundational to us
and those around us. When official curriculums and forms of engagement mis-represent or fail to
recognize literacies significant to us, we have the ability to identify these processes and
understand possibilities for ethical representation. What these early encounters with literacy
reveal are the way that formal institutions, such as the genetic testing organization that produced
the letter I found in the hatbox, interact with and shape families. The influence and interaction
between everyday experience and organizational structures figures profoundly in the chapters
and interchapters that follow.

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Notes:

1 Linda Brodkey, “Writing on the Bias,” *College English* 56 (1993), pg 547.

2 Michael Bérubé, *Life As We Know It: A Father, A Family, and an Exceptional Child*,
Chapter 1:
Crafting Citizens through Contemporary Craft Rhetoric Projects

In 2009 Sarah Corbett formed the Craftivist Collective in England, a group whose manifesto is “to expose the scandal of global poverty, and human rights injustices through the power of craft and public art.” Now an international group loosely connected through the Craftivist Collective website, they insist that “making people aware of injustices and poverty in the world can be fun as well as empowering” and they have gained recognition by coordinating international participation in craft projects. The artist Lise Bjørne Linnert created one such project the Collective solicited for participation on their site, Desonocida Unknown. Linnert describes the project as “feministic political embroidery” and she has gathered over 5700 hand embroidered “nametags” since 2006. Each nametag is 2x8 cm on unbleached muslin, meant to remember the identified and unidentified victims of femicide and human trafficking with a focus on “the critical situation in Ciudad Juárez.” In the past six years Linnert has created site-specific multimedia exhibitions for the embroidered nametags in European and United States galleries, some even providing exhibition viewers the opportunity to embroider a nametag for future display. The collective’s provocative claims of crafting’s path to “fun” empowerment and its site tag phrase “a spoonful of craft helps the activism go down” seem at odds with the issue of femicide that Linnert’s project takes up and the embodied victim the nametags, who have irrevocably “lost” their wearer, evoke at exhibitions.

The Craftivist Collective is one of many contemporary groups coordinating their craft practice for acts of civic engagement like Desonocida Unknown. In the fall of 2011, for example, Occupy Berkeley protestor Maxina Ventura started “Knit-In at the Sit-In,” a series of group knitting sessions to produce hats with handwritten letters attached to send to fellow occupy
protesters in colder regions like Occupy Manitoba. In an interview on the website Counter-Craft.org, Ventura says a primary motivation for starting the “knit-ins” were to challenge the negative press that had come to characterize the occupy movement with a “productive” activity that would be a “way to recognize we are part of one big web.” What she noticed after the first event was that it seemed to attract people who had not visited the Occupy Berkeley site before, describing one participant, Jennifer, who feels the knit-in “had given her a way to participate.” What these two examples suggest – the Craftivist collective’s articulation of crafting as both “empowering” and “fun” and Ventura’s description of crafting as a method of activism with a particular appeal for participation – is that community craft projects not only have an affective impact on the intended audience (whether attendees at an exhibition or fellow occupiers in another city), but they may also have a profound affective impact on the participating crafters and their conceptions of civic participation as well as understanding of human rights issues, in these examples the femicides of Ciudad Juárez and global economic equity.

Yet little is known about the coordinating organization or participating crafters in the world’s largest community art project – the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt – with over “47,000 individual 3-by-6 foot memorial panels – most commemorating the life of someone who has died of AIDS” made by individuals, groups, and even corporate “affinity program” volunteers. Who or what has organized these crafters to contribute to the same project? What civic significance does composing a quilt panel, embroidering a name onto a square of muslin, or knitting a hat hold for crafters when they contribute to a larger organizing purpose? Why have momentary acts of crafting for these projects resonated so largely for a range of publics – such as the over 18,000,000 visitors of the AIDS Memorial quilt – and what impact may community art projects have on these publics? These are some of the questions this chapter explores as it works toward
developing a transnational framework to understand contemporary community craft projects and the particular forms of citizenship they may evoke.

Although critical interest in material rhetoric has emerged over the last twenty years, including important theoretical work examining the AIDS Memorial quilt and a handful of other examples of crafted public rhetoric, there has been little comprehensive attention to community craft projects and the complicated relationships they forge across transnational landscapes between individuals, organizations, and publics over important questions of memorialization, gender, and community development. Even less critical attention has been paid to individuals like Linnert and Ventura above or to organizations such as The NAMES Project who – in dictating and managing formal elements of participation (such as the 2x8cm cloth, the knitted hat, and 3’x6’ panel) – function as important project intermediaries between the participating crafters and the craft project’s public representation to audiences. This chapter analyzes three contemporary community craft projects to develop an understanding of these projects as a genre of rhetorical action and argues that identifying the rhetorical work project intermediaries produce reveals the rhetorical impact of community craft projects on audiences as well as the modes of citizenship they create for participating crafters.

The three community craft projects that form the focus of this chapter – the 1970s Chilean resistance *arpilleras*, the AIDS Memorial Quilt, and The Clothesline Project – can never fully represent the complexities or range of community craft projects as diverse as the eleventh-century Bayeux tapestry or the quilt codes used amongst escapees on the Underground Railroad in nineteenth century America. Instead, I have selected them because they are three projects that have received extensive academic attention and together highlight a range of intermediating practices critical to understanding forms of contemporary civic action and citizenship. The
Chilean resistance *arpilleras* from the 1970s in particular, highlight most saliently the circulation of craft rhetoric projects within a transnational framework of human rights discourses that deploy narrative and visual rhetoric problematically and persuasively to advance human rights goals.\textsuperscript{9} While most critical attention in rhetorical studies has focused on American based craft rhetoric projects – overwhelmingly the AIDS Memorial Quilt – the Chilean *arpilleras* occupy a complicated position as both material testimony of human rights abuses and means of economic advancement for the *arpilleristas*. Unlike the donated panels of the AIDS quilt that remain a part of the quilt’s centralized archive, women produced *arpilleras* that were sold clandestinely within Chile and smuggled out of the country through a solidary network initiated by the Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{10} Setting the *arpilleras* – a craft genre still positioned today as a means of economic development for a variety of communities (typically South American, typically female) – against the one-time, volunteer contribution of the predominately American AIDS quilt and Clothesline Project begins to reveal the complicated landscape of community craft production, particularly as appeals for human rights appear alongside and even become commodified in a global marketplace. Together this chapter and the interchapter that follows it – a profile of South African crafter and community craft center founder Mrs. Eunice Gambushe – work to represent the relationships that are formed through contemporary craft projects.

This chapter explores contemporary craft rhetoric projects to situate them within the field of rhetoric and composition and understand how they articulate and accomplish rhetorical effects. First I examine the “material” turn in rhetorical studies and consider how craft rhetoric projects have been positioned within this theoretical movement. Next I theorize the role of individuals and organizations that position these projects through the concept of the “cultural intermediary” established by Pierre Bourdieu and subsequently extended to civic sector organizations. In the
section that follows I outline a definition of craft rhetoric projects and the intermediaries who position them rhetorically for publics, drawing on rhetorical studies, gender and women’s studies, sociology, and art history scholarship that has worked to analyze craft projects in terms of their cultural and historical significance. Community craft project intermediaries perform three critical practices that I identify as **centralizing material**, **framing meaning**, and **crafting citizenship**. Analyzing intermediaries in terms of these three practices reveals the potential for the rhetorical effectiveness of community craft projects at the same time they highlight the ethics of intermediation and the problematic power dynamics present within human rights networks that position craft as a form of rhetorical engagement.

**Rhetoric’s “Material” Turn and Craft Rhetoric Projects**

In Winter 2007 *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* published a special issue entitled “The AIDS Memorial Quilt at 20: Commemoration and Critique of the Epidemic Text.” Writing about the quilt, which over two decades had grown to include 47,000 panels and become the “largest community art project” in the world, guest editor Charles E. Morris says, “as a spectacle of mourning, however, even granting the four million dollars raised for direct services to people with AIDS, the Quilt arguably has flagged or faltered, if we judge it simply by its goals of awareness and prevention.” In the very suggestion that the quilt may be considered a failure, Morris asserts the material and rhetorical importance of the AIDS Memorial Quilt: he and his fellow authors in the issue take seriously that panels of cloth connected and exhibited together publicly possess significant possibilities for rhetorical impact – that joined together these disparate panels offer critical arguments about HIV and AIDS and how to remember those who have lost their lives because of the virus. In the essays that follow in the special issue, AIDS Quilt founder Cleve Jones and rhetorical critics consider the impact of the quilt and its rhetorical
development over the last two decades during the same time that HIV infection rates continue to increase and the Western perception of AIDS has shifted to view it as a chronic, rather than terminal, illness.\textsuperscript{12} Morris brings together a collection of essays that challenge readers to consider how to evaluate a durable yet shifting public rhetorical text over time. At the same time, they position the AIDS Memorial Quilt as a significant object of rhetorical study, one I identify as a craft rhetoric project.

Craft rhetoric projects intervene and participate in the public sphere through the circulation of handcrafted items composed with an organizing purpose, such as to memorialize lost life, denaturalize lived space, or persuade a tactile identification with the crafter. From the mid-1990s forward, increased attention to craft-based rhetoric projects has coincided with a shift in rhetorical studies, one that Bruce McComiskey describes as a move from a social constructionist rhetoric where “people perform rhetorical acts \textit{with} things” to a material rhetoric where “things do indeed perform rhetorical acts.”\textsuperscript{13} Material rhetoric positions the materiality of texts as both consequential for its ability to produce rhetorical effects and as a way to account for the ability of texts to produce effects that seem significant outside of the particular purpose of the rhetor or composer. As a paradigmatic object of study in material rhetoric, the AIDS Memorial quilt demonstrates that its particular rhetorical effects are tied materially to the fabric that makes up the panels and the interchangeability in the display of panels and far less to any particular alphabetic text written across an individual panel. Although composers create a panel for the purpose of remembering one or a group of individuals who have died, collectively the fifty-four tons of quilt work to “effectively illustrate the enormity of the AIDS epidemic.”\textsuperscript{14} Literally, the material weight of the quilt and the space that it requires to display make an argument about the loss of life due to HIV/AIDS.
Craft rhetoric projects like the AIDS Memorial Quilt have gained the attention of rhetorical studies scholars from the mid-1990s forward, as significant research arguing for the materiality of rhetoric engaged robust theories of materialism from Marxist, feminist, and sociology of science traditions. In the introduction to the 1999 edited collection, *Rhetorical Bodies*, Jack Selzer sets the material turn in rhetoric against poststructuralism, arguing the latter’s influence had produced criticism where “words mattered more than matter.” Carole Blair’s essay that leads the collection, “Contemporary U.S. Memorial Sites as Exemplars of Rhetoric’s Materiality,” suggests that it is precisely because “we lack an idiom for referencing talk, writing, or even inscribed stone as material” that rhetorical studies has failed to theorize the materiality of rhetoric adequately, instead understanding it “as characteristic of the rhetorical context – the physical setting, or sociocultural environment, of the rhetorical text – rather than of the text itself.” In the same collection Christina Haas will show how an individual copy of a permanent legal injunction taped to the outside of a clinic “serves to create an enforceable, material distinction” where the clinic was protected from the militant anti-abortion protestors. In this situation, it is not the specific text of the injunction that contains the rhetorical force (in fact, most of the text is inaccessible to viewers since only the first page of the injunction is visible), but the material presence of the document. In her essay and in later research, Blair turns to public memorials, including the Vietnam Veterans memorial and the NAMES Project AIDS Quilt, to understand how the materiality of rhetoric impacts public memorialization and commemoration.

Blair encourages us to understand materiality as a “basic characteristic (if not the most basic)” of rhetoric and “a starting point for theorizing” the field: she focuses on rhetorical objects like public memorials where their materiality – and sometimes even their proposed materiality –
may become the subject of debate or alteration by audiences strongly divided over representing public memorialization. At the same time she advocates for a material focus, however, she organizes her scholarship around an abstract conception of memorialization rather than to focus on examples of rhetoric that share the same materials. All three of the craft rhetoric projects I explore in this chapter work to create public memory – memory of life, resistance, oppression, and violence – through hand-embellished cloth. And these three – the Chilean *arpilleras*, the AIDS Quilt, and the Clothesline Project – exist within broader scholarship that has started to establish the rhetorical significance of hand-embellished cloth.

With increasing interest in material rhetoric, scholarly attention has turned to consider rhetorical practices of cloth embellishment (in particular, needlework) and how they shape our understanding of rhetors and rhetorical space. Maureen Daly Goggin has been the most prolific scholar to argue for the importance of situated acts of needlework and their incorporation into rhetorical studies. In an essay she contributed to 2004’s *Defining Visual Rhetorics*, Goggin examines the practice of women’s sampler-making in England from around 1530 to 1799. She argues the sampler – a type of embroidery that typically demonstrates a range of stitches and may include quotations or the alphabet – changed radically in terms of function as well as the subject position it opened up for the women who made them: “the purpose of sampler making was substantively transformed from that of an invention tool (as a means to another end) to that of demonstration of stitching skill (as an end in itself).” A woman embroidering in 16th century England was an experienced stitcher “beholden to her own art” who created a sampler as a guide to create future embroideries. However, by the turn of the 19th century that woman was a “young girl” who composed a sampler “for improvement.” This transformation, Goggin argues, displaces rhetorical possibilities women once found with needlework as an “alternative” semiotic
resource. Rozsika Parker’s *The Subversive Stitch*, one of the few material culture histories of needlework, forms a foundation for Goggin’s research on British women’s handicraft work and in cultural studies of craft. Parker’s extensive archival work identifies the cultural processes that worked to naturalize the signification of needlework with the feminine in the Western world, a naturalization that occurred contemporaneously to the rise of colonialism and the development of global civilizing projects. Parker ultimately argues that crafters may resignify needlework as subversive during moments when they can employ conventional needlework practice to subversive political goals, such as British Women’s Suffrage Banners, an example I turn to in the conclusion of this chapter.

However, research interest in rhetoric and composition on needlework and craft rhetoric has focused almost exclusively on sewers and civic craft projects from the global North, predominately in the United Kingdom and the United States. There is a divide between scholarship about craft rhetorics connected to West and development “projects” located in the global South even reinforced in most recent, exciting scholarship by Wendy Hesford. While Hesford is thoughtfully critical of visual rhetoric produced by organizations like Amnesty International that reinforce Western ideologies of human rights violations as happening outside of the United States, she fails to recognize projects like the Clothesline Project or the AIDS Memorial Quilt that also engage visual spectacle to demand recognition of human rights violations (violence against women and governmental failures in acknowledging AIDS, respectively). The three craft rhetoric projects I have selected would seem to reinforce the divide – suggesting that American based craft rhetoric projects remain separate from economic development motivations attached to craft projects in the global South.
While rhetorical studies continues to negotiate meshing global and transnational rhetorics into its traditionally Western focus, scholarship coming out of gender and women’s studies has established productive ways to examine the cultural role of handicrafts as well as its connections to femininity, social protest, and development ideology. In a 1995 issue of *Feminist Teacher*, Brenda D. Phillips offers an argument and outline for teaching feminist theory through women’s textile work. Coming from a Marxist-feminist perspective she poses two critical questions to her class: “Are women’s ‘crafts’ really art? And, are women’s textile productions economically viable?”23 If rhetorical scholars like Sonja Foss and Maureen Daly Goggin have been exploring a related critical question – are women’s ‘crafts’ really rhetoric? – what has eluded rhetorical scholarship on craft rhetorics is a consideration of this second, critical economic question. If most rhetorical scholarship that has worked to incorporate needlework and craft into the rhetorical canon, it has done so often to the detriment of ignoring the labor implications of the physical activity required to produce needlework and other handicrafts. Phillips’ students engage examples of women’s craft activism that come from diverse moments and locations, resisting simplistic readings that situates these crafts either “naturally” within a woman’s domain or radically liberating. In a unit on knitting, for example, students will study 19th century American knitting bees and the knitted scarves of the 20th century group *Madras de la Plaza* to understand “revolutionary knitting” is neither “solely American nor dated.”24

**Background: Three Contemporary Craft Rhetoric Projects**

To review, I have selected three craft rhetoric projects that have received important critical attention, engage similar rhetorical strategies, and offer meaningful contrasts in practices of national and transnational intermediation. The Pinochet resistance *arpilleras*, the AIDS Memorial quilt, and the Clothesline Project possess shared production features and techniques
but they are also craft rhetoric projects that memorialize human experience: they evidence violence and the value of human life. In this section I describe the context surrounding these three projects by examining five key elements of each project: 1) the text’s materiality, 2) function and 3) audience as well as the 4) project’s intermediary and 5) participants (Figure 1 at the conclusion of the chapter includes a summary of these five elements for each craft rhetoric project). Aristotle’s rhetorical triad inspires these analytic elements as well as the critical questions Carole Blair raises about the memorial sites she looks at in “Contemporary U.S. Memorial Sites as Exemplars of Rhetoric’s Materiality”:

These memorial sites, taken as rhetorical texts, invite us to consider at least five questions that arise from their materiality: (1) What is the significance of the text’s material existence? (2) What are the apparatuses and degrees of durability displayed by the text? (3) What are the text’s modes or possibilities of reproduction or preservation? (4) What does the text do to (or with, or against) other texts? (5) How does the text act on people?25

Although in this 1999 article she identifies the creator of the AIDS Memorial quilt, Cleve Jones, she doesn’t emphasize the importance of the Project NAMES Foundation in the signification of the AIDS quilt as text – the first of the critical questions she wants to propose to memorial sites as material rhetoric. I’ve included intermediary as a category here explicitly, and Blair’s later research recognizes the ability of commentators and organizations to shift the significance of a text. In the 2007 article Blair publishes with Neil Michel, “The AIDS Memorial Quilt and the Contemporary Culture of Public Commemoration” she recognizes the importance of the NAMES Foundation as coordinating organization – an organization that has moved to depoliticize the meaning of the quilt in a recent strategic plan positioning its function as inspirational and therapeutic rather than “angry and confrontational.”26 Although Blair and Michel explore the implications of imposing a “language of therapy” onto contemporary public memorials, the practices the NAMES Foundation deployed to re-frame the meaning of the
project from its activist roots remains unexplored. After establishing background for the three craft rhetoric projects, in the next sections of this chapter I situate the intermediary theoretically and identify three practices intermediaries engage – including the practice of framing and re-framing meaning – as they compose and position these projects for specific audiences.

**Pinochet Resistance *Arpilleras***

The fields of Spanish studies, art history, and sociology have published a significant amount of research on the art form of *arpilleras* and their circulation within an international solidarity network to evidence human rights violations and everyday life during the 1970s and 80s. This form of applique embroidery (where pieces of cloth are sewn onto a main backing cloth) originates in South America but continues today in sites predominately in the Global South. The lack of critical attention in rhetorical studies to them may be in part due to their relatively private dissemination, rather than public exhibition as a group (with the exception of their display at occasional university lectures), they were sold individually in distributed sites across the globe. I limit my examination of this particular craft rhetoric form to the resistance *arpilleras* produced by women (called *arpilleristas*) during the Pinochet regime, although the form began in the 1960s as a cottage industry and continues today as such. In Spanish, “*arpillerá*” means “sacking” or “sackcloth” – a name that invokes the quality of fabric used for the crafted panels by women coming from predominately low economic status “shantytowns”. The resistance *arpilleras* of this era were panels of cloth embroidered with raised fabric detail depicting a range of human rights violations committed by the Pinochet government.

The materiality of the cloths – typically 23” wide x 17” high panels – consists of the fabrics and threads used to create the scene on top of the rectangular backing cloth. Most cloths depicted one scene or a collage of 2-3 juxtaposed scenes representing life under the Pinochet
regime. Representing the “disappeared” – perceived political enemies secretly abducted by the Pinochet government – was an early theme that was particularly compelling for global audiences. An arpillera may depict a raid in their neighborhood when police took a family member away or a street scene where a town wall is covered in missing posters of the disappeared. Early on, the significance of the cloth’s materiality was especially poignant: arpilleras frequently used cloth from clothing belonging to family members who were amongst the “disappeared” to create the images of witness and protest they depicted. Among the resistance cloths, the particular significance for each cloth may vary in terms of specific oppressions depicted (from direct violence to the effects of poverty and unemployment during the regime), in large part because arpilleras depicted “only something she had experienced, not something imaginary.”30 This dictate to depict only direct experience came from the Vicaría de la Solidaridad, the organization operating as a global intermediary for the resistance arpilleras.

The Vicaría organized workshops but Jacqueline Adams insists the organization “did not have a single, clear goal” when they set them up. She ultimately identifies three functions most workshops shared for creating the cloths that would benefit the arpilleras and work to ameliorate life under the regime. The cloths would raise global awareness about ongoing human rights violation in Chile as they raised money for the arpilleras whose “personal growth and therapy” was facilitated by the arpillera workshop model.31 Agosín argues creating the cloths was empowering for the arpilleras and in an earlier article Adams argues that most arpilleras were not activists until the workshops socialized them through “the process of making arpilleras.”32 A small audience for the arpilleras existed in Chile where the Vicaría sold them secretly but the larger audience for the cloths existed through a solidary network including Catholic Church affiliated organizations like the Vicarias across the globe and university
The *arpilleras* were almost always for sale through these networks (in church fundraising stores, for sale at the end of an academic lecture) so most audiences encountered them initially as both human rights testimony and commercial object. As the project’s intermediary, the *Vicaría de la Solidaridad* worked closely with the *arpilleristas* to encourage the creative production of cloths within an “acceptable repertoire” of themes that shifted over time, based largely on market interest. As I have referred to them throughout this section, participants are referred to as *arpilleristas* and they formed groups that met over time in workshops frequently facilitated by a member of the *Vicaría*. These women may have lost relatives to forced disappearance and may be suffering economically due to the loss of family and household income. Based on interviews with 136 *arpilleristas*, Adams says “from the women’s point of view (when they first joined the groups), the purpose of coming to the groups was to earn money to feed their hungry families…. they had never engaged in political acts other than voting, and indeed were afraid of the prospect given the context of fear that reigned.” Like the example of the participant at Occupy Berkeley’s “Knit-in at the Sit-in,” Adams suggests the specific activity of crafting became a method for the *arpilleristas* to feel comfortable with being “political.”

**AIDS Memorial Quilt**

Cleve Jones, creator of the AIDS Memorial Quilt, describes the 1987 night he led an AIDS action rally when he had a vision for the quilt that would grow to 47,000 panels:

I ended the chanting ("Stop AIDS now! Stop AIDS now!") and explained through the bullhorn that we were going to plaster the façade with the posters inscribed with our dead…. It was a strange image. Just this uneven patchwork of white squares, each with handwritten names, some in script and some in block letters, all individual…. Standing in the drizzle, watching as the posters absorbed the rain and fluttered down to the pavement, I said to myself, *It looks like a quilt.* As I said the word *quilt*, I was flooded with memories of home and family and the warmth of a quilt when it was cold on a winter night. And as I scanned the patchwork, I saw it – as if a Technicolor slide had fallen into
place. Where before there had been a flaking gray wall, now there was a vivid picture and I could see quite clearly the National Mall, and the dome of Congress and a quilt spread out before it.  

Jones links associations of family and warmth with his vision of a public quilt that would memorialize lives lost to AIDS and demand Congress to take notice of them. Inspired by the work of artists like Judy Chicago as well as Christo and Jean Claude, Jones saw “a dramatic, powerfully moving statement” by “enlarging” everyday items and transforming them from the “homely” into something that could still communicate hominess. In *Stitching a Revolution* he (writing with Jeff Dawson) narrates the story of the AIDS Memorial Quilt as he narrates the story of his life as a gay rights activist based in San Francisco, his experience with the virus, and the development of the Project NAMES Foundation, an organization that would ultimately fire him over differing perspectives on the meaning and future direction of the quilt.

In addition to evoking domestic associations by the AIDS quilt’s material semblance to a fabric patchwork quilt, the quilt’s materiality also evokes mortality and Western burial. Early on Jones established that individual panels – originally conceived to honor one person – would be three feet by six feet. Contrasting sharply with the “warmth” of a quilt was Jones’ “vision of bulldozing the Castro and leaving only corpses lying in the sun. I wanted to show the space that would be taken up by each of those bodies.” The individual material used for each panel, a decision left to the panel’s maker, plays on the tension between the evocations of death and the domestic. A panel for the quilt may use a tradition in family patchwork quilting to incorporate scraps of worn clothing from family members. But these segments of clothing also materially stand in for the body they no longer clothe, a body and life lost to AIDS.

The Project NAMES foundation identifies five distinct functions for the AIDS Memorial quilt that grew from Jones’ early desire to memorialize publicly - an epideictic impulse that also
sought to assign blame for the silence surrounding HIV and AIDS on the American
government’s silence about it. The foundation believes the quilt functions to 1) “provide creative
means for remembrance and healing,” 2) illustrate the “enormity” of the epidemic, 3) increase
awareness of HIV/AIDS, 4) assist others with infection-prevention education, and 5) raise funds
for community-based AIDS organizations.\(^{38}\) Having an audience for the project remains critical
for it to fulfill at least two of these functions directly – to illustrate visually the epidemic and
raise awareness. In the last twenty-five years the Quilt has mounted thousands of exhibitions -
but only five displays of the Quilt in its entirety on the National Mall in Washington D.C. In
1987, 1988, 1989, 1992, and 1996 the organizers displayed an ever-increasing quilt arranged in
twelve-by-twelve foot squares – a size Cleve Jones argued early on was “large enough to be
efficient and small enough that people could reach out and touch the fabric as they walked
around them.”\(^{39}\) His desire for the audience to interact directly with the Quilt – to be able to
touch it and contribute to “response” panels composed by viewers of the exhibition – became a
part of the national exhibitions. Exhibitions of parts of the quilt have been sponsored by colleges,
churches, and other community centers – suggesting over the years the audience of the AIDS
quilt may be broader than the other projects discussed here, although all three share university
campuses as sites productive for displays and lectures about the projects. In the summer of 2012
the NAMES Project displayed the quilt in its entirety for the first time since 1996 – over four
days in July, four unique sections of the panel were displayed, as the quilt has outgrown its
ability to exhibit all quilt panels simultaneously on the National Mall exhibition space.

In recent years the AIDS Quilt has worked to develop online audiences through their
website, which features a database (searchable by name) of images of the twelve foot by twelve
foot quilt blocks. In addition, they have collaborated with university faculty at the Savannah
College of Art and Design (SCAD) as well as the University of Southern California. From 2011 forward, students participating in the SCAD-Atlanta Writing Program have worked with Professor Darby Sanders to create *Quilt Stories*, a mobile application featuring short podcasts they have written about individual quilt panels, the individuals memorialized on them, and sometimes even the crafters who made them. In 2012 Professor Anne Balsamo at the University of Southern California proposed “open software project” *AIDS Quilt Touch* on Kickstarter (an online funding platform) to raise $30,000 to develop a mobile application that would include a database (searchable by name) and the ability for users to “contribute comments to a Digital Guest Book.” As the intermediary for the AIDS quilt, the NAMES Project Foundation, appears to be more actively seeking audiences for the quilt in recent years in terms of institutional and technological collaboration as well as the 2012 national display after an interim of sixteen years.

Unlike the *arpilleras* where the cloth’s composer had a specific identity, the NAMES Project welcomes panels from anyone who wants to contribute one to the Quilt. Although both projects share the goal of representing life experience through cloth, the *arpilleristas* were encouraged to document their direct experience, whereas contributors to the AIDS quilt are asked to create a panel memorializing the life experience of someone who has lost their life to an AIDS-related illness. The NAMES Project publishes basic guidelines on how to create a panel (such as using flexible material, creating a backing, and panel dimensions) suitable for contribution. Their website also mentions ways they have incorporated panels that were not made to basic specifications (for example, they have received a number of panels that are three by six inches instead of feet and worked to combine those into a joint panel). However, the website, including the Quilt’s searchable database, does not include access to the information and related artifacts the organization has archived about panelmakers and those memorialized in
their panels.\textsuperscript{41} The NAMES Project commits to keeping panelmaker’s names confidential, although a recent podcast from *Quilt Stories*, “Uncle Mica & Grace Klauber,” suggests there are exceptions to identifying panelmakers publicly and their motivations for contributing to the quilt.\textsuperscript{42} Offering an anonymous way to memorialize someone may have started with the beginning of the quilt in 1987 as a way to provide anonymity to those who wanted to memorialize without fear of individuals and families being stigmatized, but it also reinforces making the subjects of the panel (those who have lost their lives) the focus of the project.

**Clothesline Project**

Laura Julier begins her essay, “Voices from the Line: The Clothesline Project as Healing Text,” from the NCTE collection *Writing & Healing: Toward an Informed Practice* with the claim “like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the AIDS quilt, the Clothesline Project calls attention to a point of deep and epidemic woundedness in our cultural fabric that has been accompanied by a collective – some would say collusive – silence.”\textsuperscript{43} The most recently developed of the three projects, The Clothesline Project was directly inspired by the “power of the AIDS quilt,” according to the project’s history page on the “official National Network website.” The project’s founder, Rachel Carey-Harper, conceived of using t-shirts to represent women who have experienced violence as part of an initiative with a “coalition of women’s groups on Cape Cod” who wanted to develop an educational program with visual impact.\textsuperscript{44} The first display in October of 1990 contained 31 shirts exhibited in conjunction with a “Take Back the Night” March and Rally and the organization describes the number of shirts increasing by the end of the night as “women came forward to create shirts and the line kept growing.” The “History” page on the website doesn’t mention how many women ultimately contributed to the clothesline that evening, but the activity of creating a t-shirt to hang with the local display as
ongoing event has remained a signature element of the Project. After the first display, the Clothesline Project received media attention and support from feminist and domestic violence advocacy networks that included Ms. magazine and the Ryka Rose Foundation transforming “the Clothesline Project from a single, local, grassroots effort into an intense national campaign.” Loosely coordinated projects proliferated across the United States and even reached five other nations and they continue to be an annual practice of numerous women’s centers and student organizations on American college and university campuses.45

The Clothesline Project’s core text consists of individually decorated t-shirts hung on a clothesline – typically displayed in an outdoor setting. Based on the history of the individual display or sponsoring organization, some of the shirts may be a part of the display for years and others may be generated in the days leading up to the display or at the display itself. The national network website states clearly the significance of the materiality of t-shirts on a clothesline: “doing the laundry was always considered women’s work and in the days of close-knit neighborhoods women often exchanged information over backyard fences while hanging their clothes out to dry.” Each shirt represents an individual woman’s experience of abuse and the National Network has a suggested color code if participating groups want to create a “visual statistic” about the types of abuse that have happened to women in their community. The material dimensions of the shirt, its color (such as a white shirt to represent a woman who has been murdered as a result of sexual or domestic violence), as well as the markings made upon it, then, hold significance about one woman, even if the shirt’s creator chooses not to write her name on the shirt. Finally, the national network also recommends that displays play sounds like gongs and bells during the project’s display to signify in seconds the current statistics on how many rapes, batteries, or murders against women occur in the United States.
The clothesline the shirts hang upon creates a compelling exhibition space where viewers can frequently walk amongst clotheslines running parallel or walk alongside each side of a clothesline to view the entire t-shirt. Projects frequently select outdoor exhibition spaces where the display can incorporate trees in the area to hang the clotheslines. Julier insists “the central design statement of the Clothesline Project, like the wall and the quilt, is the gathering of individual names and voices into a single visual metaphor” and expanding interest in visual rhetoric has reaffirmed this signification of the project.46 Rebecca Jones argues almost a decade later, “though the t-shirts shout out individual protest, as a collection, the Clothesline Project becomes a collaborative art installation that functions as an image event.”47 For Jones, the project functions as an image-based protest for a “public occasion” where “individual voices are joined with other individual voices to form not a single ‘voice’ or idea, but a kind of polyvocal display of a general concept.” Unified polyvocality – in the case of the Clothesline Project, centered around the concept of violence against women – becomes a crucial aspect to Jones’ elaboration of the concept of DeLuca’s image event, and for her a particularly effective one where “the visual movement reflects a simultaneous valuation of the individual and community experience.”48

The Clothesline Project’s national network identifies two critical purposes for the project that address the project’s viewers and the shirt-making participants. The first purpose they articulate for the project is its ability to raise awareness about violence against women in the audience’s community. Since individual projects are locally based and generated, audiences “see” t-shirts representing women they may know and also understand that women in their community who have made shirts may be in the audience as well. The material impact of the shirts, including the network’s suggestion of creating a “visual statistic” of different kinds of
violence through shirt colors, creates this localized awareness in conjunction with supplemental materials (such as a poster key explaining the colors) that audiences can engage with to learn more about violence against women. The network also identifies the project’s ability to let women “express their emotions by decorating a shirt” as one of its core functions. Scholarship on the project echoes this important aspect of the project, with Jones even noting that “the focus of this protest does not seem to be about getting media attention…it seems that more important than ‘coverage’ is the getting the word out to possible participants. In a way, the creative aspect of the project, the act of protesting, is more important than any overall message about violence.”49 Here Jones identifies the primary audience for the project as the project’s participants, recognizing that from its beginning, individual clotheslines have remained relatively small, local, and expectant of audience participation.

But the audience varies dramatically for the project since it continues as a localized event – with the exception of a coordinated national display with over 6,000 shirts at the National Mall and over 35,000 shirts displayed across the United States over April 8 and 9, 1995. Although Jones identifies the primary audience as participants and Julier describes their active role in a display located on a college campus, less critical attention has examined the significance of the college campus as a specific rhetorical landscape for the Clothesline Project or instances where campus organizations will display project’s with t-shirts made by community “battered women and their children.”50 Passersby with little to no awareness of the project become members of the audience at times as well – especially when organizations select a display space alongside a heavily trafficked public space or walkway. Decisions about the audience and the display are constrained by a particular location’s environment and restrictions, but also the project’s intermediary: the local organizing group.
Unlike the easily identifiable intermediaries for the 1970s resistance *apilleras* and the AIDS Memorial Quilt, the Clothesline Project interestingly possesses two levels of distinct intermediation: the national network and the local organizing group. The website for the national network functions as a guiding intermediary for local groups. In order for a local group to identify their project as part of the Clothesline Project “violence against women must be the foundation and focus” of it and “all publications must be [sic] clearly state this as our main purpose.” Besides setting the “generalized concept” (to borrow Jones’ term above for an aspect of an image event), the national network website provides additional guidelines ranging from the absolutes (“only shirts… no pants, underwear”) to suggestions about how to facilitate the planning group, t-shirt making sessions, and the exhibition experience.¹¹ Each local group becomes an intermediary for particular displays of the project and holds autonomy over many of the key decisions that impact the display, including the participants who will make the shirts.¹²

Like the audience, participants for the Clothesline Project will vary based on the local group as intermediary of particular displays. For example, the Women’s and Children’s Alliance of Boise organizes and displays an annual Clothesline Project in October with shirts coming from the community they serve: women, men, and children in the Boise area who are escaping domestic abuse and sexual assault.¹³ This may vary drastically from a display generated by college students on a college campus or a project brought in to display on a college campus. Participants may use one of their own t-shirts to create a shirt about themselves (provided they are women) or someone else or the organizing group may provide used or new t-shirts for participants to decorate. Generally t-shirt makers come from community members participating with the organization where the t-shirt will be displayed, such as an area or campus women’s center. The Clothesline Project seems to exist somewhere in between the *arpilleristas* whose
identities were linked explicitly to the cloths and the AIDS quilt that purposefully omits information about panelmakers from public exhibitions: shirts on the clothesline at once come from those remembered and those remembering acts of violence. An audience member visiting a Clothesline Project may only be able to recognize the difference between the two types of contributors based on the shirt’s use of text that may invoke the “I” pronoun.

In this section I have explored significant attributes – the materiality, function, audience, crafters, and project intermediaries – of three, contemporary craft rhetoric projects that have held significance for scholars working to understand how we represent experience and marshal those representations to effect social change. This background has established how important it is to examine the practices of the project intermediaries who have profound influence on the materiality, meaning, and dissemination of these projects across global sites (including digital sites). From project inception to development to ongoing maintenance, the *Vicaría de la Solidaridad*, the NAMES Project, and the Clothesline Project National Network make decisions that structure the rhetorical effectiveness of craft rhetoric projects and the experience of contributing crafters and audiences.

Although these organizations work to increase awareness about distinct issues – living under the Pinochet regime, remembering life lost to AIDS, and recognizing women who have experienced violence – each developed a rhetorical response crafted from embellished fabric to evoke the experience of human lives and events geographically and temporally distant from the audiences that interact with them. Moreover, these organizations have enlisted hundreds to thousands of crafters separated from them by socio-economic and geographic distance to participate in these projects. The same material parameters intermediaries establish to create rhetorical forcefulness (as one thinks of each panel in the AIDS quilt a coffin’s size) also
constrain participation for contributing crafters (as one thinks of Clothesline Project groups that bar men from contributing t-shirts). These constraints can have significant consequences on the composition process, especially when the process is linked to economic benefit, such as with the Chilean *arpilleristas* (a subject I explore in the Framing Meaning section below). In the sections that follow I establish the theoretical concept of the intermediary before I proceed to identify three practices that intermediaries for the *arpilleras*, AIDS Quilt, and Clothesline Project engaged to create and constrain craft rhetoric projects.

**Intermediaries and Intermediation**

When Jacqueline Adams describes a shift in practice for the *Vicaría de la Solidaridad* to dictate the embroidered themes to the *arpilleristas* most popular for international consumers, she also describes a significant moment of intermediation by a powerful intermediary, a representative organization of the Catholic Church. 54 This section works to outline the concept of intermediary by briefly reviewing existing scholarship from sociology, anthropology, art history and nonprofit organization studies.

In his book *Distinction*, based on a study of 1960s French culture, Pierre Bourdieu identifies agents and avocations of cultural intermediation. He locates cultural intermediaries in “all the occupations involving presentation and representation (sales, marketing, advertising, public relations, fashion, decoration and so forth) and in all the institutions providing symbolic goods and services.” 55 He theorizes the social construction and reproduction of taste as it functions to stratify social hierarchies, transmit cultural capital, and impede social mobility. In the text, Bourdieu attempts to account for the seemingly contradictory cultural embrace of “low” or “popular” art without a concomitant elevation of the lower social classes from which the art originated. He touches briefly on French cultural intermediaries, such as literature reviewers or
clothing shopkeepers, who represent popular and high art for audiences as they frame public positions of taste through review and re-presentation. Focusing almost exclusively on individual tastemakers working to reproduce consumerist culture in France, Bourdieu does not analyze the symbolic goods governmental or nonprofit organizations produce.

However, as entities that also have a stake in influencing and reproducing cultural values, these organizations may commit significant resources to the representational activities he ascribes to advertising and public relations occupations above. Keith Negus advocates for the value of studying cultural intermediaries because it highlights how production processes are mediated prior to consumption. He argues for a broader conception of the work cultural intermediaries perform and identifies professionals such as accountants as cultural intermediaries in addition to Bourdieu’s initial description. Negus explains that accounting “has emerged as a particular way of ordering and assessing the actions of individuals” that reduce these actions “to figures and these are then abstracted out of the social context within which they were created and which they seek to explain.” His example asks critics to pay closer attention to the representational work that a broad range of professional activities – even those connotatively understood to be “objective,” like accounting – brings to bear on organizational activities and cultures.

Like Negus, I extend Bourdieu’s initial conception of cultural intermediaries, in this case to account for the representational acts of organizational employees who shape popular understandings through craft rhetoric projects. Nonprofit and governmental organizations, to a greater degree than artistic cultural intermediaries, must become adept at mixing “high and popular cultural forms,” as they frame their observations of populations with research literature they marshal to justify their intervention into individuals’ lives and make claims of empowering
individuals through participation in community craft projects.58

Sociologist Jacqueline Adams’ “The Makings of Political Art” is the only critical work on the Chilean resistance *arpilleras* to look at the *Vicaría* as an intermediary and identify the tremendous influence on subject matter and signification the organization exerted on *arpillera* workshops. Adams recognizes that, as a critical term, conceptions of intermediaries have developed in political art studies and art history. In 1976, Nelson Graburn argued a “middleman” always exists as an agent between artist and consumer, particularly when the two are “culturally, geographically, or temporally far apart” and that he or she “controls the important flow of information about the object’s origin, age, meaning, and producer.”59 Graburn’s application of Bourdieu to the art world has influenced material culture theory, particularly as these theorists (like Arjun Appadurai) attempt to account for material culture as it moves across boundaries through processes of globalization.60

In the field of development studies, the concept of the intermediary has experienced a parallel history to Graburn’s dissemination of it within art history. Thomas Carroll published the first major study about intermediaries in development studies with *Intermediary NGOs: The Supporting Link in Grassroots Development*.61 In his examination of organizations that received funding from the Inter-American Foundation and collaborated with smaller, grassroots organizations, Carroll argued the term “intermediary” was already infelicitous in Latin America because of its association with “exploitative middlemen.”62 However, Carroll recognizes value in these organizations in their ability to effect change over five performance characteristics he identifies: “service delivery, poverty reach, participation, group capacity building, and wider impact.” Like subsequent scholars of development, Carroll positions effective intermediaries who move between development funding and grassroots communities as those who work to put
themselves out of business, so to speak, by valuing local knowledge and support to work toward sustainable capacity building in the community.

From its inception with Bordieu and through its application by Graburn and Carroll, the concept of “intermediary” has almost always been used pejoratively. Although intermediaries may perform necessary and meaningful functions, from their conceptual beginning, skepticism about their ethical positioning as well as fears of their potential to divert resources or action from the grassroots have existed. At the same time, much like Jacqueline Adams’ work, I approach researching these intermediaries with the understanding that these organizations and individuals within them face social pressures and constraints that may significantly impact their ability to facilitate community art projects.

The field of rhetoric and composition has had less theoretical engagement with the concept of intermediary. In the third chapter I compare the concept of a “literacy mediator” in literacy studies to distinguish it from the practices a “literacy intermediary” like the South African Parliamentary Millennium Programme may engage to construct perceptions and possibilities of women’s literacy in the New South Africa. Wendy Hesford’s 2011 Spectacular Rhetorics: Human Rights Visions, Recognitions, Feminisms identifies mediating practices that contribute to “rhetorical processes of incorporation and recognition.”63 Her focus is on theorizing the contemporary “human rights spectacle” and establishing its attendant “ocular epistemology” to demonstrate the rhetorical impact of global human rights campaigns – campaigns that may reinforce “legacies of Western imperialism parading under the cloak of international humanitarianism.”64

My criticism of Spectacular Visions is Hesford’s willingness to leave the specific actions of image-framers – organizations like Amnesty International – relatively under-theorized as she
works to understand “how spectacular texts and contexts project identifications onto audiences.” Her focus on texts and audiences leads her to conclude with a call for “ethical visions” that will transform audience members from “passive spectator to active witness.”

While she offers a theoretically grounded argument for the necessity of a change in reception, this argument tacitly positions the audience as always only consuming spectacular texts and fails to advocate for specific change in representational practices. Consequently, she examines “spectacular texts” (primarily documentary films) with little consideration about the texts’ composers and the constraints intermediaries may have placed on shaping these challenging moving images. Hesford comes closest to recognizing the power that intermediaries may hold over shaping particular conceptions of human rights violations in a chapter on global sex work and the construction of “victim identities.” There she cites an instance in 2003 when the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) alerted organizations they would not disburse any funding for anti-trafficking campaigns to “organizations advocating prostitution as an employment choice or which advocate or support the legalization of prostitution.” Hesford recognizes the “reproduction of paternalistic rescue and rehabilitation narratives” as a possible outcome of the USAID policy, but she moves quickly from this example to consider the documentary film *Bought and Sold: An Investigative Documentary about the International Trade in Women* that challenges these narratives without considering the origins of the funding for this project (only identifying that the film’s directors produced it while working for the Global Survival Network organization). In the new “vision” Hesford advocates, it seems to be merely about swapping visions, and here that swap is relatively uncritical.

Introducing the concept of the intermediary to rhetoric and composition allows scholars to conceptualize and identify the specific material practices that produce the “spectacular
rhetorics” that Hesford analyzes in terms of their effects on audiences. I begin identifying these specific practices at the end of this chapter, but broadly, the concept of the intermediary highlights more clearly the figures that move – just as the Latin prefix “inter” denotes – “between, among, or within a group.” Focusing on the composition process of rhetorical projects and the intermediaries who create these processes and position these projects reveals how rhetorical practices of positioning (in this case of craft) can be, particularly for global audiences.

In the next section I discuss three critical practices I have identified in the intermediaries who organize the craft rhetoric projects I have discussed in this chapter. I argue that intermediaries create rhetorically effective craft projects when they work to centralize material, frame meaning, and craft citizenship. However, using examples of these three practices the Vicaría de la Solidaridad, the NAMES Project Foundation, and the Clothesline Project National Network engage to create rhetorical effectiveness, I also demonstrate the ethical challenges accompanying intermediation. Decisions about how the craft projects will be positioned through exhibition and the representational texts that support them (such as brochures or websites) both open but also foreclose possibilities of meaning and practices of citizenship for participating crafters and audiences. Beyond these craft rhetoric projects, I examine these practices in the next two chapters when I move to the primary case study of the dissertation – the Amazwi Abesifazane “Voices of Women” craft rhetoric project – to describe how these practices shifted as the project’s intermediary moved from nongovernmental organization Create Africa South to the South African Parliamentary Millennium Programme. I highlight these critical practices for two purposes: first, they offer three critical areas with which to evaluate material rhetoric projects to better understand the role of intermediaries in shaping public discourse; second, to encourage ethical decision making for contemporary intermediaries engaging in craft rhetoric projects as
they make choices about material, meaning, and citizenship.

Centralizing Material

The intermediary may engage in acts of centralizing material during any stage of a craft rhetoric project – from determining the material dimensions of the project at the planning stage to bringing individually crafted contributions into an archive after or between public exhibitions. Of the three craft rhetoric projects this chapter examines, the NAMES Project Foundation AIDS Memorial quilt is the only organization that concentrates the project into a centralized, national archive (although individual Clothesline Projects may maintain local archives of t-shirts, as each project formalizes the material requirements for contributions to it). These requirements function to constrain the compositional choices for contributing crafters at the same time they work to create powerful rhetorical meaning. Project Clothesline’s national network website states “only shirts to be submitted please (no pants, underwear, etc.)” so that individual displays – even though they are coordinated by thousands of organizations across as many sites each year – share a visual continuity: each t-shirt stands in for the body of a woman who has experienced violence. The rhetorically effective visual continuity invoked by the identical form of the t-shirt “reflects a simultaneous valuation of the individual and community experience” as Rebecca Jones describes it – and it works at the individual display site as well to unify it formally to past and contemporary displays of Project Clothesline.69

Centralizing material elements of the craft project, then, works to centralize the experience of the project’s rhetorical meaning for audiences. Maureen Daly Goggin explores the connection between the materiality of embroidered samplers and cultural meaning in “Visual Rhetoric in Pens of Steel and Inks of Silk” where she emphasizes “the materiality of constructing meaning is contingent on material resources, cultural values and cultural positioning.”70 Her
recognition of the contingency of available material resources is important for understanding the constraints that intermediaries face as they set material parameters for the craft project. In the case of the *arpilleras*, access to scraps of woven fabric and a paucity of wool yarn was a contingency with significant consequences for the material rhetoric of the project. The *arpillerista*’s applique technique raised small figures – standing in for bloodied and tortured loved ones – above the cloth background in distinction to embroidery where yarn would have laid flatter on the background. Oppression under Pinochet structured both the subject matter and choice of material for the *arpilleras*, but needlework remained “a powerful place to look for alternative semiotic resources.”

Each of the intermediaries in this chapter centralizes material to draw on associations with the feminine or domestic that individual craft contributions to the projects may challenge productively through theme, creating compelling rhetorical irony. As I discussed earlier, Rozsika Parker’s historiography, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*, traces a genealogy of embroidery practices in England from before and after a cultural shift in the seventeenth century that signified it as “women’s work.” This signification, one that Goggin insists “became galvanized by the nineteenth century,” was quickly transported across the globe through missionary work that reified needlework as a civilizing practice for girls and women. While Parker’s 1989 study fails to address the parallel development of feminized needlework in British domestic and colonial institutions, Linda Cluckie’s 2008 *The Rise and Fall of Art Needlework* explores the nineteenth century British embroidery business that connected British women and colonized women in India and Southern Africa through their labor.

In the case of the *arpilleras*, the *Vicaría de la Solidaridad* was the intermediary between the *arpilleristas* and the Catholic Church, a religious institution with a history of fostering
needlework projects since the fifth century. Citing several art historians who insist that it was the association of the feminine with needlework that allowed the *arpilleras* to evade scrutiny from the regime, Adams describes an event in the mid-1980s when soldiers at the Santiago airport finally discovered one of the *Vicaria*'s shipments. A *Vicaría* employee, Rita, describes to Adams what the police found: “many times there were little bags [containing leaflets] in the back [of the contraband shipment] that described what they were about, and so there were lots of comments against the government, obviously, and that was a big scandal.” Rita’s observation where public “scandal” was associated with the printed alphabetic text and not the *arpilleras* tacitly reinforces the association of the domestic (and therefore not public) with the cloths. But while many cloths depicted poverty centered around scenes of community cooking pots or other themes that may be associated with the everyday experience of oppression, individual cloths may productively challenge their associations with their “domestic” material by depicting traumatic events. In other words, these cloths – showing moments of death in some cases – transform a material form signified with the domestic by depicting an intensely public scene of governmental violence and terror. Material and theme unite in rhetorical irony as the event disrupts the everyday. Elements and themes of the AIDS Quilt and the Clothesline Project also use rhetorical irony and contrast of the event and everyday to place the cultural associations of the domestic next to LGBTQ identity and violence, two themes both craft rhetoric projects address.

Craft rhetoric intermediaries engage practices of centralizing material to evoke unified meaning from individual contributions – these practices include setting a range of material parameters for composition but also literally taking possession of the craft, whether to circulate in solidarity networks, exhibit as a larger work, or archive. The next chapter turns to the *Amazwi Abesifazane* quilt project as an extended case study of a craft rhetoric project where I examine
the archival practices of intermediary organization Create Africa South and consider them in relation to the NAMES Project Foundation AIDS Quilt archive. The Clothesline Project’s practice of encouraging local groups to create individual t-shirt archives and provision of informal guidelines on their website to accomplish this highlights a significant feature about practices of centralizing material and other practices intermediaries may engage to create rhetorical meaning. Even intermediaries engaging the same kind of practice – centralizing material that becomes the unit of expression in a craft rhetoric project – do so to dramatically varying degrees and with varying technologies. The NAMES Project asks you to mail your panel in with a signed release form but the national network for the Clothesline Project only strongly encourages groups to send photographs and information about the Clothesline Projects they exhibit.

**Framing Meaning**

While these craft project intermediaries centralize material to establish rhetorical meaning that may include rhetorical irony, they also compose an array of materials and perform other activities that function to frame meaning. These are scaffolding practices that include intermediaries reproducing elements of the craft projects and positioning the project through text or exhibition schedule. Practices of framing meaning include articulating project function typically in a mission or vision statement, printed in brochures and on websites. Outside of the meaning found within a specific *arpillera*, quilt panel, or t-shirt, intermediaries use practices of framing meaning to produce unified arguments about the purpose of the craft project, tacitly or even explicitly demanding particular forms of action from the audience it constructs. The Clothesline Project national network, for example, offers a high-resolution brochure for individual groups to download, customize, and distribute at exhibitions that positions the project
in terms of its function, relationship to facts about violence against women, and how audience members can implicate themselves into the project by creating a shirt. In the bottom left corner of the trifold the Clothesline Project logo is set against text that frames clothesline contributors, many who make up the clothesline’s audience:

The Clothesline Project is a group of people from all backgrounds. We stand together committed to challenging our outward and internalized homophobia, racism, and sexism and other oppressions. We make the connections between these violences and the violence we experience as women.

For the groups that distribute the brochure, this text invites “all” audience members to identify with the project and then contradictorily frames the project exclusively for women in its final four words. Even more largely, although the brochure’s text above recognizes the intersectionality of oppressions, the project stipulates that “violence against women must be the foundation and focus” – sacrificing a commitment to explore the intersection between oppressions to ask the audience to focus rhetorical meaning on women.77

The *Vicaría de la Solidaridad* exerted significant practices of framing meaning for both *arpilleristas* and global audiences. The *Vicaría* framed project meaning to audiences consistently, positioning the *arpilleras* to represent ongoing human rights violations under the Pinochet regime as they raised money for the resistance and poverty relief as well as “personal growth and therapy” for the *arpilleristas*.78 The trinity of public human rights, economic development, and personal growth discourses that framed the *arpillera* for transnational advocacy networks were effective but embraced a rhetorical kairos that ensured the project would end – at least for the *Vicaría* - with the end of the Pinochet regime.79 Adams recounts the words of a Chilean exile who worked in Holland selling *arpilleras* for the *Vicaria*: “They [the *Vicaría*] kept sending the same amount of *arpilleras*, but the solidarity of the people started to change…. to other countries that needed urgent help. So the Chilean problem didn’t have the
same urgency that it had before” (335). As much as intermediaries like the Vicaría exercised the ability to frame meaning for the project through its workshop and circulation model and the functions it attributed to it, Adams’ interview here reveals intermediaries must frame meaning for audiences whose solidarity may wane or become distracted.

At the same time it was constrained by the interests of human rights networks, the Vicaría exerted influence over arpillera themes and workshop environment. Each arpillera workshop may focus on specific themes of human rights violations based on the experience of the group and the Vicaría facilitators. Adams identifies a moment when a new Cardinal Santiago (the position that established and managed the Vicaría) with a conservative political disposition fired several Vicaría employees “who encouraged the production of arpilleras about gender issues, and who talked to the women about gender oppression.”

Over the twenty-five years of the AIDS Memorial Quilt project, founder Cleve Jones believes the NAMES Foundation has “decommissioned one of the most effective weapons in the war against AIDS” largely through the way it reframed meaning for the project. His primary concerns rest with the organization’s relocation of the quilt from San Francisco’s Castro district to Atlanta and its decision not to pursue exhibiting on the National Mall in the 2000s. In addition to the organization’s recent decision to collaborate with academic institutions to develop mobile applications involving the quilt that I describe above, the NAMES Project has also worked to frame meaning of the project for a specific panel maker for the first time in project history. They launched “Call My Name” workshops in late 2011 and a tour in 2012 to encourage “the creation of new panels for the AIDS Memorial Quilt made by African Americans in honor of their friends, family, and community members who have died of AIDS.” Like the Clothesline Project’s focus on women, in this instance the NAMES Project has isolated a particular
community impacted by and associated with HIV/AIDS and moved to foster the composition
and exhibition of panels specifically made by African Americans that will “reflect the epidemic’s
impact within the African American community.” Where previously the project had worked to
anonymize the panelmaker in an effort to memorialize the individual life, the “Call My Name”
workshops reframe the quilt and ask African American panelmakers to identify their panels and
connect them to African American communities. The initiative may work to expose the Quilt
project and its function to provide a “creative means for remembrance and healing” to groups of
people who may otherwise not identify with it, but as the NAMES Project frames meaning for
sections of the quilt to create rhetorical effects for a particular audience, how will that framing
exclude the intersectional identities and solidarities that may form from its original display
method or through organizing panel-making initiatives in communities of color differently?

Intermediaries commit a significant amount of resources and produce a significant
amount of representational materials to frame meaning for craft rhetoric projects. Practices of
framing meaning include positioning the function of craft rhetoric projects for contributors and
audiences through exhibition choices as well as the production of brochures and websites.

**Crafting Citizenship**

One of the observations that opened this chapter was how little is known or published
about contributors to projects like the AIDS Quilt. Even without extensive research on the
impact and motivations for participants in craft rhetoric projects, intermediaries craft specific
forms of citizenship for these participants through the practices of centralizing material and
framing meaning that I have described above. But powerful organizations crafting forms of
citizenship – frequently motivated by material constraints – is by no means a phenomenon
limited to craft rhetoric projects. With “Drafting US Literacy,” Deborah Brandt explored how
definitions of literacy and formal literacy tests adapted to the needs of the American armed forces and worked to classify American men worthy of military service at specific moments of military need in the 20th century. In the case of the three craft rhetoric projects I have examined in this chapter, each project works to craft discrete forms of citizenship. Each project privileges the individual craft contribution as a unit of individualized experience in its presentation of the collective to varying degrees of rhetorical effectiveness. As the organizations work to represent the practices of citizenship it opens up for project participants, it crafts its own organizational citizenship through centralizing the material and framing the meaning of the projects. For some organizations, like the NAMES Project, the association of the project to organizational identity is tautological, whereas for the Vicaría, a subsidiary of the Catholic Church, it is less central.

Like the Clothesline Project and unlike the AIDS Quilt (except with their recent initiative focusing on African American panel-makers) the arpillera workshops functioned to develop the arpilleras as citizens for many women. Drawing on ethnographic research, Jacqueline Adams argues that while women who may have approached the workshop for economic gain became politicized through the practice of making cloths that evidenced their experience with the Pinochet regime. The experience and articulation of citizenship through a victim identity challenges the nascent political power the arpilleras developed. Their clandestine construction of citizenship was acted out during arpillera workshops and was therefore always managed by the Vicaria, who employed the facilitators for the workshops and encouraged specific ideological agendas (such as with the shift in Cardinal that I discussed above).

Blair and Michel position the AIDS quilt as an expression of democratic individuality that creates disconnected forms of citizenship. Despite the NAMES Project’s intentions to anonymize panelmakers, they argue the quilt “seems to be as much about the survivors as about
They claim that the AIDS quilt exemplifies an increasing democratizing trend in public memorials where “the democratic trope of the AIDS Quilt is not personal equality but individual difference.” Although each panel may take up an equal amount of space, they argue that the individuality panelmakers express in the design of individual panels reinforces deeply held beliefs about American democracy. At the same time, they recognize that the quilt straddles the public and private and that when it is positioned as a therapeutic text, there are significant consequences for our conceptions of citizenship. If crafters and audiences engage with the AIDS quilt as a memorial of what has passed and a public example of working through private loss – particularly at a moment where AIDS in the United States may be acquiring new associations as a managed disease rather than a terminal illness – then the quilt risks being rendered apolitical.

With the Clothesline Project, Rebecca Jones takes the position that the individual shirts work as a polyvocal argument together – individual unit of t-shirt calls up individual experience of violence to be recognized. Like the *arpilleras* and the AIDS Quilt, these projects demand recognition of subjects that have been largely ignored or relegated to cultural silence due to stigma. But what are the consequences of crafting identities of citizenship based on constructing discrete depictions of victimization – an act of oppression from a brutal regime, a life lost to a disease the government ignored, a woman’s body battered in domestic silence – and constructing these depictions materially through cloth? What does it mean for the crafters to sew these depictions and how do they conceive of them as contributing to a larger public statement? These questions remain largely unexplored and disconnected despite organizational claims to what participation means for contributors.

The organizations themselves work to craft forms of organizational citizenship to exercise locally, nationally, and transnationally through the Internet, traveling exhibitions, and
partnerships (both corporate and nonprofit). When the NAMES Project displayed the quilt in its entirety on the National Mall in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it worked to create power for itself as an organization that can create awareness about and raise money toward AIDS prevention and eradication. After President Bill Clinton started his term, representative panels and organization members were asked to march in the January 1993 inaugural parade. He was also the first president to visit the quilt on the National Mall on its last full display in 1996. These two actions of presidential association and recognition highlight significantly the citizenship capacities the NAMES Project Foundation developed in the 1990s and are currently working on to craft forms of citizenship in other sectors, such as education.

Ultimately the three practices of centralizing material, framing meaning, and crafting citizenship interrelate and animate significance for each other – centralizing the material constraint of the “grave sized” panel on the AIDS Memorial quilt, for example, not only unifies the visual impact of the project’s rhetoric, but also frames the rhetorical meaning of the panel as epideictic.

**Conclusion**

One hundred years before Sarah Corbett founded the Craftivist Collective in London that I discussed at the beginning of the chapter, Clemence and Laurence Housman started the Suffrage Atelier in the same city in 1909. Separated by 100 years, both groups hang handcrafted banners across the city, employing the same strategy of craftivism to startle citygoers with their medium and message. The Housmans, professional artists and siblings, intended the Suffrage Atelier to be “An Arts and Crafts Society Working for the Enfranchisement of Women” and the organization ultimately displayed hundreds of banners promoting women’s suffrage as well as sold work by society members who earned a small
percentage of profits. In addition to banners crafted for local groups and individual campaigns, the Atelier also produced a “series celebrating great women of the past and present” such as the Brontë Sisters. Writing about the Suffragists Atelier and similar groups in Britain in the early 20th century, Rozsika Parker argues “in their hands, embroidery was employed not to transform the place and function of art, but to change ideas about women and femininity… they wanted to embroider to evoke femininity – but femininity represented as a source of strength, not as evidence of women’s weakness.”

The study of clothing and textiles has remained largely within the domain of material culture, a field with connections originating in the disciplines of anthropology, archaeology, and sociology. In the introduction to the collection of essays that make up Clothing as Material Culture, Daniel Miller argues that material culture studies has two distinct and often conflicting trajectories: the first, a trajectory toward archiving, conserving, and classifying objects outside of the environment in which they originated; the second, the trajectory of cultural studies that focuses on the social relations visible through a consideration of material objects. Conventional histories of costume or textiles, usually published through museum presses where these collections reside, are extreme examples of this first trajectory while Pierre Bourdieu’s essay “High Fashion and High Culture” functions as an extreme example of the latter, where fashion is situated within the larger field of cultural production and just another form in which distinction occurs. The problem, then, becomes one of focus: in the first case the material object looms large, but its technical description remains unconnected to culture; in the second case the materiality of the object seems arbitrary, for its signification within a cultural system becomes the primary object of study.
While Miller suggests “contemporary material culture studies transcends and refuses this simplistic dualism,” the reception of clothing and textile scholarship in terms of significance continues to remain relatively undervalued, in part, Miller argues, because of our struggle with a “depth ontology, a very specific Western idea of being, in which the real person, myself, is somehow deep inside me, while my surface is literally superficial.” This depth ontology privileges the ideational and suggests that clothing is either superficial or merely representational of an inner self. Interestingly, rhetoric faced similar criticisms of superficiality from the fifteenth century forward when its once complementary discipline, logic, surpassed it with the development of print culture and the “new science.” Rhetoric was perceived to be a strictly human activity whose purpose was to persuade others without a necessary relationship to truth; similar charges waged against dress prompted many countries from the Middle Ages forward to pass sumptuary laws to reveal and stabilize social hierarchies. Of course, much contemporary rhetorical criticism has worked to challenge the negative perception of rhetoric and even identify the rhetorical maneuverings that those associated with the “new science” and the anti-Ciceronian shift in writing – like Ramus and Bacon – actually employed.

A few contemporary rhetorical studies – particularly scholars with interests in rhetorical performance and visual rhetoric – have even begun to analyze dress. Carol Mattingly’s *Appropriate(ing) Dress* examines nineteenth-century women rhetors in the United States who dressed strategically, either through affirming or disrupting the dress expectations held for women, in order to gain access to the public sphere of rhetorical engagement. Although Mattingly intimates at several moments that the clothing itself functioned to speak for the women, the focus of the book remains on these women rhetors as limited yet powerful agents who use clothing and appearance to open up rhetorical space and lend credibility to their words. I
want to put pressure on this emphasis of human agents, and in theorizing a rhetoric of material, consider what it would mean for cloth to have agency itself. At the conclusion of her expansive study of Indian dress, anthropologist Emma Tarlo argues,

> if material culture is the primary object of our study, then human agency is the subject, for people manipulate objects such as clothes in defining themselves. But material culture is not merely the object here for, despite being produced and consumed by human beings, it has a way of taking on a subjectivity of its own. For, in the same way that we define ourselves through the objects we consume, so our consumption defines us and we become the objects of a categorization process in which the world of material culture is the subject.97

Material communicates desire and pain, betrays and defies the intentions of potential users, and remembers the personal and cultural. It does this not merely through its visual representations of pattern and design, but through its touch and even through its scent. Similar to Judith Butler’s arguments about performative rhetoric that defy facile comprehension and recuperation into language or Cheryl Glenn’s notion of a rhetoric of silence, a craft rhetoric is effective because it defies authoritative detection and its materiality resists recuperation into language.98 In the next chapter I continue considering the “linguistically defiant” quality of craft rhetoric projects as I analyze the *Amazwi Abesifazane* (Zulu for “Voices of Women”) project and its association of a framed, multimedia narrative with an individual woman’s voice.

**Figures**
The 1970s resistance *arpilleras*, the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt, and Project Clothesline. Author developed table categories based on a blend of the rhetorical triangle and Carole Blair’s five questions for material rhetoric in “Contemporary U.S. Memorial Sites as Exemplars of Rhetoric’s Materiality,” 30.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Text Materiality and Significance</th>
<th>Text Function</th>
<th>Text Audience</th>
<th>Intermediary</th>
<th>Participants / Text Composers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Resistance” Arpilleras</strong></td>
<td>Embroidery and applique collage on a burlap backing (on average 23”x17”) typically with a short paragraph of text accompanying – although the form may have originated in rural Chile before the 1970s and typically depicted themes of rural life, these cloths were the first to invoke political themes.</td>
<td>Three core functions: 1) to represent ongoing human rights violations under Pinochet regime, 2) to raise money for the poverty relief and resistance, and 3) to facilitate therapy.</td>
<td>Circulation repressed within Chile – primarily an international audience exposed to them through university presentations or through a network of church craft stores in and outside of Chile. The cloths were smuggled out of the country through foreign embassies.</td>
<td><strong>Vicaría de la Solidaridad</strong> (social justice and services organization connected to the Catholic Church)</td>
<td><strong>Arpilleristas</strong> ranged from women “shantytown” residents to members of the Resistance - often family members of the “Disappeared,” imprisoned, or both.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIDS Quilt</td>
<td>Open to all “flexible” media arranged on a 3′x6′ cloth backing (some early panels range from the use of tape or marker on cloth to traditional quilting) – these dimensions signified the</td>
<td>Five functions listed on Project site for quilt: 1) “provide creative means for remembrance and healing.” 2) illustrate “enormity” of epidemic, 3) increase awareness of HIV/AIDS, 4)</td>
<td>Although segments are currently available for display through a NAMES Project program, the five Washington DC displays of 1987-89, 1992, and 1996 have</td>
<td><strong>Cleve Jones</strong> (founder) and <strong>The NAMES Project Foundation</strong> (established shortly after founding 1987)</td>
<td>Open to anyone who wants to create a panel to memorialize someone who has lost their life to HIV/AIDS complications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clothesline Project</strong></td>
<td>A t-shirt hanging on a clothesline. The t-shirt represents an individual woman and the clothesline signifies notions of “women’s work” where communication may be forged over “backyard fences.” There is an optional color code to give “a visual ‘statistic’” regarding the types of violence women experienced.</td>
<td>The founding chapter’s website highlights two core purposes for the project: 1) to raise awareness about violence against women and 2) a medium for women to “express their emotions by decorating a shirt.”</td>
<td>This varies by project but may typically be a campus community or community center audience. Some displays include the audience in shirtmaking by offering shirts and shirtmaking supplies early in the exhibition.</td>
<td>Rachel Carey-Harper (founder) proposed the idea in 1990 to a coalition of women’s groups in Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Each “clothesline” is independently intermediated – usually by local women’s organizations. The “official National Network website” works to organize the official information about the project.</td>
<td>Generally open to anyone – individual groups or organizations sponsoring the clothesline makes its own rules about who may hang a shirt on the clothesline. Some groups, for example, prohibit men from contributing but may encourage them to attend.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1 (cont.)

Notes:


in Morse code (of the Mexican and United States anthems) across a pink wall (the color designated by families in Ciudad Juárez.


4 The NAMES Project Foundation, accessed June 1, 2012, www.aidsquilt.org. The heterogeneous nature of quilt panels that has been recognized by scholars (see Blair and Michel) has as much to do with the democratic individualization of panels as they discuss as it does with the producers of the panels. These producers included corporate affinity programs who contributed panels to the AIDS quilt, like now-defunct Bell Atlantic’s “Community Threads” corporate charity endeavor, which produced a generic panel reading “Employees, Families, and Friends” with the addition of two corporate logos.

5 Ibid.

6 I’d argue Marjorie Agosín’s Tapestries of Hope Threads of Love: The Arpillera Movement in Chile (Albuquerque: UNM Press, 1996) is the best example of a text that has been able to accomplish expressing the multiple sites of rhetorical meaning at work for the crafted items she examines.

7 The most direct article of relative few on this matter of political-artistic intermediary relations is Jacqueline Adams’ “The Makings of Political Art,” Qualitative Sociology 24.3 (2001): 311-348.

8 Faith Rheingold’s website, www.faithringgold.com, links to the adult and children’s writing she has published from her research on the symbology of quilts used to transmit messages through informal networks of the Underground Railroad.


Blair, 18.

20 Ibid., 101.


24 Ibid., 89.


27 See Agosín and Adams above: both document the reception of the artifact within their disciplines.

28 Benton Museum, “Arpilleras,” accessed June 1, 2012, http://thebenton.org/exb_online.php?inc=1#. Initially the arpilleras used high quality, colorful yarn to embroider rural themes. The switch to applique (the use of scrap cloth) and the themes exploring human rights violations were both precipitated by the overthrow of Allende and the economic situation that created a scarcity in wool.

29 Adams, 311.

30 Ibid., 324.

31 Ibid., 328.

33 See Adams, “The Makings of Political Art” above.

34 Ibid., 328.


36 Ibid., 107.

37 Ibid., 122-3.

38 See “About” section of Project Names Foundation above.

39 Jones, 123.

40 University of Iowa Digital Studio for Public Humanities, University of Southern California, and NAMES Project Foundation, *AIDS Quilt Touch*, accessed June 1, 2012, www.aidsquilttouch.org. Although this project intended to be up by the end of June 2012 to coincide with the Quilt display on the National Mall, the kickstarter project site was not funded, although the project website exists with a database matching the functionality of what is available on the Project NAMES website. See Violet Blue’s “Silicon Valley Fails the AIDS Memorial Quilt” (*SF Appeal*, 22 June 2012, www.sfappeal.com/news) for a project advocate’s coverage of the lack of funding.

41 Each panelmaker, for example, is asked to write a letter to accompany the quilt panel. The NAMES Project stores these letters and basic information about the panelmaker when they intake each new quilt submission.

42 This podcast differs from nearly all in its focus on both the person being memorialized and the panelmaker. In this podcast author Osayi Endolyn narrates the story of Grace Klauber
who created a panel for her uncle’s memory decades after his estrangement from her family and over a decade after his death.


44 National Clothesline Project Network, accessed June 1, 2012, www.clotheslineproject.org. The information in this paragraph about the project all comes from this website.

45 I base this claim on web searches for “Clothesline Project” and “display.” College and universities dominate sponsorship of these events based on search results, with community centers focused on women’s issues (such as rape crisis centers, job resource centers) coming in a distant second for sponsorship, based on a basic web search.

46 Julier, 359.


48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.


51 “How to Start.” See Clothesline Project above.

52 Julier remarks that individual groups, for example, stipulate whether men may submit shirts for the clothesline exhibit or only participate by viewing.

See Adams’ “The Makings of Political Art” article above.


Ibid., 506.

Bourdieu, 359.


Thomas Carroll, Intermediary NGOs: The Supporting Link in Grassroots Development (West Hartford, CT: Kumarian, 1992).

Ibid., 9.

Hesford, 7.

Ibid., 3.

Ibid., 197.

Ibid., 201.

Ibid., 125.
The time of year unifies a number of Clothesline Projects each year that coincide in April to recognize Sexual Assault Awareness Month.

Maureen Daly Goggin, “Arguing in ‘Pen of Steele and Silken Inke’”, *Proceedings of the 5th Conference of the International Center for the Study of Argumentation* (2003): 387. For the civilizing practice there are an enormous number of primary sources that evidence this practice. In my research Moffatt’s *Missionary Labours and Scenes in South Africa* (1864) figures as one of the earliest examples showing the introduction of needlework practice to women native to Southern Africa.


See “How to Start” in Project Clothesline Network above. The national network also specifically asks shirtmakers not to identify the race of perpetrators of violence, arguing this is because they “recognize the connections between all oppressions and the underlying (sometimes blatant) racism in our society, we feel that it is very important to ask survivors not to specify the race of the perpetrator.”


Peter Cassels, “Cleve Jones,” *Edge Boston* 4 April 2012. Jones made these statements in Cassels’ interview before the NAMES Project’s plan to exhibit the quilt in the Summer of 2012 over four days on the National Mall.


See Adams, “The Makings of Political Art” above.

Blair and Michel, 609.

Ibid., 599.

See Scandlyn above for arguments on perceptions of HIV/AIDS as a chronic illness.


Ibid.

Parker, 197.

Ibid, 197.


See Sharon Helmer Poggenpohl’s, “Doubly Damned: Rhetorical and Visual,” *Visible Language* 32.3 (1998) for a historical account of the denigration of rhetoric beginning in the fifteenth century. In her article she draws connections between rhetoric and visual culture – both criticized for their manipulation of appearance without a direct relationship to reality.

See the Fall issue of *Argumentation & Advocacy* 36.2 focusing on argumentation and dress as an excellent starting point.


Interchapter B: Mrs. Eunice Gambushe

This interchapter profiles Eunice Gambushe, founder of the *Zamukuziphilisa* Sewing and Crafts Centre, in Umlazi township, South Africa. Where the first interchapter identified the early experiences with craft and alphabetic literacies as they connected to my family, then this interchapter begins to describe related literate experiences. What this narrative about Mrs. Gambushe also shares with the first interchapter is an attention to the specific contexts and individuals who are involved with the larger organizations, such as Create Africa South or the Parliamentary Millennium Programme, whose rhetorical practices and reach as intermediaries work to shape audience understanding of individuals like Eunice Gambushe. As the body chapters identify and argue the significance of those practices, the interchapters focus on the individuals and individual experience outside of or resisting those intermediating practices.

It is cooler in the underground garage off Florida Road in Durban on an early morning that has already turned hot and humid. There are four women and two vehicles – a small VW two-door and a *bakkie* with a tiny front seat but large cargo area – and we are at an interior design firm to load up expired fabric sample books they have donated to Create Africa South. We wedge the large books into every possible space of the vehicles, making sure to secure the load in the cargo area and to leave spaces for us to sit amongst them for the drive to Umlazi. As we near the end of loading, we realize we will not be able to take all of the sample books so we become picky – fanning them open to see how large the fabric swatches are and how vibrant their patterns.

When we emerge from the garage, the sun pierces the VW’s windshield and illuminates the specks of dust kicked up by the sample books. We make our way out to the N2 and drive south to Umlazi township. It is the second township that I will see after having visited
KwaMashu’s community arts center the week before with Janine and Morongoe, so I am prepared for the varying sections of fine houses followed by a section of lean-tos made of corrugated metal and tarp. I am unprepared for Umlazi’s scale – vaster and denser than KwaMashu, it is also far less green. Janine sails past massive sections of housing, a university, an outdoor market with chickens and goats, and endless billboards advertising Sunsilk or KFC. These more urban elements weave in and stand apart from the rolling hills and tall grasses and trees that have yellowed in the late February summer – somehow the billboards seem to sag and dull with the brilliance of the blue sky and sun that shines most of the year. Umlazi, a township whose name means “sour milk” in Zulu, is the second most populous township in South Africa (second only to Soweto near Johannesburg) with nearly a million. We turn right onto a road less recently paved and another right past a shebeen with open-air seating and a handful of men seated for a drink, who regard our caravan quietly, one nodding his head gently into the air. After the shebeen any semblance of a “street” seemed to drop away and tall yellow grasses nearly overgrow the unpaved driveway we take down to the Zamukuziphilisa Community Project – three small structures, including two devoted to creating a space for women to work on sewing and craft projects.

As we begin to unload the sample books, Mrs. Eunice Gambushe, the founder of the project, immediately starts directing traffic, codeswitching between English and Zulu. She stands just below five feet tall but I will not realize she is shorter than me until I see a picture of us together for photographic accuracy fails to capture the commanding presence she projects in a frequently busy workroom with women talking and sewing machines humming intermittently. Janine introduces us and Eunice instantly pushes us to discuss the sample books and marketable items crafters at the center can make to sell for local craft markets frequented by tourists. I get
the distinct impression that she has already determined one way in which I may be of use already, as a market research test subject – the American tourist interested in buying crafts – and I am happy to oblige. I even have experience crafting patchwork skirts from fabric sample books, as our morning trek has reminded me of a similar sample donation a clothing company makes to the occupational center in Southern California I attend for garment industry certification a decade before. But I have less experience selling crafted items and admit as much to her, including a lack of connection to American handmade craft markets with the exception of volunteering at 10,000 Villages for six months. We agree to work together on Tuesdays to develop craft items from the sample books and our group departs after unloading the rest of the books.

The next Tuesday when I return, Eunice greets me outside before I enter the sewing room where a small group of women have gathered out of interest. She shows me the side structure devoted to a beading area, storage, and a single bed – I will learn over some time that she offers places to sleep in each area of the center to protect it from theft and vandalism. She started the center with her friend Gertrude Zulu in 1995, when they built a wattle and daub structure on the same land. A few years after beginning and amassing sewing machines and other equipment through donation, vandals destroy and burn the center to the ground. When we approach the doorway of the sewing room, she speaks very directly to me and says that the women who participate have to leave with something – if I can’t provide paid piece work, then some sort of certificate that lists my qualifications and prints their name to say they’ve taken lessons with me. I express my willingness to print certificates if that formalizes the experience for the women, but I express my interest in learning how she has come to create a center like this, establishing it as a cooperative even after the loss of her friend Gertrude, and how she manages it. I insist I’m here to learn, which I understand may be disappointing.
In the sewing room that day I draw out a pattern for a simple purse that slings over the shoulder and across the chest and has space for an applique decoration or patch pocket on each side. At one point I confuse myself figuring the next step to sew the lining into the bag and Mrs. Gambushe smiles and asks me to pass the bag to her. I learn over the afternoon that the cooperative is loosely organized around orders. She will often receive an order for work (school uniforms, track suits, beaded pins, Zulu traditional attire for special events, and so on) and a group of women will work on the order together, covering the overhead of electricity, water and lunches to split the rest of the profits afterward. If a woman has a private order she is working on, she may ask Eunice to use her machinery and offer a gratuity to cover the electricity and expertise that Eunice offers efficiently but always generously. During another visit we talk about costing the collective’s craft items and she pulls out a ledger and shows me her expenses for three recent items they are proposing to Tradepoint: South Africa Durban, a transnational organization whose mission is to help artisans “access global markets.” She sets an average wage for a day of handicraft labor in the Durban area at 40 South African Rand. At the time this exchanges at a little over $5 United States. More importantly, in terms of what R40 could get you to eat, a loaf of bread or a liter of milk went for anywhere from R4-7 each depending on where you bought it and the container the milk came in. I don’t know if the wage Eunice sets is a living wage for the area even knowing these average costs and the exchange rate at the time. I know that defining something like “living wage” is more complicated and locally dependent than many universal human rights and international labor organizations often concede. Even with the wage set as low, she and I both share concerns the products may be too costly for the market Tradepoint intends. These concerns echo those I feel the first day sewing in Zamukuziphilisa’s workshop where I oscillate like a sewing machine engine, finding myself energized by the
community Mrs. Gambushe has created at the same time I am leaden with the incredible
difference between global market values and the time handicrafts consume. Why do
nongovernmental organizations repeatedly turn to small craft production as a way to generate
income for women in “developing” areas?

I finish demonstrating the bag within two hours – conscious of choosing a purse pattern
that would be flexible for embellishment but could also be completed within an hour. After
demonstrating how to assemble the bag I want to see what everyone is working on and in the
week that the fabric sample books have arrived Eunice has already started creating patchwork
squares for quilts, pillowtops, and placemats. She works most closely on this project with Moline,
a refugee from Zimbabwe who lives with Mrs. Gambushe and sews in the center each day. Like
most young women around Mrs. Gambushe, Moline, called Mo for short, is attentive and
unhesitatingly respectful to her.

When Eunice, Morongoe, and I travel to the Mpumulanga province for a little over two
weeks in March, Mo will cook for Eunice’s husband and ration the sorghum beer Eunice has
made for him prior to the trip since he prefers hers to the shebeen’s. One day she comes home to
find a paper-wrapped package inside the refrigerator containing a bird that she proceeds to pluck
and prepare, assuming Mr. Gambushe had left the package in there for dinner. Sometime later he
returns home and asks Mo for the package – he grows angry when he discovers she has plucked
and cooked an eagle he was planning to sell to a sangoma, a Zulu faith healer. When
“xenophobic” riots break out in Umlazi township just a handful of months after the eagle dinner
– riots fueled by economic anger and unleashed on African refugees living across parts of South
Africa that May – Eunice will hide Mo in her residence, just across the street from the center,
and forbid her from even crossing the street for fear she may labeled a makwerekwere and
attacked by one of a handful of small crowds inciting violence over a period of days.

Over the next several weeks that same street will be quiet most days I visit. Incidents will impede our sewing progress at the center and our preparations for the upcoming cloth workshops Mpumalanga province. The fringes of hurricane Jokwe, which devastates coastal areas of Mozambique and destroys nearly 20,000 homes on March 10, storms on Durban and creates flashfloods all over the city, affecting Merebank and Umlazi the most. When Morongoe and I go to the CAS office on the 11th, we discover rain has leaked through the room and damaged our only computer and monitor. The archive room that holds the primary Amazwi cloths, hard copies of the narratives, and our supplies for the workshop that begins the upcoming Saturday remain dry and we are grateful for the roof. We cross our fingers that Janine has a recent backup of the cloth database. When our friend Charmaine drives us out to Zamukuziphilisa we find that the center has been without electricity for the last two days so they have been unable to work on much sewing, although somehow Mo is nearly done with a large quilt despite the loss of power. That morning I photograph some of the cooperative’s finished samples – quilted placemats, blankets, and purses – to support a portfolio Eunice builds in Zulu and English (with my descriptions) to market to local and international craft sellers. I take a break to watch two roosters and a hen awkwardly stepping their way beneath a clothesline and my eyes focus more largely on the hillside. Much of the roads in Umlazi were covered in mud and waste washed down from the storm. People dotted the hillside roads in the distance, sweeping dirt and bucketing water.

Most of the mud had disappeared from the main roads in Umlazi the morning of the 15th of March when Janine, Morongoe, and I pick up Eunice from her home to travel to the airport. Instead of her usual headscarf, Eunice is wearing a large wig styled in a salt and pepper Afro and
a matching tan skirt suit. I think of my grandmother and how she complains that no one gets
dressed up anymore for the airport and I look down at my jeans and t-shirt. I’ve packed one dress
for the trip, anticipating a banquet or celebration of some scale to mark the close of the memory
cloth workshops. On our way to the airport, we still in traffic on the strip of the N2 that bisects
Umlazi from the airport and Janine casually tells a story she has heard about an airplane that
lands on the freeway instead of the runway by mistake. When the passengers on board hear
movement in the cargo area and the doors open, thieves from Umlazi greet them instead of
rescue assistance. Morongoe and I exchange a silent look in the backseat, and I scrunch my eyes
in pondering this act of retelling a story that absolves the teller of responsibility for it.

We fly to the place where the sun rises – or "mpumalanga" in most of the nguni
languages – a province in the new republic of South Africa formed after 1994 from pieces of
former provinces with Afrikaans names. On the flight from Durban, Morongoe and I sit next to
each other and Eunice across the aisle from us. The sun has risen long before we land in the
Nelspruit airport and only Eunice’s whispered prayer and dry hand digging into her arm seems to
mark our landing as the small, Jetstream 41 bounces to the ground like a top-heavy ibis. The city
where we land is now called "Mbombela" – but was known as "Nelspruit" when we land and for
a short slice of history before that, once named for three Afrikaans brothers from the Nel family
who used the land to graze their cattle in the winter months. The renaming of provinces, cities,
streets, and buildings has been a project for the new republic almost twenty years in the making
with maps and street signs that suggest South Africans live in a moment of double naming: the
colonial name still present with a crimson line cut across it diagonally and the new name above.

The three of us wait in the small airport for the Parliamentary Millennium Programme
(PMP) representative, Ilane, to fetch us as minutes turned into a handful of hours. We are there to
represent Create Africa South for two cloth workshops in the Mpumalanga province with the first to be sponsored by the PMP who covered the costs of our lodging and roundtrip flight from Durban.

Eunice, the matriarch of us three, grows impatient for Ilane: "Who is this young woman, to keep us waiting?"

"Wenzani?" Mrs. Gambushe finally asks me when I take yet another picture of her and Morongoe sitting on the bench inside of the terminal – what are you doing? – saying it with a shake of the head and a slight sigh.

"I want to remember this moment so I'm taking a picture," I say. "What, this moment when we are being disrespected by Parliament?" Morongoe scoffs.

This is my first trip assisting CAS as a facilitator for a cloth workshop, but Morongoe and Ma have traveled together to the Western Cape a few months prior to collaborate with Parliament for the first time and their experience was not entirely positive. We spend the time waiting on the benches of the airport rehearsing the concerns they have with the last workshop. Although the staff was always respectful, Morongoe and Ma believed the PMP had less interest in the memory cloth project history the two possessed or their expertise in languages and handicrafts, respectively. Although the waiting frustrates us, I am amazed how the experience of annoyance brings us together. Ilane eventually picks us up at the airport, apologizes profusely and explains the PMP has been hosting another event at Kruger Park that has ended today.

Three days later, Mrs. Gambushe and I are sitting next to each other as most of the women at the workshop are settled into embroidering their cloths. I take out an embroidery I started a couple of weeks after arriving in Durban and Mrs. Gambushe, also idle, begins to make a memory cloth of the farm where her family lived. After pencilling a rondavel and several
rectangular houses on a piece of muslin, she writes “Dumas Kraal” on the bottom of the cloth, naming the cloth expanse with her family name and an Afrikaans word for an African settlement.

I let her finish sketching the group of houses before I take the recorder out and ask Eunice if she will explain the cloth to me: “Tell me about everything on here.”

She describes how the family kraal started out with one house but eventually grew to include another sleeping house and a kitchen rondavel:

My brother, when he was still young, he was sleeping here [pointing to rondavel]. Once he gets a girlfriend, he’s here [pointing to rectangular house] in a room. Once he gets married, he sleeps here [pointing to larger rectangular house separated from others] – here is where a bedroom is and a dining room and love la la and a kitchen for them. This one now [first rectangular house] is for visitors.

The pencil sketches of housing on the muslin open up a narrative of her brother’s growth from young man into husband – one that she narrates lovingly and at moments in the present tense – but because of her gender, an experience she never shared. The first story Eunice tells me is of being ejected from her mother’s bed when her mother is pregnant:

One day we were sleeping together here [rectangular house] – me together in one blanket with my mother. My mother was pregnant. Okay, the baby was kicking inside my mother’s stomach […] so I had this thing kicking me so I just kicked back in my sleep […] My mother put me out. I was crying now.

The ejection from her mother’s bed with the subsequent births of her siblings marks an early separation from her family but not her last. Zulu women in traditional households like her own are expected to figure as the girlfriend turned wife figures in Eunice’s story about her brother above. In other words, she grows up knowing that she will likely become a part of another kraal and be asked to incorporate herself into that family’s lifestyle. She goes to school for a handful of years and loves it but soon she learns that if she wants to continue, then she will have to come up with the school fees on her own since her family can no longer pay for her with her other siblings to consider, especially the male children. To cover her uniforms, books, and
supplies Eunice starts making crafts and selling them on roadsides miles from her family’s kraal. She learns to manage her supplies and reinvest profits so that she can support her schooling through Standard Six, an accomplishment remarkable for her time given her gender, the cost, and the demands of rural farm life on a young Zulu woman. Remarkable, and yet, within the boundaries of acceptability for a “Bantu” woman at a time when the South African Bantu Education system incorporated craft production into its curriculum.

The Dumas farm is set upon the Midlands, however, a growing tourist area where pastoral farmland shifts dramatically into rocky terrain creating a waterfall hundreds of feet above a slow river. The Drakensberg mountain range, known first in Zulu as uKhahlamba, remains a constant whisper on the horizon, with snow visible on distant peaks even in late summer. During this same time that Eunice grows up in the Midlands, Nelson Mandela will be arrested in nearby Howick, a small Afrikaans farming community, and remain a political prisoner for 27 years.

I never learn how she meets Mr. Gambushe so I don’t have a sense of when she moves from the Pietermaritzburg area to Durban an hour south of her or how they came to live in Section J of Umlazi township. After she explains the cloth and how it represents her family expanding over the years, I ask her if many of her family continue to live on the kraal she has depicted. The way she has spoken about the houses and the way she has touched the cloth has made the farm, her grandfather, the blanket she shares with her mother – all of them come to presence in her retelling. She admits no one lives on Dumas kraal any longer although her brother’s family still lives in the Midlands. This last point she remarks quickly and it’s as if all the objects she has recollected into being disappear. She means to finish the cloth to give to her son. He is building a house in Umlazi that was meant for her father to live closer to her family.
but they have lost him unexpectedly before it is done. Her son will finish the house for his family and Eunice will give him the cloth to hang there and remember the family *kraal*, separated by an unreachable distance of kilometers and decades.

**Figures**

*Figure 2: Zamukuziphilisa Community Project; J Section of Umlazi, South Africa*

*Figure 3: Mrs. Eunice Gambushe, 2008. Sketching “Dumas Kraal” cloth on muslin.*
Chapter 2:

Create Africa South and the *Amazwi Abesifazane* Voices of Women Project

“But if sewing meant drudgery and oppression it also represented much more. Sewing is the only lasting material thing many women have left behind them. It is the voice of a huge section of the population who do not feature in history books and who are otherwise silent.”¹

In this chapter I turn to the craft rhetoric project that serves as the primary case study for the dissertation: the *Amazwi Abesifazane*, Voices of Women memory cloth project. Like June Freeman indicates in the quote above, the project embraces the belief that sewn handicrafts have unique abilities to communicate women’s voices – a belief that Maureen Daly Goggin traces to the Philomela myth in the Western tradition.² As an initiative that asks South African women to compose a narrative and embroidered cloth in response to the theme, “A Day I Will Never Forget,” the *Amazwi* project elicits startling multimodal narratives that describe women’s experiences under Apartheid and the transition to a democratic South Africa.

The project started in 2000 motivated by two principles: the first that “in order to heal, the individual has to be heard and their individual history must be honoured” and the second “to develop, preserve and publish… South African creativity.”³ South African artist Andries Botha and the African Art Centre sponsored a five-day “memory cloth” workshop based on the theme “A Day I Will Never Forget.” Women from Richmond Farms, a shack or informal settlement⁴ next to the township of KwaMashu, traveled to the Centre in Durban for five days to compose multimodal narratives made of text and embroidered cloth in response to the workshop theme. After this first workshop Botha and the African Art Centre exhibited the cloths at the Centre and Botha created the organization, Create Africa South, which has since gone on to facilitate workshops and archive over 2500 narrative memory cloths. Occasionally exhibited around the globe throughout the 2000s, predominately in the United States but also in Portugal and the
Netherlands, the memory cloths constitute an important craft rhetoric project and engage practices consonant to the projects I analyzed in the first chapter. Craft rhetoric projects intervene and participate in the public sphere through the production of crafted items collected or displayed together through an organizing purpose, such as the purpose to retrieve local memory, as the Amazwi project strives to accomplish. Contemporary craft rhetoric projects are located across the globe, including loosely organized craft rhetoric networks, such as the Craftivist Collective and the Clothesline Project, to projects formally produced through governmental, commercial, and nonprofit sponsorship hybrids, like South Africa’s Keiskamma Tapestry that tells the story of the San people from pre-colonialism to the 1994 democratic elections.

This chapter provides a critical case study of the Amazwi project and its organizing intermediary, nonprofit organization Create Africa South (CAS). Embracing the qualitative research methodology I outlined in the introduction, I question how CAS works as an organization to centralize material, frame meaning, and craft forms of citizenship for the women participants who contributed to the cloth archive and to the project’s audiences. The case study is based on a four-year relationship I have sustained with CAS – including spending six months over 2008 and 2009 with CAS in their Durban office and participating in two memory cloth workshops. In the next section I position the project within its South African context, focusing on the concept of reconciliation and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which initiated debates about reconciliation that continue to the present day in South African and human rights discourses. In particular, I offer a very focused reading of recent arguments about this incredibly important and expansive topic. Reading two recent essays about reconciliation together, one by former South African president F.W. de Klerk and the other based on an interview with South African activist Zackie Achmat, I question the focus on individualized and unequal private
development that happened in the transition to a democratic South Africa in the 1990s. I offer this contrast to position the Amazwi project as a paradigmatic representation of it – the project’s intense focus on the individual through its processes of centralizing material and framing meaning forecloses possibilities for community-based conceptions of citizenship that may ultimately be the most effective in the face of the “broadly liberal, plural and free market society that has emerged in South Africa since 1994.”

I move on to analyze the Amazwi project in terms of the five categories I established in the first chapter: the project’s materiality, function, audience, intermediary, and participants. CAS functions as a cultural intermediary that works to position the Amazwi project as a healing process through which marginalized South African women “eradicate the indignity of postcolonial invisibility.” But CAS accomplishes this positioning through centralizing the project materially, framing public meaning, and crafting a specific form of global citizenship “by proxy” for participating South African women. Moreover, echoing the concerns of scholars Carole Blair and Neil Michel, I consider the implications of rhetoric craft projects justified through arguments for individual recognition or individual healing that may exclude or even deny the project’s potential to foster social action. Ultimately I argue that key intermediating practices that CAS performs subverts and prevents critical opportunities for the Amazwi project from contributing to the development of communities and democratic citizenship in South Africa.

Although my view of the Amazwi project is critical, I explore and do not discount arguments about the project’s significance as an historical archive that provides knowledge about life in South Africa that may otherwise be unknown largely because “Apartheid had obliterated social history in South Africa.” My research process has involved active participation in the project – participation based on reciprocity and honesty. The concerns I raise about the Amazwi
project are ones that I have raised with CAS staff members during meetings and electronic correspondence so that this research would not be separate from or counter to the interactions we shared. These conversations produced thoughtful discussion and planning about future iterations of the project. In addition to the criticisms I raise about the project, then, I move to propose practicable solutions in the conclusion of the chapter.

Mary Sheridan-Rabideau explains the importance of researching small organizations because she insists “as the histories of these fleeting grassroots organizations disappear and those of more centralized, national organizations with institutionalized resources are overly represented, we lose sense of how these movements were lived.”10 Tracing the practices of these smaller organizations also reveals critical moments of transition as these organizations expand, contract, and negotiate relationships with the “centralized” organizations and “institutionalized resources” that Sheridan-Rabideau describes. For example, the previous chapter cites Cleve Jones, the founder of the AIDS Memorial quilt, who argues the NAMES Foundation has “decommissioned one of the most effective weapons in the war against AIDS” as the organization shifted from housing the Quilt in San Francisco and displaying the quilt near-annually on the National Mall of Washington D.C. to storing the quilt in Atlanta with infrequent displays by sponsoring churches or organizations who pay the Foundation a fee to host sections of the quilt. As Jones intimates, the location of a craft rhetoric project – even its storage site – have significant rhetorical implications as the Quilt moved from San Francisco, a site at the forefront of LGBTQ activism, to Atlanta “where rents were cheaper.”11 The following chapters extend Sheridan-Rabideau’s research on an American, grassroots “girl-centered organization” in her study Girls, Feminism, and Grassroots Literacies to turn our field’s attention to literacy and multimodal composition projects and their sponsoring intermediary organizations across the
globe.

The field of writing studies has increased its global focus to these types of projects, with scholarship that has developed complex but distributed understandings of the circulation of human rights rhetoric\textsuperscript{12} as well as the incorporation of postcolonial theory into the field.\textsuperscript{13} Significant scholarly interest in South Africa and its rhetoric, literacy, and composition initiatives has also developed in the field. The 1996 landmark edited collection, *The Social Uses of Literacy: Theory and Practice in Contemporary South Africa*, presents case studies drawing on New Literacy Studies theories and methods that examine literacy practices of predominately Coloured and Black South Africans in the 1980s and the first two years of democracy.

In the preface to the collection, Brian Street highlights the importance of this moment when “the arrival of a literacy programme together with the associated national publicity about the problems of lack of literacy, themselves serve to construct ‘illiteracy’ among people for whom the term previously had no salience.”\textsuperscript{14} The essays that follow in the collection identify localized and nationalized struggles in a range of sites: these include a rural farming community in Namaqualand working to retain communal space against “the local institutions of the apartheid state” move to private land ownership;\textsuperscript{15} Xhosa speakers traveling from rural to urban areas who must develop “bureaucratic literacies” in order to navigate “official documents of surveillance and control” and “evade and circumvent this system of social control”;\textsuperscript{16} and a division of literacy practices in an informal settlement outside of Cape Town where a literacy nongovernmental organization’s educators could not perceive “their delivery of literacy going beyond the classroom and into the lives of the learners.”\textsuperscript{17}

This collection has profoundly influenced the research design and scholarship I present in this dissertation, but I extend the critical considerations it raises in two significant ways. First,
the essays present a tight focus on community literacies without extensive consideration of how these literacies connect to globalized representations of South African literacy (such as in a report by the United Nations) or “transnational advocacy networks” focused on literacy development projects.\(^1^8\) Since the collection, both technological developments in the Internet and access to the Internet in South Africa have increased, with the South African government estimating 5 million Internet users (about 11% of the population) in 2008 and a World Bank estimate of 12.3% two years later.\(^1^9\) In other words, since the collection has been published, circulation of South African literacies has expanded (albeit unequally); in part because of the developing Internet, grassroots organizations have cultivated audiences from online transnational advocacy networks. The increase in mobile phone ownership and usage has increased far more rapidly than Internet, with UNICEF estimating that 72% of 15 to 24 year olds possess a cellular phone at the same time a “pronounced digital divide” remains in terms of Internet access that is “divided by race, socioeconomics, and geography.”\(^2^0\) The case study I present of the Amazwi project identifies and critiques the global circulation of literacy and composition projects and the audiences these projects develop in large part because they continue to cultivate an audience disconnected to project participants. Second, none of the essays from *The Social Uses of Literacy* presents a case study where handicraft production and literate practices are linked. As I described in the first chapter, sewn handicraft projects have been positioned over time and specifically at sites in the Global South as strategies to “develop” women of color, whether morally, economically, or a vague hybrid of both.

Pippa Stein’s essay, “The Olifantsylei Fresh Stories Project: Multimodality, Creativity, and Fixing the Semiotic Chain,” is the only article in the field of writing studies to touch on handicraft production and multimodal literacy practices in South Africa. In Carey Jewitt and
Gunther Kress’ edited collection *Multimodal Literacy*, Stein examines a project designed for South African children in Grades 1 and 2 that asks them to generate “fresh stories” that are “distinct from traditional African folkloric tales” and to create dolls to enact the stories in performances for each other. She argues the dolls the children create for the project “form part of the ongoing semiotic chain of social, cultural, and aesthetic practices around fertility doll/child figures which have existed in Southern Africa for hundreds of years and which continue to exist in some communities today.” Although Stein constructs a compelling description of her case study and immediate links on the “semiotic chain” connected to the children’s dolls, she fails to establish a significant connection between the contemporary dolls and these figures from “hundreds of years ago” as well as acknowledge the semiotic links where the fertility figures and contemporary reproductions of them have become commodified in global art and tourism markets. Additionally Stein’s argument possesses a challenging implication in its focus on the link between the children’s dolls and “traditional” fertility figures as it neglects to explore more contemporary media influences on their multimodal compositions. Like the art intermediaries I discuss in the first chapter, Stein problematically implies the South African children’s more authentic voice as composers evoke pre-colonial or traditional themes.

Stein problematically naturalizes the associations between traditional Africa and the modernized West in her analysis of the Olifantsvlei Fresh Stories Project. She states these associations most clearly in a description she provides of one of the dolls: “with safety pins for ears, a traditional African black bead necklace and a Taiwanese pink, green, and purple plastic seashell necklace wound around her neck, Ntswaki straddles the African and the Western, the local and the global, the past and the present.” Like the associations between needlework and femininity that became problematically naturalized in England that I discussed in the first
chapter, Stein’s description of the project invokes associations that positions the African semiotic influences on children’s multimodal processes as distinctly in the past and in direct contrast to a Westernized, globalized, present.

More recently, scholarship in writing studies has worked to challenge this association of South African multimodal composition with a traditional past. In a recent essay that “examines the concepts of public writing, public literacy, [and] public rhetoric,” Jacqueline Jones Royster turns to a South African-based billboard campaign expressly to challenge exclusive associations of contemporary rhetoric originating in the West. Early on in “Reframing Public Literacy: The loveLife Multimedia Campaign to Prevent HIV in South Africa,” Royster identifies the final goal of her analysis:

To suggest that models for strategic action in the face of complex contemporary challenges and problems (such as the loveLife billboard campaigns) are being developed in parts of the world (on the continent of Africa, for example) where those of us in Western societies tend too often not to look for guidance or to expect, notice, or perceive the possibility of innovation or pacesetting global leadership – regardless of evidence that we should.

But what Royster merely footnotes – the significant amount of funding the loveLife multimedia campaign receives from the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation – flaws her description of the loveLife campaign as a solely South African model for “strategic action.” Although I do not equate funding with the creative composition practices the loveLife campaign engages, I question how funding from a foundation (functioning as an intermediary) may both open up and constrain potential composition subjects and practices.

Like Royster, this chapter also works to identify critical rhetorical practices originating amongst individuals, organizations, and governmental bodies outside of the United States and Europe. Both Royster and I recognize that powerful rhetorical messages about pressing global issues – such as the transmission of HIV – are developing in non-Western sites and circulating in
local and transnational advocacy networks. But Royster examines her case study with a focus on the local and national implications of the loveLine project (the places where the project is viewed), without analyzing its important global connections. She makes two critical oversights in her essay that leave readers with an uncomplicated picture of the loveLife campaign where “the South African people have identified the available means at their disposal for proactive response, means that hinge on a dynamic multimedia campaign.” The primary oversight Royster commits is her flattening of “the South African people” with the nongovernmental organization that is loveLife. Researching this organization and its innovative marketing campaigns is important work, but I want to question how a more complex understanding of the loveLife campaign can emerge if that research recognizes the global advocacy network and nonprofit organizational structures that shape those campaigns. These are the kinds of questions I bring to bear on CAS as a South African nonprofit organization that has struggled to find steady funding and has found the most funding for the Amazwi project from non-South African donors.

As a struggling arts and culture nonprofit organization in a country with a problematic history of investment and a transnational trade agenda, CAS is one of many amongst local nonprofit organizations connected to transnational audiences and funding opportunities through the nonprofit industrial complex. As Dylan Rodríguez describes, this complex is “a set of symbiotic relationships that link political and financial technologies of state and owning class control with surveillance over public political ideology.” Although a relatively small initiative, CAS has actively implicated the Amazwi project within this global complex, receiving support and collaborating with foundations in the Netherlands and the South African Parliament (this latter collaboration is the subject of the next chapter). As I explore in sections below, this
complex of funders and funding requirements works to inform many of the practices CAS embraces to frame meaning of the project – including the global exhibition of the Amazwi cloths at art galleries in the United States, Netherlands and South African parliamentary buildings. Global exhibitions of the Amazwi project have focused primarily on the belief that sharing individual experience through multimodal narrative is a method that achieves reconciliation. After discussing the role of reconciliation in shaping a democratic South Africa during the 1990s, I move to an analysis of the Amazwi project as a craft rhetoric project and its specific practices that work to centralize material, frame meaning, and craft forms of citizenship that were linked initially to community building but have shifted to an individualized model of public memory.

**Reconciliation and a Democratic South Africa**

There is a semantic linkage between intermediaries and processes of reconciliation – “intermediary” denotatively meaning to work between contrastive elements or constituents. The concept of reconciliation continues to hold significant rhetorical force and has since the 1990s with the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1996 after the establishment of a democratic South Africa in 1994. The question of reconciliation in South Africa is one that has been debated for over two decades as evidenced by an explosion of South African and global scholarship within the same period.³⁰ In her article on the need for building a postcolonial archive in South Africa, Cheryl McEwan argues “coming to terms with the past has emerged as the grand narrative of the late twentieth and early 21st centuries. Individuals and nationals are seeking to overcome their traumatic legacies through the establishment of historical truth and the creation of collective memory.”³¹ As a process of “coming to terms with the past,” reconciliation in South Africa possesses its own slippery figuration between the collective and the individual.
My intention in this brief section is to demonstrate this tension between the collective and the individual that remains unresolved in the question of South African reconciliation. To do so, I turn to a recent collection co-edited by Fanie du Toit and Erik Doxtader, In the Balance: South Africans debate reconciliation, and in particular two opposing viewpoints expressed by former South African president F.W. de Klerk and one of South Africa’s most prominent activists, Zackie Achmat. These opposing viewpoints reveal the larger tension between compromise and justice, respectively.

In “The need for forgiveness and reconciliation” F.W. de Klerk offers a definition of reconciliation as one premised on three principles: forgiveness, balance, and compromise. In his explanation and argument for these principles, de Klerk moves between personal anecdotes of family quarrels and a broader positioning of the whole of the Afrikaners people in South Africa. Overall his essay intimates an ability for him to speak on behalf of his role in the process of reconciliation (one that he was awarded a joint Nobel Peace Prize with Nelson Mandela in 1993) and to speak on behalf of the Afrikaners people, leaving the rest of the South African population loosely defined in the essay as “others” who are largely lumped into the category of ANC “supporters.” Essentially, he fails to acknowledge the broad political landscape of interests that existed during the 1980s or the activist movements challenging the ANC in the contemporary moment. His arguments for reconciliation and the values it requires remains at a level of abstraction that reduces the intense bodily and structural violence visited upon Black South Africans to the word “injustice.” Instead he focuses on how Afrikaners “had to make one of the greatest sacrifices that can be asked of any people” when he insists, “my people, the Afrikaners, had to give up the right to exclusive national self-determination for which we had struggled for more than three centuries. We are as much a nation as any other people on the face of the earth,
with our own language, culture, and history.”

De Klerk’s movement between the self and the collective remains unflinchingly unreceptive to the material realities of a large number of South Africans today. A particularly striking example of this basic lack of understanding hinges on a financial analogy de Klerk offers in his argument for balance:

All of us have, at some time or other, struggled to reconcile our bank statements with the often wildly inaccurate figures in the stubs of our cheque books. We overlook longstanding debts and debits. Sometimes we are surprised by unexpected credits. And we have all experienced the satisfaction when we finally succeed in balancing our books to the last penny.

The invocation of “all of us” falls flat immediately with the knowledge that “all of us” simply excludes most of the population of South Africans, in particular Black South Africans who arguably have the most significant grievances over the injustices of the past that must be “balanced” in order for reconciliation to occur, according to de Klerk’s words. At the conclusion of both Mpumalanga province cloth workshops that I discuss in this chapter and the next, PMP and CAS paid the women a small stipend as compensation for the multimodal narrative they contributed to the project. These payments were made in cash because most women did not possess bank accounts, not even an Mzansi Account, the low-income transactional bank accounts established through the 2004 Financial Sector Charter. Beyond my observational evidence, in 2006 the Financial Sector Charter Committee reports showed that 3.3 million Mzansi accounts were opened over the first two years. Although I have not been able to locate a more recent figure for the number of these low income accounts that have opened or been able to procure an exact figure for how many non-Mzansi accounts exist within the South African banking system, with a country population estimated at 50.5 million in 2011, I would speculate that even assuming 20% of the population possesses a bank account in which one might learn the financial
literacy lessons de Klerk maps onto the political question of reconciliation is a generous estimate.

I belabor this point about possession of bank accounts for a more significant reason than to merely show that de Klerk offers an analogy to which few black South Africans would relate. First, as I examine in the next chapter, a conflation of economic with political and personal values of reconciliation is one that the South African Parliamentary Millennium Programme even advocates and is perhaps one of the most dangerous ideologies of individualization that circulates in South Africa today. To monetize value in a space where income and wealth disparity remains one of the highest in the world\(^{38}\) is to invite those who have very little of what is valued to project that deficit upon individual shortcomings rather than persistent structural inequities. As the Mpumalanga province “democracy cloths” resoundingly reflected, an ability to participate actively in a democracy requires social goods, such as a baseline financial stability or “balance” in place that most of the women in the workshop and South Africans simply do not possess. In other words, is a collective or national reconciliation genuinely possible if basic conditions in order to be able to forgive, balance, and compromise are not even in place? In Naomi Klein’s *The Shock Doctrine* she describes the transition to universal democracy in South Africa in the 1990s as a “democracy born in chains.”\(^{39}\) De Klerk’s facile banking analogy reveals largely a neoliberal logic at work where traumatic wounds may appear as deficits on a checkbook register that may be balanced by “unexpected credits.” But as many South African rights activists argue, these credits are both expected and long overdue.

Zackie Achmat articulates this argument saliently in an essay from the same collection, *In the Balance*, that is titled “No reconciliation without social justice.”\(^{40}\) Although de Klerk may not differentiate between a South African populace divided by socioeconomic, racial, geographic, and gendered disparities, Achmat has no problem doing so, even as he recognizes he occupies a
position within the middle class and the attendant benefits, such as the protection of the South African police force, that it affords him.\textsuperscript{41} His essay calls out de Klerk specifically, arguing that the former President “held the TRC in contempt” because of his failure (amongst other National Party politicians and South African “big business”) to “do what was necessary for coming clean about their role in apartheid and for doing something to redistribute wealth more equitably.”\textsuperscript{42} Achmat’s essay represents the new democratic South Africa as a stark landscape of increasing privatization that has led to “inequalities in education today that are greater than under apartheid.”\textsuperscript{43}

Taking up the economic values-based discourse I attribute to de Klerk above and the Parliamentary Millennium Programme in the next chapter, Achmat refuses to conceive of the economy at a level of personal finance and therefore the suggestion of personal responsibility to access economic markets and the social goods that would seemingly be circulating in ever broader networks of access in a democratic South Africa. Instead he argues throughout the essay that major businesses in South Africa that profited from apartheid structures continue to owe a debt of reparations that “are not paid to an individual only.”\textsuperscript{44} For Achmat, then, there has been no meaningful reconciliation despite the TRC and its existence as an ideal on which a democratic South Africa has been founded. His conclusion is bleak – asking and then answering with a resounding yes the following question: “Have we averted a civil war or have we simply postponed it?”\textsuperscript{45} He sees a causal link between chronic injustices for so many South Africans and the rise in hate crimes and conflict, including the explosion of xenophobic violence against African immigrants coming into South Africa and the rise in violence against women (including a startling rise in the murder of black working-class lesbians).\textsuperscript{46} That transnational publics may look to South Africa as an exemplar of peaceful transition and a reconciled public is a
representation Achmat challenges fundamentally. Although this question was not initially at the forefront of my research, it was hard not to ignore stark contrast between the representations of healing and reconciliation circulating in the media and amongst nonprofit organizations like CAS and the prejudices and stereotypes I witnessed on the ground and that many people I spoke with expressed to me unsolicited, sometimes upon first meeting. Like Achmat, I believe that reconciliation is a concept much discussed but one that most South African citizens have not witnessed or felt in lived experience. This observation is significant to the analysis of the Amazwi project that follows since it is framed around a meaning that suggests individual processes of reconciliation became possible in a post-Apartheid South Africa.

In the introduction to In the Balance: South Africans debate reconciliation, Doxtader and du Toit begin by saying, “the question of reconciliation is persistent.”47 In this section I have presented two critically opposing views of this “persistent” question to situate the rhetorical intervention of the Amazwi project within an ideological context in which it was created. As I go on to explore in the section on “Framing Meaning” below, CAS elides this multi-perspectival ideological context to present an uncomplicated argument that the Amazwi project creates opportunities for healing and reconciliation. As Fiona Ross, one of the most important feminist critics of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the formalized and limiting processes of recognition it constructed, reminds us: “the past arises unexpectedly in everyday life, and reconciliation and national unity may not necessarily have a bearing on how people conduct their ordinary lives.”48

The Amazwi Abesifazane Voices of Women Craft Rhetoric Project

In this section I describe the Amazwi project based on the five basic categories for analyzing material rhetoric that I established in the first chapter: the craft rhetoric project’s
materiality, function, audience, intermediary, and composer(s).

The project uses a range of materials to create rhetorical meaning. The basic material unit of a finished *Amazwi* multimodal narrative consists of a frame (25”x15”) containing a memory cloth (around 15” x 11”) with the following printed below it: a narrative in an original indigenous Southern African language, an image of the cloth’s composer, and an English translation of the narrative. CAS provides pre-cut cloth panels, embroidery thread, and seed beads during the workshop to coordinate the crafting materials. Unlike the Chilean *arpilleras* that typically traveled unframed, unsigned, and with little to no textual narrative about the cloth, the *Amazwi* project’s material unit is multimodal – engaging visual and alphabetic modalities for viewers. The *Amazwi* archive stores the majority of its over 2500 cloths unframed, folded in half, and stored in a plastic sleeve. The paper containing the original, handwritten narrative is stored inside of the sleeve as well. These sleeves are collected into binders that organize the cloths chronologically.

CAS situates the project’s function for participants and audiences within the rhetorical context of reconciliation that I explored above. The project claims it functions to heal and develop creativity through “honour[ing] individual history.” For CAS, the events of the five-day workshop and the subsequent exhibitions of the cloths work to honor the experience of participants through a process of public recognition. CAS founder Andries Botha links the project and its “creative methodology” explicitly to his attendance of TRC hearings and a desire to generate additional testimony that would serve “as a means for women’s memory to be recounted and held in trust as part of the memory archive of South Africa for future prosperity.” The majority of the cloths, a corpus of over 2000, were created in workshops that took place between 2001 and 2006. In the last five years, CAS has shifted to focus on the
exhibition of these cloths, with an identified function of the project to “establish Africa’s first Women’s Museum.”

But if CAS conceived of the impact that the project had on participating women who created the multimodal narratives over the course of the five-day workshop, then it has failed to articulate the function it envisions for the project on audiences clearly – despite the fact that they have emphasized exhibiting the project at sites in South Africa, North America, and Europe as well as online. Because of the particular framing process, exhibition within museums, and critical coverage of the project’s reception, I argue that the audience for the Amazwi project is African art audiences located within South Africa, Europe, and North America. As I discuss further below – centralizing the multimodal composition within this framed unit works to both individualize the contribution of the crafter to the memory cloth archive at the same time that it distances the possibility for these multimodal narratives to serve a function as activist texts within the communities they were composed within or even for broader South African based activism. The audiences who have been able to view these cloths, whether in museum spaces like the Phansi Museum in Durban or the partial online database CAS published in 2007, are nearly always audiences outside of the communities these cloths work to represent. To put it simply, if the composers are women coming from townships (and in particular sections of townships that are frequently the most economically marginalized), they have never been conceived of as the broader audience for these cloths which may be displayed in downtown Durban or Cape Town art galleries, but never within community centers located in the townships themselves.

As the intermediary and initiator of the Amazwi project, CAS has always consisted of a very small staff of individuals who themselves manifest to large degree the economic divisions
that continue to divide South Africa. Both CAS founder Andries Botha and Executive Director Janine Zagel are Afrikaners who speak fluent English and Afrikaans only. Their staff has rotated over the years but has almost exclusively consisted of black South Africans who work as the workshop facilitators, archivists, and narrative translators. The executive staff is unsalaried, as CAS is an “other project” to Botha’s primary profession as an artist. This division between executive and program staff became most apparent to me in February of 2008 when I asked CAS Executive Director Janine Zagel if I could have permission to accompany Amazwi project workshop organizers Morongoe Tsoaeli and Eunice Gambushe. Although Zagel granted me permission without hesitation, her response to my follow up question (what to expect in the workshop environment and specifically how I might be perceived as a white woman co-facilitating the project) genuinely surprised me. Although she had narrated the five-day process of the workshop with precision on multiple occasions, she admitted that she had never participated in a memory cloth workshop. Also, although she describes the early days of the Amazwi project to me in a 2009 interview imagistically as “just Andries and his bakkie [truck] driving around Durban townships,” I was never able to gain a clear sense of Botha’s role as an intermediary within the workshop setting itself or how much he participated early on. I am hesitant to ascribe this lack of clarity as strategic or intentional deflection – I speculate that it was inspired more by Zagel and Botha’s intimacy with the project materials post-workshop and their profound belief in the project and discussion about the workshop process they would encounter from workshop facilitators after their conclusion. I also believe they would assume a level of commitment from their staff that matched their own, even when individual staff members were dependent on CAS as a primary source of income and that salary was below the average salary for comparable data entry work in the nonprofit sector.
The division between executive and program staff is significant and led to conflict during the CAS workshop I participated in co-facilitating in March 2008. The primary point of contention was over budgeting – in that Zagel established our budget for the cloth workshop from afar and based it on cost estimates of past workshops facilitated in townships located in the Durban metropolitan area.\(^\text{56}\) During the second week in the Mpumalanga province when we conducted a workshop in the township of Mahushi we encountered costs for transportation, potable water, and food in particular that exceeded the budget we had for three facilitators to conduct a five-day workshop and stay in Mahushi for an additional three days prior to and after the workshop’s conclusion. As I narrate in Interchapter C, we spent our food budget for the week and a half in a matter of four days, in large part because we believed it appropriate to share our food with our host family.\(^\text{57}\) There were other critical ways that, as an intermediary, CAS was divided as a staff rather than a unified nonprofit organization working toward a shared mission. As an intermediary organization that I established the most access to as a researcher, CAS demonstrated how these divisions can lead to high turnover in program staff – all staff members that I worked with over 2008 and 2009 have since stopped working for CAS – largely to pursue employment that was more consistent and higher paying.\(^\text{58}\) Working with CAS has also challenged my research to understand how even a small-staffed nonprofit organization that works as an intermediary between a population and sources of governmental and transnational support and sponsorship can be divided ideologically and economically.

Despite the challenges I discuss above, CAS possesses a broad vision of who may participate in the *Amazwi* project – one that highlights even further the problematic representations Parliamentary Millennium Programme staff produced of the kinds of composers who might participate in the project that I discuss in the next chapter. At base, the *Amazwi*
project is open to any South African woman who wants to contribute to the cloth archive with a multimodal composition. I also believe that they would be open to receive any cloth made within the specifications of the project (a composed narrative, an embroidered cloth, and an image of the composer), but in a *de facto* sense the composers for the *Amazwi* project have been Black South African women and have largely been Zulu based on the early relationship Botha and Zagel established in the townships of Kwa Mashu (where former CAS staff member Leonard Zulu lived) and Umlazi (where occasional staff member Eunice Gambushe lived and operated the community centre that I discuss in Interchapter B). There are no *Amazwi* cloths that have been composed solely in English, suggesting that another *de facto* quality shared between women contributing to the project is that they will speak one of the other ten official languages of South Africa.\(^59\) In February 2008 I initiated contact with an ethnic Indian senior citizens group in the township of Clairwood – Zagel in particular expressed an interest in adding the experience of ethnic Indian women to the *Amazwi* archive.\(^60\) The composers for the *Amazwi* project are practically limited, then, at the same time that CAS conceives of “South African women” as the group whose perspective that makes up the *Amazwi* archive. If I discussed a division between CAS executive and program staff above, I noticed less of a sense of division between CAS program facilitators and women composers who participated in the Mpumalanga province *Amazwi* workshops. Tsoaeli suggested that this was not always the case, but I was able to observe that the closeness some women composers expressed for Eunice Gambushe in particular, was based on their admiration of her as a community center founder and ability to support herself through sewing projects.\(^61\)

In examining the five elements of analysis to study craft rhetoric projects (materiality, function, audience, intermediary, and composer), I would argue the *Amazwi* project works to
bring ideologically conflicting communities and people together both during the five-day workshop and the circulation of texts afterward to South African urban-based and global audiences. As I turn to the three processes I recognize as a part of contemporary craft rhetoric projects in the next section, I consider the implications of these ideological conflicts to reflect on the ideas about individual and collective reconciliation I discussed in the previous section as well as to consider further how divisions between CAS staff worked to centralize material, frame meaning, and craft forms of citizenship for project participants.

Centralizing Material

In the first chapter, I identified practices of centralizing material that worked to contribute to the rhetorical significance of craft projects by unifying or coordinating materiality. The Amazwi project engages in a range of practices that centralize the material of the project from the use of the same materials, establishment of a basic multimodal narrative “unit,” and central physical and digital archive. Like the NAMES Project organization that maintains the AIDS Memorial Quilt, CAS centralizes the material of its project strictly by creating and managing archives that contain each “official” contribution to the project. But unlike the NAMES Project that merely provides guidelines for standardized independent cloth production (which may be composed by individuals or groups who organize themselves for one time or repeated gatherings to make panels for the AIDS Memorial Quilt), Amazwi project workshop facilitators exert a level of control over the archive before the cloth is even completed. All four craft rhetoric projects my study examines – the Chilean resistance arpilleras, the AIDS Memorial Quilt, the Clothesline Project, and both the CAS and PMP iterations of the Amazwi Abesifazane “Voices of Women” project – centralize material by setting standardized formal dimensions for their projects.
Perhaps the most significant form of centralizing material, however, from a compositional standpoint is the Amazwi project’s centralized theme of “A Day I Will Never Forget.” This centralizes the subject material for women to create a multimodal composition in that participants must remember and recount a memorable experience contained within the same durative time frame. The theme is purposefully broad, but in the two workshops that I co-facilitated in the Mpumalanga province, I observed women composing related narratives that were based on the exemplar presented by CAS staff member Morongoe Tsoaeli or based on what others around them were composing. In the CAS workshop in the township of Mahushu, for example, the framed cloth we brought with us visually depicted a house at the same time the narrative discussed Busisiwe Dhlamani’s negative experience working for an Afrikaans family that provided her with substandard room and board. Sharing this one example seemed to have a strong influence on centralizing the themes that emerged within the workshop, held in a rural township area where employment opportunities would be limited to working in the tourist industry that served the Kruger Park region but most typically working on area farms or for farming families. In other words, the example cloth seemed to influence the range of experiences women composing for the workshop recalled, both visually and thematically. For women who approached the framed cloth visually, multimodal narratives emerged that centered around events happening in their family homes, which (like the example) typically women represented as the largest object in the center of the cloth. Only five of the fifty-nine cloths we collected from the Mahushu workshop did not contain a depiction of any houses.

For women who approached the framed cloth thematically, stories emerged that centered around women’s experiences as a domestic worker. Edith Lekhuwane, a more senior woman in the group (and therefore someone who received a tremendous amount of respect from other
participating women), was one of the first women to finish the alphabetic text of her narrative and she asked me to assist her in sketching a visual interpretation of that narrative onto her cloth. Specifically, when she called me over, she asked me to draw a cooking pot resting on a table, suggesting to me that her memory was situated in a kitchen or dining room space. I asked her to tell me about her experience as I attempted to sketch a symbol for a cooking pot. She explained that when she was a domestic worker for an Afrikaans family she was asked to clean the tile floors of the kitchen in a very particular manner: without letting her skin touch the floor, with the suggestion that direct skin contact would dirty the floor. She proceeded to call others to watch her, and then she pantomimed the process of trying to clean a floor on her hands and knees with cleaning rags serving a barrier between her skin and the floor. She explained that when she was finally tired of working for the family and this humiliating restriction, that she made a large pot of porridge and dished it out into nearly every plate the family owned. Then she walked out and never returned, imagining the horror of the woman of the house who would discover solidified porridge in all of her china. The sense of humor she brought to the pantomime about the revenge she visited on her employer elicited a lot of laughs around the room. The example we displayed before women created their narratives likely influenced Lekhuwane to recall her own experience as a domestic worker. This leads me to conclude that shared visual and narrative themes may emerge from both the examples that CAS brings to shape understanding of the project and the influence of workshop participants on one another.

At the same time these “creativity transfers” worked to centralize material at the workshop, there were more problematic ways that CAS worked to centralize the expectations for the visual presentation of the cloths. At the end of each day of the workshop, CAS facilitators collect the cloths from participating women and spend time in the evening “checking” them
before the workshop resumes the following morning. I observed this process during the 2008 Hazyview and Mahushu workshops where Edith Gambushe spent time inspecting each cloth for sewing quality. The evening sessions worked to centralize the quality of the material presented in terms of visual appearance (typically stitch consistency and neatness) and we did not participate in any discussions of the subject matter depicted in the cloth during these evening sessions. When Gambushe identified a cloth with an appearance issue, such as an inconsistent border, she pulled out the “incorrect” stitching and “corrected” it before returning it the next day with a brief explanation to the woman crafting it. In my interview with Morongoe she affirmed the practice of collecting the cloth at the end of each session because otherwise she believed that women may get ahead on the project too quickly and would likely make “mistakes” that would have to be taken out and would waste thread. However, this practice may work to lessen the connection a participating woman may exhibit toward the cloth, as she never retains complete ownership of the written and embroidered narratives of her experience. I discuss this practice in the next chapter as well when CAS and PMP workshop facilitators clashed over expectations of cloth appearance.

The Phansi Museum of South Africa currently houses the physical archive consisting of a selection of framed cloths and a series of binders I described in the section above. The museum complex contains a handful of offices and a collection of Southern African images and artifacts that offer permanent and rotating displays as well as a café and musical performances. Located in the Glenwood neighborhood of suburban Durban, the 1898 Victorian mansion complex is called the Roberts’ House, named after Esther Roberts who was one of South Africa’s first female anthropologists. I assisted CAS with the move to the Phansi Museum in 2009 by writing a successful grant to the Bartel Arts Trust that would cover the cost of renting space as well as
physically moving the collection from the downtown Durban warehouse where CAS had stored the archive and maintained an office since 2002.

As mentioned before, the location of an activist project – even its storage site – have significant rhetorical implications (such as when the AIDS Quilt moved from San Francisco, a site at the forefront of LGBTQ activism, to Atlanta\textsuperscript{64}). The move to Glenwood worked even further to frame the meaning of the project for museum-based audiences that I discuss below. Practically, the move meant access to physical spaces that had a greater chance of preserving the integrity of the project, in large part because the offices in the Roberts’ House complex were climate controlled, heavily securitized, and soundly constructed. In contrast, at the original Palmer Street location CAS experienced several robberies over the project’s near-decade residence there in addition to an intense storm in 2008 that caused water to leak through the roof.\textsuperscript{65} The roof area holding the cloth collection was spared, but CAS lost two 1990s era personal computers to water damage that Morongoe Tsoaeli and I both used to store organizational files and load the database program that stored the cloth archive.\textsuperscript{66}

Since February 2009 CAS has expressed a desire to centralize the material of the \textit{Amazwi} project into a secured online database as well as with the creation of its own museum – what Andries Botha articulates will be the first Women’s Museum for the continent of Africa. There has been a significant shift from the collection of new memory cloths to working with the existing collection to find markets that can generate revenue for CAS and increase awareness about the project in terms of its potential research value. In March 2009 I conducted research for CAS and Phansi Museum to assess the feasibility of creating an independent online database that would charge users an access fee. I cultivated a list of potential researchers by gathering contact information for Departments and Centers of African Studies and Gender and Women’s Studies
across the continent of Africa as well as English-speaking countries in Europe and North America. From there I created an anonymous online survey I sent to individuals affiliated with these departments and centers to ascertain both the interest in such a database and the willingness to subscribe on an individual or institutional level to such an independent database. Although survey response rates were very low, I attempted to use this data and my own use practices of information databases through my affiliation with the University of Illinois to persuade CAS to consider licensing the content rather than working to create an independent database. I was and remain highly skeptical that an independent database would be an endeavor that would generate revenue for the organization, supplying them with evidence from a workshop on heritage preservation sponsored by UNESCO that CAS and Phansi Museum asked me to attend.

**Framing Meaning**

In the first chapter I identified “scaffolding practices” that intermediaries engage in to articulate project function and work to fix an audience’s reception of the craft rhetoric project. Practices of framing meaning may include an organization’s mission or vision statement, images of the project embedded within print and digital spaces, or a number of other discursive media that works to position the meaning of the project. Unlike PMP, which ultimately worked to frame and re-frame meaning for the project when it became the “Voices of Women” national quilt project, CAS has consistently framed the meaning for the project as a women’s history project. In its first website iteration, the project is described as one that would “give later generations the opportunity to learn [sic] about the history of the women of South Africa.” In the most recent iteration for the Voices of Women Museum website, CAS describes the project “as a means for women’s memory to be recounted and held in trust as part of the memory archive of South Africa for future prosterity [sic].” Interestingly on another page of the same
website, the project also argues “the memory cloths and narratives… open up discourse about South African women’s feminine aspect and our understanding of what that might be.” As a craft rhetoric project that invites composers to participate based on their gender as I addressed above, these statements frame the meaning of the project on that shared identification between composers.

The evolution across statements above, however, suggests a shift from an expansive conception of the history of women to a more individualized sense that CAS has created a “memory archive” that may reveal less about the history of South Africa and more about “women’s feminine aspect.” This may seem to be a subtle shift in framing or merely a matter of diction, but it crucially evokes the conflict between individualized and collective national processes of reconciliation that I examined at the beginning of the chapter with my analysis of the de Klerk and Achmat essays. In other words, the organization moved from framing the collection of cloths as a corpus that could communicate a collective sense of South African women’s history to re-position their collection as one that reveals broad meaning about African women’s “feminine aspect.” Recent organizational goals to establish “Africa’s first Women’s Museum” manifests this shift saliently, as conversations during the early planning stages of this museum project in 2009 centered on Botha’s belief that the Amazwi project was about women broadly and not South Africa. A focus on women broadly, I argued to Botha and Zagel, would work to essentialize the association of needlework with women (something I discuss further below in addition to the previous chapter). Perhaps even more seriously, the broader focus could strip the cloth archive’s specific rhetorical context of being a project that worked to preserve experiences of South African women who were adults during apartheid, the democratic transition, and South Africa’s early days of democracy. The need to recognize this radically
specific and important context was invaluable. My work with CAS on another project in 2009 where we interacted with a number of young South African students, many of who were born in 1994 or later, reflected the generational difference of those who had never directly experienced apartheid. The cloths in the collection represented phenomena like forced removals, police brutality, and resistance group inter-conflict in ways that could reveal to audiences the ways in which critical events structured and shaped the everyday experience of women and their communities. As Veena Das argues in *Critical Events*, “in the memory of an event as it is organized and consecrated by the state, only the voice of the expert becomes embodied, acquiring in time a kind of permanence and hiding from view the manner in which the event may have been experienced by the victim herself.”

The *Amazwi* project, I insisted to CAS staff in 2009, needed to retain the historical context out of which the project developed, even if it had desires to position the cloth collection into a broader examination of African gendered experience.

During these 2009 discussions, I began to realize a significant conflict about project direction centered over questions and ideas about project audience. The argument I made to CAS staff about the need to frame the value of the project as a record of South African history revealed my own assumption that I conceived of South African publics, and even more specifically communities affected by apartheid, as the most important audience for the project. As I identified in the section above, based on its exhibition practices, the *Amazwi* project reaches African art audiences located within South Africa, Europe, and North America almost exclusively. To be more specific, in South Africa, CAS has mounted exhibitions of the project in art galleries in Durban’s suburban art district and other South African city centers exclusively, including its recent rotating exhibition based at the Phansi Museum in Glenwood. The audience
for these exhibitions, then, becomes individuals who either live in these spaces or have monetary access to travel to these spaces. The glass frame and formalized mounting of the cloths within it placed on the walls of art museums constructs a “high art” audience for the project that structures an experience with the project where typically one audience member can stand in front of one woman’s cloth at a time. My concern with this structured audience experience rests on these questions: what does recognition mean in this setting and what could it mean if these cloths were instead exhibited connected together, out from the glass and positioned in the communities or at least in the historical context in which they were made? I turn to these questions below to consider their impact on citizenship development, as well as in the conclusion to propose alternative sites and imaginings for project exhibition.

**Crafting Citizenship**

As the previous section reveals, CAS worked to frame the meaning from the project from one about South African women’s history to one about revealing the “feminine aspect” of experience more broadly. The organization’s attempt to universalize women’s experience through an embroidery-based craft project, however, works to construct an essentialized link between South African women and needlework that is simply not essential. If that is how the organization frames meaning for audiences on the one hand, how CAS actually works to craft forms of citizenship for the women who participate in a five-day workshop and may never collaborate with CAS again, remains vague. While CAS works to catalog, preserve, and exhibit the cloths it collects, it has never worked to research the lasting impact of the project on participating women in a sustained or meaningful way.

I observed this failure and immediate severance of connection with participating women during the Mahushu township workshop I co-facilitated with Gambushe and Tsoaeli in March
2008. By the end of the week we collected the handwritten narratives, hand-sewn cloths, photographs of each cloth composer, as well as the composer’s full name. Our process included printing the photographs in nearby Hazyview so that we could write the composer’s name on the backs of the photographs before departure so as not to confuse cloths between images of composers. During the final reception women signed a sheet of paper next to their names to receive a small monetary stipend for their participation. CAS did not distribute any certificates or other organizational documents to provide formalized or lasting proof of their participation or information on what would happen to their cloths or likenesses. I used my camera equipment to take pictures of the women and I paid for an extra print of each photograph to gift to the women along with the stipend she received, for three specific reasons that worked to challenge basic CAS protocol. First, I felt uncomfortable photographing the women without giving them physical proof of how they appeared in that photograph. Second, I wrote CAS contact information on the back of each photograph for the composing women so that if they had questions about what their participation in the project meant, they had this information as a link (albeit a very cursory one) back to the organization. Finally, I knew that photographic equipment was less common (based on my conversations with the Mokoenas, our host family I discuss in Interchapter C) and I wanted women to have an image of themselves as a memory of what they looked like at that particular moment in their life if that was something that held meaning for them.

If CAS fails to maintain contact with cloth composers, what they do is offer an “event” experience in the lives of participating women that may or may not have any lasting effects or influence on them. In 2009 I advocated for protocols that would work to attempt further connection with past composers and expressed an interest on working for the organization on the
process of gauging longitudinal project impact. I founded the protocols on what I argued to the organization were “practical ethics” that recognized the difficulty of maintaining contact with participating women whose living arrangements may be informal or transitory. At the same time I argued the importance of at least attempting this contact, particularly as the organization made decisions about expanding representations of the composers and their cloths to more digital spaces and the permanent museum space. While Zagel and Botha understood the motivation behind the protocols, the focus on the cloths and their exhibition remained primary and they justified this focus by using evidence I had also presented to them. In researching the legality and ethics of displaying the composer’s image and multimodal narrative online, I was able to determine that CAS was within full legal right to display the collection without additional permissions because participation was contracted and formalized through the process of paying the women a stipend for their contributions. As the organization was shifting from cloth collection to permanent forms of cloth exhibition, these protocols and my arguments about ethical practice that could go beyond the letter of the law became moot (although during a period where reflection on future workshop practices could be fruitful).

Neither CAS nor I have any systematized idea about how the project may work to craft forms of citizenship for participating women, let alone how it may work to craft a durative sense of citizenship for them. Yet audience members, based on processes of framing meaning I discuss above, may read citizenship into the multimodal narratives based on the particular exhibition’s framing. When the cloths appear in the *Weavings of War* exhibition that I referenced in the introduction chapter, then they work to communicate the idea of a creative citizenship that emerges from traumatic events. When the cloths appear on the newly launched “Voices of Women Museum” website, then citizenship becomes a citizenship of womanhood, albeit one
problematically decontextualized from the intersectional experiences of participating women. My point is that the framing of the project becomes the primary context for suggesting the forms of citizenship it might craft in large part because of those practices to centralize material and disconnect participating women from the multimodal narratives they are asked to produce. Each framed narrative materially gives the impression it represents a woman and her identity, when few audience members or scholars that have started to research the project critique a “standing-in” based on a five-day ephemeral experience.\textsuperscript{74} That identity could be represented through needlework remains unquestioned across all of the ways the project is framed, and even Cheryl McEwan (who works to articulate what a postcolonial archive might look like, celebrating the Amazwi archive as a positive example) fails to recognize the very colonial history that needlework possesses in a Southern African context.

The framing of the project suggests it will initiate conversations about “women’s feminine aspect,” hinges in large part on project founder Andries Botha’s beliefs about gender and the practice of needlework. As the first chapter examined, the association of needlework with the feminine was not a natural association but one that scholars like Parker and Goggin suggests are framed by the values of the moment. Botha has explicitly claimed that needlework is a “natural medium” for women’s expression although this framing for why the particular materiality of the Amazwi project does not appear on any official project publications.\textsuperscript{75} Even after I shared evidence with Botha that showed 19\textsuperscript{th} century British missionaries introduced needlework as part of “moral” women’s practice in colonial South Africa, Botha did not seem to be persuaded from the belief that this was a natural medium for women.\textsuperscript{76} In distinction to the other craft rhetoric projects I examined in the first chapter, CAS is the only intermediary who premises its project’s materiality on an argument that women seek out needlework because it is
an artistic medium that naturally speaks to what they want to express. Whereas a project like the AIDS Memorial plays on the association between needlework and the feminine to challenge audiences explicitly (in particular late 1980s audiences who continued to associate HIV/AIDS with gay men, a “non-traditional” identity in the United States), CAS leaves these associations untroubled.

Ultimately, the durative forms of citizenship the Amazwi project may craft for participating women are simply unknown. While some of the earliest participating women work on embroidered panels they sell on commission through Durban-based African Art Centre (including the 2008 exhibition “What Makes Me Happy”), CAS maintains no connection to these women crafters and seems to have little organizational interest in gaining a sense about what early participation in the project meant for them as citizens in a democracy, then only six years old. The focus on framing the meaning of the cloth through the individual presentation of a framed multimodal narrative cloth unit evokes the tensions over South African reconciliation that I articulated in the contrast between de Klerk and Achmat above. In some sense, the Amazwi project presents a de Klerkian view of reconciliation that simplistically maps an individual’s choice to reconcile oneself as one reconciles the balance of a checkbook. I question if the Amazwi project could work to support a view of reconciliation premised on social justice, as Achmat advocates, where citizenship becomes crafted on the belief that meaningful and collective reconciliation can only happen after material inequities (such as the access to education and other human rights) have been addressed.

Conclusion
In 1983, writing with María Lugones, Elizabeth Spelman insists that “we can’t separate lives from the accounts given of them; the articulation of our experience is part of our experience.” In the same essay, Lugones and Spelman go on to write together

Many reasons can be and have been given for the production of accounts of people’s lives that plainly have nothing to do with illuminating those lives for the benefit of those living them. It is likely that both the method of investigation and the content of many accounts would be different if illuminating the lives of the people the accounts were about were the aim of the studies.

As this chapter has examined, the *Amazwi* project separates the multimodal narrative “A Day I Will Never Forget” unit from “the people the accounts [are] about.” The appeal and impact these narratives can have on audiences are powerful, as I describe in the introductory chapter: in my encounters with the cloth, they puncture me and demand that I consider radically specific contexts and experiences of participating South African women.

But researching the processes behind this relationship between audience and multimodal narrative reveals that CAS has emphasized the production of an object over a genuine commitment to the lives of the women it invites to participate in their organization (both staff members and cloth composers). While the project worked to monetize these experiences only briefly (through Business for Crafters courses and the practice of selling an additional cloth on consignment when the project first began), the organizational practices of centralizing material and framing meaning work to commodify experience. Without knowledge of the radically temporary and constructed nature of the project, audiences viewing the *Amazwi* cloths may likely assume these cloths open up broader or more lasting knowledge about the composer’s experience and identities. Moreover, when project audiences are outside of a South African context, their limited knowledge and the exhibition of cloths works to suggest the project is more democratized than it actually is, largely because CAS is a South African nongovernmental organization.
As I situated research on rhetoric and composition in South Africa early in this chapter, I accused Royster of engaging in this similar flattening of South African publics. Much is at stake when – in any context – we map “the people” onto an organizational intermediary that may possess its own anti-democratic structures and remain in abeyance to international funding that can work to structure the nature of the project and the distribution of funding profoundly. If in Royster’s work I wanted to suggest that a billboard may not be as easily representative of “the people” as her article suggests, then in the Amazwi project I want to argue that the multimodal narrative may not represent the woman who composed it in the ways audiences are asked to understand it. Tracing the economic and symbolic transnational advocacy and art networks that circulate information and messages about HIV/AIDS (with Royster’s example of the loveLife campaign) or about the experience of South African women (as represented in the Amazwi project) is the first step in recognizing the constrained agency that nearly all of us as citizens living with and through neoliberal processes of globalization may have afforded to us. That different forms of agency emerge and depend on one’s intersectional identity and location in the world is important to recognize. In the conclusion I turn to the next step – beyond identifying the networks where craft rhetoric projects like the Amazwi project circulate – how can scholars work to advocate for change in the rhetorical practices of intermediary organizations. If we can’t both trace production processes as well as perform this advocacy work, as my introduction suggested with my critique of Wendy Hesford’s Spectacular Visions, then we risk merely supplanting one decontextualized representation over another. In other words, if proponents of the Amazwi project in its current form seek to champion its ability to represent or stand in for South African women, then how are we not replacing one representation of South African women with a representation that is simply more pleasing to us because its frame merely insists
these representations are empowering?

**Figure 4:** Edith Lekhuwane, “A Day I Will Never Forget”

Notes:


2 In Greek Mythology, King Tereus of Thrace rapes Philomela, his wife’s sister, and cuts out her tongue because she vows to expose his act to the world. Voiceless, Philomela weaves a tapestry that describes the experience and sends it to her sister, Procne. This moves Procne to murder the child she and Tereus have, Itys, and serve him to Tereus. When that Procne has fed him his son, he pursues the two sisters who flee – ultimately the Olympian Gods change all three into birds. In Ovid, Philomela becomes a nightingale – thus restoring her voice in her transformation (Summary based on Ovid’s version from the *Metamorphoses* VI, 424-674).

The terms for housing in South Africa are very specific and diction invokes significant meaning. I align my use of terminology with *Abahlali baseMjondolo*, the Durban-based shackdweller movement who uses shack settlement in nearly all media except for legal documents where they use “informal settlement” in accordance with the South African government’s usage of it.

I will abbreviate the *Amazwi Abesifazane*, Voices of Women project to “the *Amazwi* project” from hereafter in the chapter.


See Susan C. Jarratt, “Beside Ourselves: Rhetoric and Representation in Postcolonial Feminist Writing,” in *Crossing Borderlands: Composition and Postcolonial Studies*, eds. Lunsford and Ouzgane (Pittsburgh, U of Pittsburgh Press, 2004); Kay Schaffer and Sidonie


16 Ammon China and Steven Robins, “‘We can all sing, but we can’t all talk’: literacy brokers and *tsotsi* gangsters in a Cape Town shantytown,” in *The Social Uses of Literacy*, ed. Mastin Prinsloo and Mignon Breier (Cape Town: Sached Books, 1996), 162.


19 South African Government Estimate for 2008 (http://www.gov.za/), World Bank estimate taken 2010. As far as I could surmise, neither estimate specified whether this means home users/personal computer owners, but this is my assumption based on observation. Nor
does either estimate how many users are based in urban areas versus rural areas of the country. Internet cafés were prevalent in Durban but nonexistent in the rural areas I conducted research in. I could not find any estimates of Internet café usage nor could I tell if any data is being tracked in this area to get a sense of how many discrete users these cafés might possess.


22 Ibid., 125.

23 Ibid., 133.


25 Ibid., 140.

26 The loveLife Corporate website (in distinction to the campaign website) highlights that “major funding is provided by the South African Government and the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation,” http://www.lovelife.org.za/corporate/about-lovelife/partners-and-funders. According to their “About Us” page, the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation is a US based foundation “focusing on the major health care issues facing the U.S., as well as the U.S. role in global health policy,” http://www.kff.org/about/index2.cfm.

27 Royster, 159.


32 For an critical challenge to F.W. de Klerk’s public persona of reconciliation, see Anthony Sampson’s Mandela: The Authorized Biography (New York: Vintage, 2000). In it he argues that de Klerk worked behind the scenes to support inter-ethnic conflict between the ANC and the Inkatha Freedom Party as well as to support Calvinist Afrikaners separatist elements secretly at the same time he allowed National Party ministers beneath him to create “criminal empires” that defrauded and drained governmental resources directly prior to transitioning the government to the African National Congress. See pages 439-40 and 442-4 in particular.

33 de Klerk, 31.

34 Ibid., 30.

36 Ibid.


39 Klein, 194.

40 Zackie Achmat, “No reconciliation without social justice,” in In the Balance: South Africans debate reconciliation, edited by Fanie du Toit and Erik Doxtader (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2010), 110-117.

41 Ibid., 116.

42 Ibid., 111. Naomi Klein’s chapter in The Shock Doctrine, amongst others, echoes this fundamental belief that the rush to reconcile and establish a TRC left important discussions about economic restructuring behind in order to focus on a global perception of a peaceful democratic transition.

43 Ibid., 112.

44 Ibid., 114.


46 Ibid., 116-117.

Fiona Ross, “Truth and Reconciliation,” in *New South African Keywords*, ed. Nichk Shepherd and Steven Robins (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2008), 244.


Create Africa South, “About.”

*Amazwi Abesifazane* Voices of Women Museum, “About Us.” The establishment of this museum is an activity that I have been recognized for on this very web page, but one that has caused the most conflict with myself and CAS. This is an important subject that my future research must address. Our contestations over questions of digital and physical access and presentation remain the strongest areas of critical division between myself and CAS founder Andries Botha and Executive Director Janine Zagel.

I use “other project” literally – this is the tab that Botha lists the *Amazwi* project under on his professional website, http://andriesbotha.net.


Morongoe Tsoaeli, email to Martha Webber, April 3, 2010. Tsoaeli shared this information with me about pay comparison after taking a position with another Durban-based nonprofit organization.

This is where the majority of cloths that form the *Amazwi* archive have been composed.

As Interchapter C also intimates, this was a point of frustration for us with our host families that was never addressed directly, rather Morongoe and I would discuss this on our own to strategize how to make our food last for the week plus we were in Mahushu. Unhesitatingly I
intervened and paid for much of the food that went over budget myself – I believed this to be a part of the reciprocity that my methodology is based on, but it was also motivated by hunger that still occurred during some portions of the trip based on the distance between the house in Mahushu and the markets in Hazyview and our inability to carry as much food as we needed in the minibus taxis we took into town a handful of times over the week to obtain food for the workshop and for ourselves. Although I have not successfully located research on cultural differences in linguistic exchange in South Africa and the United States so I would not dare generalize, I would say anecdotally (and perhaps connected to my personality type) that I would often use far more direct language with CAS and PMP staff and my host family and perceived that avoiding direct discussion of issues, in particular of money, had become part of the culture of their relationship.

58 Tsoaeli email, April 3, 2010.

59 Interestingly in February 2009 when the PMP sent translations of cloths from the Mpumalanga province workshop (where I was present) and the Limpopo province workshop (this occurred in May 2008 after my first departure), they sent two narratives from the latter workshop that were only written in English. When we contacted PMP staff member Ilane van Louw she insisted these women wrote their narratives in English. Morongoe Tsoaeli believed this to be untrue based on her participation in the Limpopo workshop and said that there was no woman participating who chose to compose her narrative solely in English.

60 I make distinctions between ethnic groups here, although I want to be clear that any non-white person is considered black under the current democratic South African government – if apartheid played on emphasizing differences between ethnic identities, then moving toward a broader conception of blackness works to confront that emphasis on difference. At the same
time, in most everyday conversations with CAS staff (and even on many South African Broadcasting station channels and programming) these distinctions were used or were immediately known based on where one lived and what language one spoke.

61 This was based on observations as Mrs. Gambushe and I sat together to distribute the thread and “check” memory cloths that women brought up to us. Over both workshops a handful of women asked Mrs. Gambushe if she would be willing to travel to their area or host them at her community center in order to learn how she was able to establish and maintain the center.

62 Interestingly the Amazwi project spawned cloths for sale for a time being, which were not part of the archive, but possessed the cloth, and paragraph in original language and English translation available for sale. The project has also spawned American artist and academic Leslee Nelson to create “Voices of Women” cloths informally but inspired by the project. They recently collaborated in June 2012 where Nelson traveled to Durban to visit the archive and give a talk at the Phansi Museum of Durban about the importance of recording women’s history.


64 Zinko, “AIDS Quilt Gets Teary Welcome Home in Castro.”

65 Janine Zagel, interview by Martha Webber, tape recording, February 23, 2008.

66 Security in 2008 was maintained by a man named Joshua who was compensated with free rent on the floor above CAS offices for himself, his partner, and their young child.

67 See footnotes 48 and 49 above. Both iterations are online simultaneously, this one ostensibly for Create Africa South as a broader organization and the next launching in April 2012 as the African Women’s Museum website.
Over the course of February through April 2009 I debated this question with Botha and other project planners both conceptually, but also through the very choice of a name for the database and museum space they wanted to create. This section is based on observations at a series of meetings as I worked with the organization to shape the project.


Create Africa South.


See Carol Becker and Cheryl McEwan’s articles that I cite above – there are only a handful of articles about the project currently.

Andries Botha, interviewed by Martha Webber, tape recording, April 8, 2008.

Ibid. The missionary account I showed Botha was Moffatt’s *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa*.


Ibid. 578.

Becker, 119.
Interchapter C: Mahushu Township

This interchapter describes the township of Mahushu, the site of a March 2008 Create Africa South (CAS) “A Day I Will Never Forget” memory cloth workshop. Sixty-two women participated in a workshop that CAS facilitators Eunice Gambushe, Morongoe Tsoaeli, and I coordinated the week following the Parliamentary Millennium Programme workshop in Hazyview. This interchapter documents the challenges of accessing basic services like potable water and affordable food in rural townships where transportation is costly. The challenges became considerable for a nonprofit organization operating on a shoestring budget where providing lunch and hosting a final ceremony meal for participants and community members raised logistical issues. Finally, I reflect on the affordances of “low” technologies like sewing and the CAS workshop model’s embrace of these technologies.

Like the two interchapters that precede it, this essay narrates my point of view about the relationship between individuals and the organizations and larger infrastructures that contain and create opportunities for them. However, where the first two interchapters focused on profiles of two individuals (myself and Mrs. Gambushe), the next two interchapters focus more closely on the passage of time through journal entry based narratives. In this particular interchapter, the short passage of time (two to four days elapse between each entry) reinforces the focus on the challenges of rural South African life, especially at a moment where an event like the cloth workshop for sixty-two women and the introduction of three houseguests into a household of six taxes the available resources and capacities of those involved.

Thursday March 20, 2008

The township of Mahushu sits in a valley next to other townships encircled by game reserves and the tourist town of Hazyview where the main food markets, banks, and stores in the
area are located. Mahushu stretches along the R538 highway 10 kilometers south of Hazyview for about 4 kilometers, molding itself to the road and broadening to 1 kilometer inward at points. Access to the road, rather than public gathering spaces, frequently defines daily life in the community in addition to giving Mahushu its characteristic strip shape that hugs the road. Easter weekend would prove to be an exception, at least for the family we stayed with, where events focused around the family home and the township’s graveyard. Taxis (group minivans) run between the townships along the R538 to Hazyview, as well as the game reserves and upscale lodges, who employ township residents (largely Swati speakers) for labor seen and unseen in the international tourism the area receives. Hazyview is five hours by car from Johannesburg and one hour from the Nelspruit airport making it a popular long weekend retreat from the city for South Africa’s financial and mining elite.

With the final day of the Parliament-sponsored workshop coming to a close on the twentieth of March in Hazyview, Gogo, Morongoe, and I faced the prospect of spending Easter weekend and the next week in the township of Mahushu to conduct the first Create Africa South memory cloth workshop with women from the Mpumalanga Province. On the Easter weekend most runs into Hazyview for the shop’s limited hours would be final items to prepare for family to come together over food.

Morongoe selected this township for its proximity to Hazyview where the Parliament workshop would be held, but also because a councillor she contacted had the courtesy to respond back to her when we did not hear back from the provincial government. Meeting an organizational goal the CAS memory cloth archive would feature stories and experiences from rural Swati women for the first time after our weeks in Hazyview and Mahushu. The stories would share experiences that speak of the experience of rural women who face challenges of
finding work and access to basic services because of relative geographic isolation. If I encountered stories like these through Amazwi cloths and through discussion with women at the PMP workshop the previous week, the workshop in Mahushu would demonstrate to me directly how challenging rural township life and the daily labor demands feels.

The councillor, Lizzy, picked us up at the lodge in Hazyview after the Parliament workshop concluded. Our host Doris drove us in her pickup truck that carried bags of food we purchased at a supermarket in Hazyview before we drove south. When we slowed down to turn off the highway, I saw the large spread of houses and shacks that stretched along the main highway and spread inward in a labyrinth of unpaved and uneven roads. We encountered several large craters in the dirt roads that Doris handled deftly with her truck – driving slow enough that my presence began to draw the attention of pedestrians. Eleven days later, the last morning in Mahushu, I wrote the following in my fieldnotes: “I don’t know if I put on paper exactly one of the biggest difficulties of staying in a township. From the moment Doris drove us into it to the moment we’ll leave - I get stared at, more often glared at.” If I struggled with acceptance for being the only white woman participating in the Hazyview workshop the previous week, my naiveté at the impact of entering a township felt embarrassingly deep. By the next day I will reduce a toddler to tears at a Good Friday family gathering for reaching in to tickle his side – my observational skills failing to understand he wanted to keep his fascination with me at a distance.

Doris Mokoena gives us her section of the house, the master bedroom and a side bedroom, to stay in during the time we are there. That night after dinner Morongoe and Gogo introduce the Amazwi project to Lizzy and Doris in detail, even speaking of the issues facing the workshop during the previous week and the collaboration with Parliament. Morongoe explains the outcomes to Lizzy and asks for her help in opening and closing the workshop, mentioning the
braai and local speeches we hope to host on the last day. Lizzy describes some parts of Mahushu as “the poorest of the poor” and asks me if I know of women’s groups in the US since the markets (for handcrafted items) were surprisingly lacking in the area despite the tourism. Informal commercial space in tents at shopping center lots is scarce for local vendors and my own walk through the Kruger National Park gift shop that Easter Sunday will reveal a tremendous number of manufactured items from China and a handful of NGO or business-sponsored art enterprises like Monkeybiz (beaded dolls), Kaross (embroidery), and Ardmore (ceramics) from other areas in South Africa rather than local enterprises. I mention the research I am working on for Mrs. Gambushe to Doris – at establishing connections to fair trade organizations like 10,000 Villages – but if I had concerns about my ability to reach Ma Gambushe in Umlazi township in metropolitan Durban, I was skeptical I would be able to reach the Mahushu area easily by phone considering my limited language ability, the cost of transportation, and the paucity of Internet access for local residents (despite the 3G wireless available in the area).

Our first morning is Good Friday and Doris and her family wake up early to go to the cemetery to tend to their relatives’ graves. A low kuk of a bird wakes me after sunrise. When Morongoe and I rise we start sorting our laundry early since I will be leaving that afternoon for several days of sightseeing based out of a hostel in Hazyview. Doris will drop me off later that day at a meeting point where I will catch a ride to the hostel with one of its caretakers. We also start our laundry early because it promises to be hot. The sun is already out prominently with just a handful of white clouds, like dollops of fluffy maize pap. Both clouds and pap are puffed with water, but one kind hangs in the sky and the other kind sits on your plate next to your stew (one that would mostly be vegetables and broth later that week, as Morongoe and I worked to stretch
the chicken we purchased to feed nine people a night instead of the three we assumed. My clothing dries quickly, some lightly crisp with soapy residue from the tub of rinse water, and sometime after noon I begin fanning up and down the clothesline. A steam of Sunshine laundry soap perfumes the air as I pluck dry items and reposition damp items for more time on the line. Family members and friends of the Mokoenas begin to gather for food and time together after the morning trip to the graveyard.

Monday March 24, 2008

When I return to the township after my weekend at Gecko Backpackers, the air is still and the sun low in the sky. The Mokoena house is quiet after Friday’s family party and I find Ma Gambushe sitting on a woven straw mat next to an elderly woman: Doris’ mother, whom I call Gogo out of respect when I greet her. I sit down on the mat and listen to the two exchange Zulu for Swati, the languages close enough they can make conversation. Doris’ mother is very thin, her high cheekbones stretching her skin taut and her clothing comfortably hanging on her body - head scarf, loose top, and long skirt in coordinating dark colors. She says to Ma, who translates for me, that she never imagined in her lifetime that she would be sitting next to a white woman without barrier, at the same level. I whisper “Ngiyabona” and ask Gogo to say I am grateful for her words. Really, I am not sure what to say, to ask Gogo to translate that the divisions I have encountered in the last month defied any textual understanding I had gained about apartheid before traveling here? That the night before, an Afrikaans motorcyclist sputtered that “it was dangerous” for me to go into a township? That although he would not articulate any specific reason why, I felt a stare of incredulity bordering on anger coming from his direction the rest of the night that I stayed in the common area of the hostel? I listen to the sounds of their conversation instead as I watch light fade and sky darken.
Entering the house, I see Morongoe, who confides in me quietly we are nearly out of the food we bought and we have another week to stay in Mahushu.

“Sho, they are eating all of our food!” she hisses.

Wednesday March 26, 2008

The large window next to Doris’ bed is draped with ceiling-to-floor satiny curtains but they do little to drown out the loud, low “kuk-uk-uk-uk-uk” of the green wood hoopoes nesting in the eaves outside. Their singing increases in volume with the light and I am irritated at the cheerful interruption of my sleep. In a few hours the second morning of the workshop we are holding in Mahushu township will commence but this is the seventh day we have been staying with the Mokoenas. My eyes focus on the fabric mountain to my left – a pile of five or six, decorative pink-tan polyester pillows on the floor that I will stack on the bed before we leave at ten to nine. I get out of bed and slip on a pair of khaki shorts.

“What time is it?” Morongoe asks from the bed.

“I’m not sure. Uhhh…” I move across the room, toward my mobile phone.

“Six-ten.” I finally say.

“It’s too early.”

“I know – I’ll take my bath first and make Gogo’s water and breakfast. I’ll get you up.”

Doris put Morongoe and me in her bedroom with Ma in a small bedroom off to the side of us. These bedrooms were close to the garage, separated from the rest of the house where the family was staying – Doris, her two sons, her niece, her daughter-in-law, and her grandson. After I drag a comb through my hair, I pull it into a ponytail at the back of my head.

I grab the plastic bucket in the small waiting room outside of our bedrooms and walk through the garage and the kitchen to a hallway that leads to the bathroom and the family’s
bedrooms. The house is still. I empty the plastic bucket into the toilet, flush the toilet, and clean the bucket in the nearby tub. When I return to the kitchen, I set the bucket down on the floor and fill the electric kettle with “brown water” from the tap. The first day we arrived I made the mistake of drinking water that came from this tap before Doris’ niece told me the water in the plumbing is brown water – piped into the house from a massive plastic barrel out back. The house has autonomous plumbing, even a septic tank, but it can’t connect to a larger water system that doesn’t exist. By one of the last days we are there – late on the night of the 29th – the plastic barrel runs low to empty on brown water and we can’t flush the toilet any longer.

The potable water holds out longer, kept in large plastic containers on the floor of the garage for drinking and cooking. That morning I pour some from a container into a large drinking pitcher and waddle back to the kitchen with it. I’ll use that water to make the Rooibos tea and hot porridge we eat for breakfast, “Jungle Oats.” But before I do, it’s time for my morning bath – I bring a large bucket of boiling “brown water” filled with two electric kettles worth of water. I set this bucket in the tub and turn the cold “brown” water tap to fill a few inches of water into the tub, then tip about half of the bucket into the tub to warm up the water. I use a washcloth and bar of soap to clean myself in the tub filled with two or three inches of water. Filling the rest of the bucket with cold water, I rinse the soap from my body with the tepid water carefully, sparingly.

I duck back to the bedroom and dress quietly since I want to prepare two or three kettles worth of water before I wake Morongoe to take her bath. When the water is ready, she will undergo the same routine, as will Gogo before we have breakfast and walk over to the brick building for the second day of our workshop. By 9am, a little over half of the women (27 out of 54) who composed stories and sketches the day before arrive and begin choosing cloth rectangles
to embroider visual representations of their narratives. Within 15 minutes we will have a rush of women we need to get thread and needles out to as well as several new women who want to participate in the project. At the end of the hour Morongoe realizes we have 62 participants and speculates using her own money to pay them the stipend at the end of the week rather than admitting to Janine that we simply overenrolled the workshop by 2 participants.

Compared to the PMP workshop where we simply managed the cloth production and collection while we stayed in a catered lodge, in Mahushu we have to care for ourselves and learn on the first day participants will not stay to sew if we do not provide lunch for them. They leave at the noon hour on the first day since their stories and sketches did not take the entire day to complete, but we have to promise to serve lunch the rest of the week in order to ask the women to stay until four each afternoon. Like the water preparation in the morning, the extended process of fetching lunch materials will also prove to be a challenge in the rural township.

Morongoe, workshop participant Mickey, and I depart a little after 10am to take a taxi to the Hazyview marketplace. We won’t return with lunch (bread, margarine spread, polony, cheese, and concentrated sugar punch juice) until after 1pm when I begin grating the polony roll (a meat substance not unlike bologna) and cheese to stretch it across the 20 loaves of bread we purchase. Our budget has left little protein for each sandwich. We can only afford one paper plate for every two women and Morongoe embarrassingly but sternly announces we will need to reuse them over the rest of the week when we finally serve lunch. We will need more bread tomorrow. The three-hour trek will probably have to happen again each day since we can only carry so much with us each time we take the taxis into town. Shortly after lunch I write in my notebook, “the rash on my neck stings and has gotten bigger. Both Gogo and Morongoe have noted that something is different about me today. I have been extremely quiet and direct rather than joking
around.”

We are all stretched to our limits – Morongoe and I have been quarreling, not listening to each other, and Gogo was frustrated at managing sixty-two women for three hours with little refreshment while Morongoe and I were away fetching lunch materials. There is no running water, brown or otherwise, at the school and only a drop toilet in front of the school that Morongoe and Gogo will tease me for taking pictures of that night. When we finally get back to the Mokoena house I note “the mood seemed to lighten… even though Morongoe didn’t have any dinner and I just made Gogo and myself peanut butter and jam sandwiches with rooibos tea.”

Saturday March 29, 2008

It’s a little after 7am on the last day of our workshop – the memory cloths completed yesterday and this morning Morongoe and I rise even earlier than usual to let women into the creche to start the fire for the braai. Morongoe and I prepared the meat we paid a woman to purchase for the occasion – sectioning off long twisted segments of boerewors (literally translated as “farmer’s sausage” from Afrikaans) into small pieces to stretch the meat. My drawn out water ablutions have become easier for me by the end of the week, but I have not yet gotten accustomed to the low grade hunger and the persistent drive to stretch whatever meat we have as far as is possible. Earlier in the week I scrape a slight edge of knuckle surface and blood when I am grating polony and I feel sick about having to throw out the mound of shredded meat. I eat the polony myself, stuff it into my mouth and chew quick handfuls quietly, hoping no one will notice. The day after this final braai with the workshop participants, Morongoe, Ma Gambushe and I take the taxi into Hazyview. I insist on treating the both of them to what I describe in my field notes later as “a feast at KFC” reflecting that “I probably overdid it.”

By 9:15am all the sausage has cooked and it’s a painfully small amount. The women
tending the grill and the three-legged stove request R400 for more meat but Morongoe and I can only come up with R100 on the spot. The new meat arrives at 10:05 and we eat first before the speeches start at 11:00am. The water and the food and the time that it takes to make so little strains me. But the coolness of the mid-morning air and the smell of the smoke rising from the burning logs still me.

I eat with one of the upcoming speakers, Nora Fakude-Nkune, and discuss her background in the area as an apartheid activist and local entrepreneur. She says Mahushu’s distance from the urban areas meant “they were not always recognized as the big men in the movement were.” She recounts the time (in the post-1976 activism era) when she and other activists closed the Numbi gate into Kruger by stoning cars to create a protest visible to international tourists attempting to enter. If resources like clean water are hard to come by in Mahushu, stones abound. A simple but potent technology of protest. Nora’s words testify to the beauty of “low” technologies.

Much of the work CAS performs – imparting basic sewing and economic skills and collecting embroidered cloths – bases itself on access to forms of “low” technology alone. In our workshop we worked during the day in a building that lacked electricity. Besides our digital camera to photograph the women for the archive, the rest of our materials consisted of pads of paper, regular and colored pencils with sharpeners, cloth, cotton embroidery thread, sewing needles, scissors, and a few sewn samplers to demonstrate stitches. At times, it feels that much can come from little. But as the previous chapter demonstrated, “much” happens in terms of framing the CAS workshop narratives long after they have concluded but prior to international circulation. The “low” technologies of the archive’s basic unit of paper and cloth meet word processing, printing, and framing as CAS employees juxtapose the cloth with an image of the author, the typed narrative and its translation, all underneath the cloth.
Chapter 3: Literacy Intermediaries and the Parliamentary Millennium Programme

Early in 2007 the South African Parliamentary Millennium Programme (PMP) published an announcement for the “Voices of Women” national quilt project on their website homepage.\(^1\) The PMP justifies the project, in which 270 women from all 9 South African provinces would create narrative cloths “documenting the[ir] ordinary perspectives …. on what democracy means to them,” by arguing that because of the “high level of adult illiteracy…. media other than the written word therefore need[s] to be explored to illustrate a wide range of perspectives” as well as to “facilitate optimal participation in the projects of the PMP.”\(^2\) The initiative proposes that a craft-based composition project will open up fuller democratic participation, “especially” for rural women who have been prevented from “active participation in the Parliamentary processes that affect their daily lives.”\(^3\) In a little over one hundred words, the online announcement offers a short, but ideologically dangerous argument: alphabetic literacy increases the quality and level of individual civic participation; without literacy the state must create programming and services to accommodate civic participation. In this case, the PMP suggests that embroidering thread on cloth is the appropriate “other media” to gauge and display the “perspectives” of rural South African women.

A variation of the “literacy as empowerment” myth that Harvey Graff and other literacy scholars have analyzed for decades, the connection between literacy acquisition and an increase in formal political or social participation has been challenged by several qualitative and a handful of quantitative studies over the years. While these studies showed slight but meaningful increases in participatory “tendencies” of women living in postcolonial sites like India and Bolivia, transnational feminist critiques of development more broadly argue ideologically freighted
literacy initiatives may challenge women’s indigenous knowledge systems and social structures.\textsuperscript{4}

However, the misdirection in the PMP’s argument is not entirely attributable to the tenuous link they suggest between alphabetic literacy and increased social participation: it is what they mean by illiteracy. The “high level of illiteracy” the PMP establishes as the basis for an alternative media project does not accurately reflect the literate abilities of the women who ultimately participated in the national “Voices of Women” quilt workshops. Nor does it reflect statistical estimates of literacy from organizations like the United Nations, which estimate overall adult women literacy rates in South Africa around 86\%.\textsuperscript{5} The implicit argument the PMP offers – despite South Africa’s official recognition of 11 languages – is that English illiteracy prevents rural South African women from democratic participation in the projects of the PMP and, by extension, the “new” South Africa. Although cloths the women produced in the workshop would overwhelmingly counter this myth with examples of community participation and insightful government critique, the website surrounding the announcement seems only to emphasize it: each feature and downloadable resource about PMP and its projects are composed almost exclusively in English with occasional titles and taglines in Zulu or other official languages.

Instead of tracing the circulation of literacy myths connected to civic engagement and English acquisition in South Africa, this chapter focuses on the powerful actors who circulate these myths as they enact processes leveraging their position as organizations serving “local” populations through a transnational literacy advocacy network. Building from the groundwork I established in the first chapter defining cultural intermediaries and the second chapter where I identified CAS as a significant cultural intermediary engaged in public memory making processes, I shift to consider how the PMP functions specifically as a literacy intermediary. This
chapter analyzes PMP media and several events from a 2008 “Voices of Women” national quilt workshop to offer a theory of literacy intermediaries. A pervasive sponsor of literacy in postcolonial, multilingual, or multicultural locations, literacy intermediaries are typically organizations or collectives who mediate, compose, and disseminate strategic representations of participants involved in literate practices. Like other sponsors of literacy, they create, foreclose, and direct opportunities for literate development and expression. But as literacy intermediaries, they also actively mediate between multiple audiences and genres, forging relationships with audiences as the central hub in literacy initiatives that connect disparate sites of transnational literacy practices and policy together as they centralize material, frame meaning, and craft forms of South African citizenship. These relationships are typically hierarchical, a quality I explore later in the chapter, when I describe the resources PMP employed to reframe the meaning and history of the “Voices of Women” project, as they continue to wrest project ownership away from CAS and have worked to do so since the beginning of their collaboration in 2007.

In the “Limits of the Local: Expanding Perspectives on Literacy as a Social Practice,” Deborah Brandt and Katie Clinton write, “local events can have globalizing tendencies and globalizing effects, accomplished often through the mediation of globalizing technologies.” The PMP website announcement of the “Voices of Women” National Quilt Project I introduced at the beginning of this chapter signals one moment of mediation where the PMP uses web technologies and global English to represent itself as a transnational literacy sponsor for rural South African women. But how does the PMP engage intermediating processes as a transnational literacy sponsor differently than CAS? What are the “globalizing tendencies” significant to representations moved from an art exhibition space into governmental and online representative spaces? And what is the significance of the “authentically national” status now
accorded to the project with parliament sponsorship and the PMP’s shift in composition theme from “A Day I Will Never Forget” to “What Does Democracy Mean to Me?”

In the second chapter I analyzed CAS and how they functioned as intermediaries to incorporate cultural values of reconciliation and public memory into the *Amazwi Abesifazane* project and how they framed these values for specific transnational audiences. Examining the multimedia narrative handicraft unit (narrative and cloth) and its archival and exhibition practices, I identified three processes CAS shares with other craft rhetoric project intermediaries: how they worked to centralize material, frame meaning, and craft citizens through the multimedia forms of the project.

In this chapter, I turn to PMP’s intervention as literacy intermediary and how these three processes shifted for the same craft rhetoric project under governmental intermediation. Looking at the impact of what they call “globalizing connects,” Brandt and Clinton argue “policies of centralized governments… can introduce new communication networks that affect locales, redefining or even destabilizing traditional methods of communication.” As an organization of South Africa’s centralized government, the PMP has introduced the “Voices of Women” National Quilt project as a new communication network for women. From a pilot project that nearly stalled to incompletion before reaching all nine provinces, the PMP continues to invest in producing post-workshop materials and representations in print and online for professional and public audiences. Focusing on the PMP’s organizational activities – the meaning making processes that surround the quilt project with governmental intervention– produces insight into the ideologies behind the project as the intervention marks a significant shift from identifying South African citizenship with acts of public memorialization to acts of neo-liberal democratic representation.
Without an observation-based account – one produced outside of the cameras and digital applications the PMP set up to record strategic moments of the workshop – PMP’s representation of the participating women’s literate abilities would remain the only narrative available to global audiences (and the only one officially disseminated in South Africa). This chapter exposes literacy intermediating processes in the national quilt project by countering the PMP’s limiting narrative with rhetorical-ethnographic research methods that strive to provide a thick description of the “Voices of Women” South African quilt project. What my particular thick description reveals raises larger implications about digital representations of literacy and related empowerment programs in the global South administered by governmental and nongovernmental organizations.10

Theory: Literacy Intermediaries and Transnational Literacy Sponsors

After establishing the concepts of literacy sponsor and mediator within writing studies scholarship in this section, I outline how the PMP centralizes power, frames literacy, and identifies citizens as a literacy intermediary for the national quilt project before presenting a case study of these processes in the final section.

Several years prior to “Limits of the Local,” Brandt offers the concept of the “literacy sponsor” in her 1998 landmark essay to address the “analytical failure” of scholars to discuss individual literacy development without recognizing its systemic connection to larger “economic forces.”11 The field’s intense focus on the individual, Brandt argues, had reduced the “structural conditions in literacy’s bigger picture” to mere context for accounts of literacy that “sometimes even managed to enhance the literate potentials of ordinary citizens.”12 Although she doesn’t cite Janet Emig’s The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders in the essay, Brandt’s conceptualization of the literacy sponsor may be reacting to the increase in research of self-
sponsored writing after Emig made the distinction between “school-sponsored” and “self-sponsored” writing in 1971. Too focused attention to the local literacy practices of a group or individuals, Brandt suggests, risks amplifying the significance of these literacies without recognizing forms of powerful sponsorship that can undermine localized forms of literacy. Additionally, an over-emphasis on the individual’s agency during the composition process often occludes the economic and structural forces that shape the conditions, materials, and dissemination of the composition.

Examining the sponsors of literacy illuminates the forces that shape opportunities and ideologies surrounding literacy that individuals navigate on a daily basis. Evoking corporate sponsorship activities ushered in by radio and television, Brandt defines literacy sponsors broadly: “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy – and gain advantage by it in some way.” Almost any entity with influence could serve as a literacy sponsor for an individual’s literacy development – from a grandmother to a labor union training program.

Researchers lose the critical economic implications Brandt envisions for literacy sponsors when research on self-sponsored literacy practices fails to examine the larger structural forces that constrain literacy, even in unstructured or seemingly “self-sponsored” literate practice. In a recent article reviewing the findings on self-sponsored literacy research, Youngjoo Yi and Alan Hirvela celebrate the genres (such as ‘zines) and technological tools (referencing computers and social media applications) that “allowed [students] to explore writing on their own terms instead of those operating in school.” Invoking identical language years earlier, Brandt insisted that few sponsors, even and especially composition instructors, possess the affluence or power to sponsor literacy on their “own terms.” In a mirroring of language years prior, I see a challenge
to Yi and Hirvela’s assumption that the absence of an institutional context or composition assignment signifies an ability to define literacy independent of other limits, or “terms” that structure the literate experience.\textsuperscript{17} This understanding of self-sponsored literacies ignores subtle, structural forms of sponsorship that even the most seemingly solitary composer may navigate during literate activities (through the use of a word processing program, for example, that sponsors certain forms of literacy and structure what is possible for literate expression).

Avoiding the tendency in the field to “enhance the literate potentials of ordinary citizens,” Brandt focused her research on identifying the influence of the “more powerful sponsors” of individual literacy development, concluding over a decade later in \textit{Literacy and Learning} that industry and the market have eclipsed church and state in the United States as dominant sponsors of literacy.\textsuperscript{18} Brandt describes the broad influence and processes of these sponsors in her original essay:

\begin{quote}
Literacy as a resource becomes available to ordinary people largely through the mediations of more powerful sponsors. These sponsors are engaged in ceaseless processes of positioning and repositioning, seizing and relinquishing control over meanings and materials of literacy as part of their participation in economic and political competition. In the give and take of these struggles, forms of literacy and literacy learning take shape.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

In her definition, Brandt highlights the function of a sponsor powerful enough to \textit{mediate} flows of information about and resources for literacy. I want to focus on and develop these aspects of literacy sponsorship – the processes and materiality of literacy mediations – through the concept of the literacy intermediary. Not to be conflated with literacy mediators, a figure that New Literacy Studies scholars worked through in the 1980s and 90s, the intermediary differs from those individuals who possessed closer, frequently familial relationships with the communities they represent.

Although it has fallen out of use, the idea of literacy mediators afforded New Literacy
Studies scholars like Arlene Fingeret, Liezl Malan, and others the ability to identify literate engagement by actors who mediate between distinct cultural-linguistic spaces, frequently on behalf of those who do not possess the skills to “mode shift” and “codeswitch” across linguistic groups. Fingeret’s early use of the term positions an illiterate woman’s husband as her mediator to a “larger society” that ultimately isolates the woman and “creates asymmetrical inner network relationships.” Through processes of literacy mediation, the woman’s marriage becomes a relationship she believes she can never fully reciprocate; despite the amount of housework she pushes herself to accomplish each day. While literacy mediators and literacy intermediaries may both forge asymmetrical power relationships, from its inception, the literacy mediator has almost always figured as a member of an inner network charged with mediating responsibilities for fellow members where the literacy intermediary is a more powerful literacy sponsor, governmental and nongovernmental organizations that facilitate literacy programming and public perceptions of literacy.

Unlike literacy mediators who are recognized for their ability to establish a bi-directional relationship between members in their family or community and the dominant culture, literacy intermediaries are not typically close members of any community. Yet they identify with multiple communities, as they establish intersecting relationships in which they become the central hub intermediating action as they centralize communication and representational power between groups (as I have graphically represented in the figure at the conclusion of the chapter). They are also frequently larger than any one mediator, as literacy mediation research has frequently focused upon the individual. In order to engage literacy sponsorship practices that can influence literacy development as powerfully as Deborah Brandt describes above, literacy intermediaries must possess considerable representational influence across several communities.
of meaning.

In the previous chapter, I extended Bourdieu’s initial conception of cultural intermediaries to account for CAS and the *Amazwi* workshop model – how formal elements of the project evoked ideological structures as they created and constrained definitions of reconciliation and public memorialization. Nonprofit and governmental organizations, to a greater degree than artistic cultural intermediaries, as Bourdieu initially conceived, become adept at mixing “high and popular cultural forms” to frame their observations of populations with the research literature they marshal to justify their intervention into individuals’ lives.23 Deborah Mindry demonstrates how a popular construction of the category of “rural women” in South Africa developed in the 1990s as a subject position ripe for intervention and how organizations who claimed the most access to “grassroots” women stood the best chance to receive international development funding.24 When the PMP invoked a claim of access to rural South African women’s literacy in their announcement of the “Voices of Women” National Quilt Project I described at the beginning of the chapter, they positioned themselves as a literacy intermediary in terms of the relationship they navigated with CAS, their subsequent project publications, and the forms of citizenship they crafted.

**Literacy Intermediary Practices in South Africa and the “Voices of Women” National Quilt Project**

In this section I briefly explore the context of South African national literacy initiatives and provide an organizational history of the PMP before identifying critical moments where the organization centralizes material, frames meaning, and crafts limited forms of South African citizenship for rural women. Participant-observation and interviews conducted over 2008 and 2009 in Durban, Hazyview, Mahushu, and Cape Town form much of the evidence for this
section, but I also incorporate archival evidence, including organizational publications (such as the PMP website) that manifest these intermediating practices. As I discuss in the introduction chapter, combining ethnographic, archival, and rhetorical methods for this organizational analysis creates a thick understanding of the PMP as a significant intermediary for South African literacies and citizenship in the 21st century.

Unlike the United States that Brandt describes in *Literacy and Learning*, South Africa experienced a rise in state-sponsored literacies from the 1990s forward. With the end of apartheid in a newly democratic country led by the African National Congress (ANC), the South African government invested more meaningfully in popular literacy education as it finally recognized nine indigenous languages from the Niger-Congo language family as official languages joining English and Afrikaans. During the democratic transition, John Atchison describes the “decimation of the NGO sector” for 1990s South African adult education programs and John Trimbur’s article “Popular Literacy and the Resources of Print” explains key reasons why literacy NGOs and other “education, labor, and community organizations that vitalized civil society” disappeared. Before the end of apartheid, local, national, and even international groups may not have been unified in practice but apartheid resistance unified them in purpose. After its end many individual activists working with these groups left for a place in the democratic government. Denise Walsh describes how the “dynamism” of the Rural Women’s Movement faded after 1994 when “its most talented leaders moved into parliament.”

Unfortunately this “systematic demobilization of popular energies” occurred at the same time the South African government shifted from the rights-based, populist principles of its Reconstruction and Development Programme to neo-liberal economic practice with its Growth, Employment, and Redistribution strategy in 1996. Its impact on literacy education was
significant as “the terms shifted from the consciousness-raising of alternative education in the 1980s to capacity-building.” At the same time, funders (who previously supported community organizations like the ones Trimbur describes above) “prioritized support to the new government’s programmes, ostensibly with a share earmarked for channeling to local NGOs. While there were diverse programmes and donors, in general the conditions placed on funding increased.” In other words, the confluence of an emerging democratic government and late 20th century neoliberal economies forged new relationships between citizens, local NGOs, the state, and international development networks in South African civil society. And out of these new relationships, the South African state, and the Parliamentary Millennium Programme by extension, emerged as a powerful intermediary – creating conditional opportunities for nonprofits to work toward literacy development that conciliates international funding sources.

The relationship forged between the PMP and CAS with the alternative literacy “Voices of Women” quilt project provides a compelling example of the shifts described above as it illuminates literacy intermediary practices that resonate across transnational literacy initiatives in postcolonial sites. As I outline the history of the Parliamentary Millennium Programme (PMP), I discuss how their collaboration arose out of an intersection at an American university hosting a UNESCO-sponsored event – in other words, I begin to sketch the transnational relationships PMP engages as a literacy intermediary.

A joint project of the Speaker of the National Assembly and the Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces, the PMP defined its mission in the early 2000s “to be Parliament’s primary tool for nation building” by fulfilling three constitutional mandates: “providing a national forum for the public consideration of issues; fostering unity in diversity; and improving the quality of life of all South Africans.” Past projects include artistic and
educational exhibitions as well as creative projects that target participation from South African youth almost exclusively. The “Perspectives On and Of Africa” marked their inaugural educational project, producing an exhibition and educational materials on international and historical representations of Africa through mapping. They have since expanded to host outdoor art exhibitions, literature readings, and a national film festival from 2002 to the present.

The PMP projects that preceded the “Voices of Women” quilt project primarily created opportunities for the governmental organization to produce media for an urban South African public rather than with any specific South African communities. Their 2004 collaboration with the Frank Joubert Art Centre in Cape Town stands as an early exception. The collaboration asked the young student artists at the Centre to submit visual compositions of their “perspective of Africa” to coincide with the culmination of the “Perspectives” mapping project. Four years later, the “Voices of Women” national quilt project marked the PMP’s first initiative that incorporated the “perspectives of ordinary South African women” (PMP) into the national forum they sought to create and represent.

CAS emerged during the same time as the PMP and held its first “memory cloth” workshop in 2000. Examined in detail in the previous chapter, in the initial workshop sponsored by CAS and the African Art Centre, a group of women from the Richmond Farm informal settlement composed a narrative and embroidered a cloth in response to the theme “A Day I Will Never Forget.” Workshop organizers recognized the value of the workshop process and were inspired by the conversations and connections the shared composition process evoked in the project participants. They also recognized the historical value of the women’s compositions that evoked striking events from everyday South African life during apartheid, transition, and the “new” South Africa. They called the initiative *Amazwi Abesifazane* (Zulu for “Voices of
Women” and began conducting workshops in townships surrounding Durban. They have since archived over 2300 memory cloths that represent an “everyday” history of South Africa. The organization’s founder, Andries Botha, has used his position as a contemporary South African artist to disseminate some of the project’s archive across the globe in art exhibition spaces and an online searchable database. While Botha constructed a limited global art audience to circulate the *Amazwi Abesifazane* project, the 2007 collaboration the PMP redefined the “Voices of Women” national quilt project’s audience to include national and provincial legislators and an imagined South African public. It also re-defined the workshop process significantly, as the PMP took over primary planning and administrative duties of the nine provincial workshops they planned. The first radical difference was PMP’s choice to bus women from across a province and to house them together at a vacation lodge for a week compared to CAS’ practice of facilitating a workshop for women from a single area, sometimes even a single residential section of a township.

The Executive Director of CAS, Janine Zagel, narrated how the PMP first approached the nonprofit organization with the desire to create a national quilt representing women from every province of South Africa. In October of 2005 the Speaker of the South African National Assembly, Baleka Mbete, opened the 6th Annual UNESCO Comparative Human Rights Conference at the University of Connecticut and introduced its attendees to an exhibition of *Amazwi Abesifazane* memory cloths. At the reception Mbete spoke with Botha and Zagel at length about the narrative cloths, where she expressed her interest in its mission but lack of awareness of the project. In separate interviews both Zagel and Botha highlighted Mbete’s surprise at the conference – to be at an event in the United States and to be introduced to a South African project that was half a decade old and worked to accomplish a similar purpose to the
Truth and Reconciliation Commission, of which she served on as a member of the Presidential
Panel.

In 2005 Mbete set the agenda of the PMP as Speaker (ANC), and sometime after the
UNESCO conference, she proposed the PMP sponsor the national quilt project. Less than two
years later, in August 2007, the first workshop took place in the Northern Cape province. Zagel
supposed at several points in her interview that Mbete proposed the collaboration because of
Mbete’s encounter with the project in a UNESCO-sponsored space and the significant influence
the UNESCO conference sponsorship accorded to CAS in terms of organizational credibility.

The collaboration the two organizations forged was one where the PMP exchanged
money for facilitation assistance and permission from CAS to use the workshop model. The
primary agreement between PMP and CAS stipulated that PMP would do the following: cover
workshop costs, acknowledge CAS and the Amazwi Abesifazane project at the workshop and in
related materials, and divide the 60 maximum workshop participants into 30 composing for the
“Democracy” theme and all additional participants composing for the “Day” theme. This split in
workshop theme marked the most obvious split in purpose and motivations for the two
organizations: CAS entered the collaboration almost exclusively to obtain narrative cloths from
women participants who lived in areas and came from backgrounds not already represented in
their memory cloth archive whereas PMP wanted responses from the women about
contemporary democracy. These responses would be framed for exhibition in specific
provincial capital buildings and as a national group in parliamentary buildings in Cape Town, a
practice I discuss further below.

Since the PMP covered the entire cost for the Hazyview workshop (including our travel
and lodging cost as CAS staff), the workshop’s structure and resources contrasted sharply with
the CAS workshop model and the Mpumalanga province workshop CAS we would facilitate on our own in Mahushu township the week following the Hazyview workshop. In March 2008 I traveled with two CAS staff members to facilitate the Hazyview workshop sponsored by the PMP for rural women from the Mpumalanga province. Although this was my first workshop assisting CAS as a facilitator for the “Voices of Women” initiative, Morongoe Tsoaeli and Eunice Gambushe had traveled together to the Western Cape a few months prior to collaborate with the PMP and they were already critical of their experience. The relationship PMP initiated had proven unequal from the onset, as CAS facilitators Tsoaeli and Gambushe (who, together, represented a decade-long history of conducting cloth workshops, as well as translation and embroidery knowledge, respectively) functioned as assistants to the two core PMP staff who managed the events of the workshops including an opening banquet and closing breakfast (see the weekly schedule detailed in Figure 4). PMP staff members, Ilane-Lloren van Louw and Tshephiso Masenya, facilitated the workshop after the opening banquet featured Director Zubeida Shaik and the first day included additional PMP staff assistance to enter the women’s narratives into Microsoft Word.

The inequity of the partnership between the organizations, which formally lasted from 2007-2010 but problematically continues in digital forms today, resulted from disparate access to municipal and provincial government support (two relationships the PMP managed as the more powerful literacy intermediary to CAS). PMP sponsorship of the cloth workshop transformed the process into a highly publicized event where women traveled from as far as eight hours away to room with fellow women from across their province as they participate in a range of PMP-sponsored activities. For the week, the women received room and board and a small stipend for their cloth and time. Surprisingly, none of the women were told about the
stipend before the end of the week and most did not know the theme or purpose of the workshop prior to arriving. Although the women came from the same province, they would likely never see each other after the end of the week, nor would they be invited to the subsequent events recognizing the cloths and the project held at provincial legislatures and at the Parliament complex in Cape Town. In contrast, most of the original women from the Richmond Farms settlement have continued composing narratives and embroidering memory cloths about their experience, recently exhibiting “What Makes Me Happy” at the African Art Centre in Durban eight years after their first workshop together.\(^{36}\) Although the CAS and PMP workshops were markedly different in recruitment practices of and likely impact for participants, as an intermediary I analyze the PMP in terms of the three processes I identified in previous chapters to understand the critical similarities and differences that emerge.

**Centralizing Material**

Literacy intermediaries negotiate potentially fractious relationships through models of patronage that work to reconcile and erase conflict rather than highlight it as they centralize material through relationships based on economic and information dependence. Positioning itself as a central hub between stakeholders, the PMP established itself as a patron to CAS and women workshop participants when it provided the monetary resources to support the national quilt project, provide women participants with a small stipend at the end of the workshop, and partially fund independent “Day I Will Never Forget” quilt workshops for CAS scheduled after several provincial workshops.\(^{37}\) Brandt and Clinton identify patronage structures in literacy sponsorship that “integrated otherwise antagonistic social classes into relationships of mutual, albeit, unequal, dependencies.”\(^{38}\)

As an organization, the PMP engaged in multiple acts to centralize material and
ultimately its power as a literacy intermediary, such as the patronage relationship PMP negotiated with CAS and workshop participants described above. As an organization its primary authority rests in the ethos it gains with its status as a program of the national Parliament. The PMP reinforced its role as a hub – the organization centralizing communication and meaning about the national quilt project – in small acts that challenged the authority and creative property of project participants and CAS. Together these acts – the possession of the women’s narratives through the workshop and translation process and the PMP’s 2009 attempt to usurp the creative property (the workshop model) from CAS without their further involvement in the completion of the national quilt project – exemplify two significant ways the PMP centralized power through its status as workshop patron and the more powerful intermediating organization.

PMP’s possession of workshop participant’s narratives subverted public project goals and signified the organization’s mistrust of CAS to possess these stories until they had been translated a year later. More importantly, it signified that –immediately after composition – the PMP possessed material and metaphorical ownership of the narratives, rather than the participating women. On the fourth day of the workshop (March 18, 2008) at 4:25pm I wrote in my fieldnotes:

Ilane and Tshephiso have been away into town for some time now – from about 2:30 at least. Tshephiso stapled up the stories so no one could get into them while she was away but there was the issue of a couple of women who had come later not being able to access their sketches.

The stapled bundle of narratives signified the “Democracy” stories were no longer accessible to the women who composed them or to CAS facilitators. Even though the project’s final participant, Nomvula Gule, arrived and started composing a democracy narrative about health
services that same morning at 9 am, PMP facilitators stapled the stories around lunch time before departing for a shopping center to complete tasks in preparation for the final breakfast on the sixth day of the workshop. Although ostensibly texts for a public quilt project, the hand-written narratives become privately contracted documents by the PMP, discounting the role of the narrative and sketch for the women’s embroidery process as well as participants’ feeling that they hold ownership over the narratives they are sharing with their government.

When van Louw and Masenya returned at 5:10pm, I observed “Ilane said Morongoe should have felt free to open the package of stories since they were working together. Morongoe is not sure Tshephiso would have felt the same way about it.” Although van Louw insisted on a partnership between the organizations and conferred with CAS facilitators upon her return about project progress, Masenya immediately started “checking” participant’s cloth work and confronted Tsaeoli about it despite her absence of several hours. Masenya identified a cloth with “incorrect” colors for the South African flag and a more widespread overuse of beads as key issues with the cloths as the participants began to finish up (the first cloth finished by Nkosi Lindiwe corresponded with these criticisms). Both CAS and PMP share a problematic practice of “holding” the cloths overnight for participating women in workshops for redistribution in the morning – in an interview with Eunice Gambushe and Morongoe Tsaeoli, they suggested this was to prevent sewing errors that have the potential to frustrate both organizational staff and participant. At the same time, however, this practice also strips the participant of ownership of her composition. The physical possession of the democracy narratives and the cloths as well as the ability of PMP facilitators to dictate the compositional elements on the cloths worked to centralize the material artifacts of the national quilt project.

By early 2009, the national quilt project had stalled, with three remaining provinces and
the approach of national elections (and therefore a hesitation to make future financial commitments), including the election of a new South African president, Jacob Zuma. During a meeting in March 2009, PMP indirectly proposed carrying on with the national quilt workshops without any collaboration with CAS. PMP employees present (Masenya, van Louw, and Ernestine White) cited a delay in the framing process, a reason to sever collaboration that Janine Zagel challenged, reminding them that the PMP translations of narratives functioned to delay the process more significantly. The conflict between these two organizations echoes the earlier conflicting project visions that I explored in the first chapter – in particular the government co-optation of the Chilean *arpilleras* craft protest form and the fractious relationship that developed between Cleve Jones and the Project NAMES organization culminating in his termination and disassociation with the AIDS Memorial Quilt.

**Framing Meaning**

As its common denotative meaning, an intermediary is an entity who seeks to bring about agreement and reconciliation. A process with significant cultural resonance in South Africa since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), reconciliation is a process that may intend “to forge a common memory” but is always “predicated on making public particular kinds of knowledge.” A critic of the TRC as a venue for women’s testimony, Fiona Ross argues “witnessing needs to take into account that which is left unsaid in testimonies.” The intermediating practices the PMP engaged to present the women’s narratives – from website descriptions to reports digesting the women’s narratives for various Parliamentary Portfolio Committees – also silenced women’s voices whose narratives fell outside of “agreement” with the relatively narrow function that PMP envisioned for the cloths.

As the website blurb I examined at the beginning of the chapter demonstrates, the PMP
framed a conception of literacy that equated English literacy with democratic participation in the new South Africa. In terms of framing meaning of the national quilt project, most literally the PMP framed the narrative cloths from each provincial workshop and divided the thirty democracy cloths collected with the province so that national and provincial legislatures would permanently own a portion of cloths for display. But the PMP also engaged in significant acts of framing literacy for project participants through the workshop process that South African and online publics do not get to see through the finished products of the framed narrative cloth or the PMP’s online representations.

A significant frame for the workshop and representations of it online include the emphasis the PMP placed on English literacy. The organization reinforced the ideological link between English literacy and South African civic participation it established tacitly in the website description of the project in literacy events during the workshop that promoted and provided resources predominately in English.

On the fifth day of the workshop as most of the cloths were completed, the PMP sponsored two literacy events that distributed citizenship resources printed entirely in English. During the afternoon, a representative of the local Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) arrived to give a presentation about the types of services they provide to individuals and groups of South African citizens who desire to start their own business. The representative arrived with a digital, slide-based presentation composed in English and began to address the audience mono-lingually in English as well before a woman in the crowd almost immediately requested that he speak in a language in which they had more proficiency. Still speaking in English, he asked if he should speak in Afrikaans. Most of the women in the room said “No!” emphatically and no one spoke in the affirmative for this language. Instead he spoke in Zulu
with occasional reversions to English (typically for economic terms). During the talk he also distributed printed information in English about SEDA in a pamphlet and small booklet format.

After the SEDA presentation in Zulu that afternoon, PMP facilitator Ilane van Louw piled stacks of promotional materials from past PMP projects on a table. The pile included film festival brochures, a handful of children’s reading books, and a large stack of slickly printed folders containing papers explaining the Parliament and South African government structure and the rights of citizens in the new South Africa. Like the SEDA pamphlets distributed earlier, all of the materials were in English. This critical governmental information – about the relationship between the bodies of government, its history, and the rights one holds as a South African citizen – were all explained colorfully in English across pages. Several women jumped up immediately to take materials and women began to crowd around the table. Some women hung back and loudly expressed their hopes that everyone would be fair in how many they took. I waited until the women had helped themselves to ensure that I was not denying anyone access to these publications and I took a copy of the Parliamentary packet. The room grew quiet as we turned the pages and examined the brightly colored pages covered in text.

I knew that nearly every woman there could not read English fluently, but somehow something about the professionally published documents drew us in: there was a power contained in them. They were created by the new South African government and I imagined the women thinking that these pages might contain the answer as to how to connect to government and services they had been trying to access for years, that they had been sewing about over the week, if only they could locate the right section or telephone number. In an interview later, workshop participant Maureen Mashego expressed a sentiment about SEDA she believed other women shared with her – that while the presenter appeared friendly today, there is often little
guidance the office will offer you if you travel to it yourself.\textsuperscript{44}

In her 1982 essay, “Protean Shapes in Literacy Events,” Shirley Brice Heath describes a literacy event as “any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of the participants’ interactions and their interpretive processes.”\textsuperscript{45} But what if the participants can’t read the text so integral to them – I wondered – how might literacy researchers understand this as a significant literacy event? “The having of something in writing is often a ritualistic practice, and more often than not, those who hold the written piece are not expected to read what they have.”\textsuperscript{46} This moment in the workshop, when the Parliamentary texts represent a significant interaction between a citizen and her government, becomes a literacy event where the material existence of the text is more important than the ability of its owners to read or understand it. These events frame literacy as a lack within workshop participants – a lack of English literacy – as the reason for not being able to participate in the economy and access critical governmental resources.

Interestingly, the initial website blurb identifying the project as an “alternative literacy” project (as well as any mention of the “Voices of Women” project) disappeared from the PMP website for nearly two years over 2010 and 2011. When a description resurfaced in 2012 on the website under its “Latest Project” section to announce the project’s completion, the PMP reframed the meaning of the project away from an “alternative literacy” argument completely. Instead they describe the project as “a national campaign designed to fortify the status of marginalised women, across the country.”\textsuperscript{47} They further describe that this fortification “was done by creating platforms for open and honest dialogue, affording ordinary South African women an opportunity to share with Parliament, their opinions on issues related to policy and legislation that is intended to improve their lives.” The intense criticism of the government that I
observed in talking with women participants and reading the translations of the narratives provided by Parliament is euphemized to suggest that the workshops “created opportunities for women… to give a clear impression, of the kind of challenges that continue to confront their communities.”

The paradigmatic framing document the PMP produced out of the “Voices of Women” project was a project report that worked to synthesize the democracy cloths. The project report, submitted to “various Parliamentary and legislation Portfolio Committees,” works to both generalize the deficiencies of the participating women at the same time it works to individualize (and thus de-collectivize and disempower) and compartmentalize the intersecting critiques and expectations for democracy the women composed in their multimodal narratives that responded to the theme, “What Democracy Means to Me.” While I do not deny the significant challenges the PMP articulates about South African women (with the exception of illiteracy, which I countered in the previous chapter), what I take issue with is their positioning South African women as passive agents in need of governmental intervention. Moreover I take issue with the PMP positioning an inter-governmental publication directed at South African Portfolio Committees as the only possible genre that can to give voice “to the voiceless.”

By “dissecting” the narratives to generate content for the various Portfolio Committees, the formal arrangement of the document removes a sense of frequency and interrelatedness of the women’s conceptions of democracy. It is individualized models of citizenship that work to isolate responsibility for marginalization in the new democratic yet neoliberal South Africa upon the participating women themselves.

Crafting Citizenship

In the transformation into an officially national quilt project based around the theme
“What Democracy Means to Me,” the PMP crafted a different form of citizenship open to women participating in the workshops compared to the original memory cloth workshop. The original workshop theme of “A Day I Will Never Forget” invoked citizenship and identification through participation in shared memorialization and local community where the PMP invoked citizenship as participation in national bureaucratic organizations based on arbitrary provincial identification (the workshop unifying the women together as women of one province, not of women coming from a variety of linguistic or cultural backgrounds).

Brandt and Clinton argue that “attention to sponsors can be shaped out of the struggle of competing interests and agents, how multiple interests can be satisfied during a single performance of reading or writing, [and] how literate practices can relate to immediate social relationships while still answering to distant demands.” The qualitative methods of participant observation and interviewing reveal the “struggle of competing interests” and the “multi-sourced” agency left out of the public representations literacy intermediaries produce. The interaction between CAS and PMP project facilitators revealed significant competing interests, as the previous sections detailed in its identification of practices PMP performed to centralize the materials produced at the workshop and frame meaning of the project for the workshop and broader audiences.

On the first day of the workshop, Create Africa South waited for its time to speak to introduce the history and purpose of the cloth project as the Parliamentary Millennium Programme (PMP) introduced its own aims with the project. Tshephiso Masenya, the PMP employee fluent in the Nguni languages most typical of the Mpumalanga province area, was the designated PMP representative to serve as primary facilitator over the week and on this first morning preview the week’s activities. She spoke for almost an hour, speaking about the
importance of the project, code-switching across several languages: isiZulu, English, Afrikaans, and Pedi. The primary benefit of the project she highlighted that morning (with no allusion to being paid at the end of the week) was that the most salient stories would be read and heard in the national Parliament. She even said that the Speaker of the South African National Assembly, Baleka Mbete, would reference select stories and their authors by name during formal assembly proceedings in Cape Town. At the same time it offered itself as an organizational conduit to a parliamentary session, the PMP identified South African citizenship as direct participation in national, parliamentary structures.

However during that same first morning of the workshop where workshop participants were left to themselves, away from the performers and provincial officials who attended the opening banquet the previous evening, PMP facilitators identified the women as neoliberal citizens as they prepared them to begin the project. To communicate the high national importance accorded to the cloths, Masenya insists that the PMP will be very strict about the quality of embroidery the women would accomplish over the week, concluding with, “it’s a valuable piece of art… good enough to get sold, because it’s your life…. cherish it as your life.” In this quick but alarming connection, Masenya assumes that if a monetary value is placed upon the cloths - then the participant will feel a greater responsibility to commit quality work on their quilt panel. Whether the participant was composing for the “What Democracy Means to Me” or “A Day I Will Never Forget” theme, Masenya suggests the most valuable experiences and lives are ones that are the most profitable or at least ready for consumption by commercial markets. For women whose narratives represented intimate experience with economic hardship, some sudden but most sustained, I can’t even speculate how they received this equation, nor did I feel it was appropriate to ask.
After time to meet each other and an icebreaker where women introduced one another throughout the room, Morongoe Tsaeoli walked up to the microphone to explain the Amazwi Abesifazane project to the Mpumalanga Province workshop participants and articulated a citizenship linked with personal memory that I discussed in the previous chapter. She emphasized the distinction between completing a “What Democracy Means to Me” and “A Day I Will Never Forget” cloth for the two purposes represented at the workshop. Holding up an example of a finished, framed cloth Morongoe also encouraged the women to create quality cloths. The framed cloth functioned as an exemplar that many women approached over the week for inspiration and to remind them of the cloth’s rhetorical purpose. A discussion ensued after her presentation and it became clear that more women wanted to write about the CAS “Day” topic over the democracy topic the PMP and the Mpumalanga provincial legislature had invested in creating. Masenya reminded the participants the Speaker of the Assembly had commissioned the democracy topic, so that at least thirty women would have to address that theme. She selected the first thirty names on the list of project participants to display on the projector screen attached to a laptop at the front of the room and insisted these women would compose for the democracy theme. What ensued instead over the week were narratives and cloths that frequently addressed both topics since democracy, democratic opportunity, and personal experience were so intricately tied to one another for many of the workshop participants’ experience. Two conceptions of citizenship compete because of the choice or existence of the two narrative themes in the same workshop environment. Ultimately the conception of citizenship the PMP crafted revealed more about their self-perceived role as a cultural intermediary than any “authentic” information about the participating women they purported to represent.

As a parliamentary organization based on governmental structures formed in the late
1990s, the PMP reinforces the neoliberal subject categories figured as “ripe” for development, in conjunction with priorities set by South African economic policy, the United Nations and other transnational actors who sponsor cultural and democracy building projects. Extending the concept of cultural intermediaries to governmental and cultural organizations has proved fruitful for anthropology and art history scholars including Nicholas Thomas. In Colonialism’s Cultures: Anthropology, Travel, and Government he examines “scientific explorers, missionaries, and official administrators” who investigate, challenge, and co-opt artifacts and cultural elements from colonized peoples as they produce knowledge for the West. He characterizes the actions these colonizers engage in – “fighting tigers and savages, collecting Egyptian mummies and drawing crusader castles” – as “self-fashioning exercises that decompose and recompose” the cultural intermediary. Thomas identifies a crucial function of cultural intermediaries operating in colonial and postcolonial sites: the representations they disseminate about indigenous or “grassroots” knowledge frequently reveal more about the intermediary’s desire for identification over the actual population being represented.

The PMP’s “recomposition” of their homepage in late 2009 provides a compelling example of contemporary fashioning organizational identity and citizenship based on desires for identification with subject categories of South Africans. The “Voices of Women” announcement appeared on the website in late 2007 below one promoting the upcoming commemoration for the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale, when a conscripted South African military fought against the People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola Labour Party from 1987-8. Together these announcements display symbolic identities – that of the historically oppressed rural woman and the conscripted veteran – that PMP wants viewers to identify with the organization; these announcements appear directly below the organization’s objectives, one of which is “to make
visible and assert our South African and African identity.” By late 2009, however, the PMP shifted from fashioning their organizational identity through rural women and veterans to an intense focus on the nation as youth, at least in their website and Facebook presence. In the same space reserved for the previous two announcements, the site now promotes the “Bokamoso Ba Rona / Our Future is In Your Hands” initiative. Below the short description, viewers can access the separate “Boka Buddies” website or download the project’s URTURN Magazine. PMP’s “recomposition” mediates youth culture and neoliberal theory to encourage young South Africans to focus on individual skills development as a way to contribute to South Africa’s future. While youth development has always been a PMP concern, the “Boka Buddies” project distinctly represents the organization’s future-oriented focus – signifying South Africa almost exclusively as a space for economic opportunity for young people who commit to individual development. At postcolonial sites like the ones Thomas investigates and the “Voices of Women” national quilt workshops, these self-fashioning acts have significant implications for the populations that intermediaries represent as they identify the categories of citizenship valued by the Parliament as well as the forms of citizenship the PMP may co-opt for itself.

Conclusion

PMP and CAS and the contentious partnership they developed together demonstrate the larger socio-economic forces structuring the activities of literacy intermediaries and unequal power relationships they forge through literacy initiatives. The shift in project direction – from Amazwi Abesifazane’s focus on public memory building to the “Voices of Women” project focus on representative government and neoliberal individual development – was possible only through the actions of the PMP as a literacy intermediary, a “more powerful” literacy sponsor. As they centralize material, frame meaning, and craft citizenship, governmental literacy
intermediaries possess positions of power where their representations are accepted as credible frequently because they are the only ones available. Consider the United Nations, Central Intelligence Agency, and the United States Agency for International Development as paradigmatic examples of representational dominance for knowledge about global literacy. Intermediaries take advantage of the broad access they achieve through the relationships they manage between communities and project stakeholders. With intermediation comes hierarchy, and although the intermediary may function as the hub between relationships, they may still have to “answer to” national or international entities above them informally or formally. Just as CAS Executive Director Janine Zagel suspected the PMP selected the “Voices of Women” project because of its previous United Nations sponsorship, organizations functioning as literacy intermediaries may have complicated relationships and funding conditions with their governments or international financial institutions. The PMP itself relied upon provincial sponsorship for partial funding of the quilt workshops and its other national initiatives. To convince provincial legislatures to make the expenditure, the PMP had to select the appropriate time and presentation to make before the proper committee. Timing their March presentation to the KwaZulu-Natal provincial government too closely to the April 2009 elections, for example, guaranteed stalled progress for the national quilt project in that area.53

Despite what the “Voices of Women” online project announcement that I examined at the beginning of this essay implies, the average literacy rate for women participating in the Mpumalanga province workshop was 96.7% - all but one of the thirty women could write a robust narrative in her home language in her own hand. In terms of narrative content, eight women write about participating in community meetings and another describes her past position as a local councilor.54 The narratives composed during the project demonstrate a nuanced
understanding of governmental structures that directly counter the representation PMP presents of these women in their announcement. Even the sole workshop participant who requested a scribe, arguably the only project participant matching PMP’s description, composed a narrative that demanded the government to recognize democracy as “our heritage” and with that heritage, a responsibility to provide basic services, in particular roads to support tourism for the traditional dance group she organized. Citing nepotism in provincial government and unheeded requests, her narrative argues government insufficiency of service delivery and not a lack of knowledge prevents her from engaging with civic society fully.\textsuperscript{55} In this instance the PMP’s representation of rural woman like Anari Mona Malele reduces the complexities of her life and local economic opportunities merely because of a focus on her alphabetic literate ability in Pedi or English as a determining factor for her development.

Just a few years after the first democratic elections in South Africa, Brian Street recognized that “formal systems” and even families implemented the illiterate “label” to devalue South African political activists despite their ability to “incorporate” literary documents for their causes and navigate “literate environments.”\textsuperscript{56} The PMP similarly devalued the literate abilities that “Voices of Women” project participants possessed: they applied the label of “illiterate” to explain why the women couldn’t access civic life when the women’s narrative cloths demonstrated engagement with their community and named specific governmental and social resources they wielded or desired to help them seek fulfillment in a democratic South Africa. But with access to composition technologies and multiple audiences, the PMP’s representation of the project and rural South African women occludes both the women’s agency and inequities in service delivery and human rights protections that persist from South Africa’s colonial history.

This is not to say that the women who participated in the Mpumalanga Province quilt
workshop were not interested in learning English, as many had a familiarity and ability to speak it (if not write it) to varying degrees. These women are cognizant of its tremendous sweep and connection to the global economy, this is a language that is featured on a majority of the television programming (much of it imported from the United States), and English is the colonizing language the women at the workshop preferred to be addressed in if the speaker addressing them offered them a choice between English or Afrikaans. This even despite the fact that the area's settler colonial population is predominately Afrikaans and that nearly all employment opportunities these women have had over the years in working in this rural area has been working on the farm or as domestic servants within Afrikaans-speaking households.

But what would happen if any or all of these women became more literate in English? Would they finally be able to help with the delivery of the "baby" the PMP figuratively argues the country carry: "pregnant with opportunities, freedom and change." Probably not. My experience after the Parliament sponsored workshop brought me to stay with Doris Mokoena and her family in the township of Mahushu that serves Hazyview where the PMP workshop was held. For two weeks I came to know Doris, a local schoolteacher, and her family – all native Swati speakers – but all also literate in English. Holding the position as a teacher in the area, Doris was one of the most affluent members of Mahushu township: the size of her house and the possessions within it as well as her ownership of a truck reflects this fact. But the Mokoena family's success and ability to engage in English language networks within South Africa doesn't change the fact that their community has no access to potable water unless they drive miles to retrieve it in her truck and store it in large plastic containers in the garage.

The promise of service delivery and other rights, evokes the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the South African constitution, broadly considered to be one of
the most progressive in the world with respect to gender. But as Helen Moffett recognizes, the constitutional text clashes with “South Africa’s heritage of overlapping patriarchies (colonial, apartheid, Calvinist, missionary, traditional African)” on a near daily basis as the country continues to experience the highest rates of rape in a non-conflict zone.” Brought together by literacy intermediary PMP, the women participating in the “Voices of Women” national quilt project composed multimodal narratives that highlight some of these same contrasts, patriarchies, and conflicts as they worked to challenge the intermediating processes of the PMP.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how researching organizations as literacy intermediaries who compose strategic representations of participants and literacy initiatives helps us better recognize the transnational processes of intermediation that connect “literacy on the ground” to ideologies about literacy and literate development. Researching these organizations highlights a critical intersection between literacy, rhetoric, and professional writing studies since intermediaries not only engage popular audiences through website and public display, but also produce specialized forms of writing, like grant proposals and project reports that have limited circulation between local organizations and governmental bodies.

Literacy intermediaries are particularly significant organizations to study because of their claims to represent and empower communities marked as most vulnerable, in need of development, and with little access to global communication technologies. Perhaps the most challenging narratives to encounter after the conclusion of the Mpumalanga workshop were written by women asking for immediate help to address a dangerous living situation involving domestic abuse. Because the PMP conceived the purpose of the cloths was to represent South African democracy *statically*, this woman’s plea for help was ignored during the workshop week and continued to be ignored through intermediating processes that delivered the narrative’s
translation to CAS offices almost a year later in February 2009.

**Figures**

**Figure 5:** PMP Voices of Women project description in “Current Events” section of the South African Parliamentary Millennium Programme home page. 2007-8.

**Figure 6:** Literacy Intermediary PMP
The Parliamentary Millennium Programme (PMP) represented as a literacy intermediary between “Grassroots” South African Women, nonprofit organization Create Africa South (CAS), South African Provincial Legislatures, and the United Nations.
Figure 7: A complete, framed “Voices of Women” multimodal narrative is pictured on the left and was used by CAS and PMP facilitators to explain the project to Mpumalanga province participants. PMP facilitators laid the finished Mpumalanga province cloths on the table for provincial officials to view on the final day of the workshop that featured a tea and speeches. (Photograph taken on 20 March 2008 by author at Mthunzi Lodge in Hazyview, South Africa).

Notes:


2 Ibid. The short description of the project referenced and reproduced in Figure 10 at the end of this chapter no longer appears on the PMP homepage although a screen shot of the site from 23 July 2008 is available online through the Internet Archive “Wayback Machine.” When this chapter was written the project description and all mention of the project had disappeared from the site, with exception of a reference to the project in a downloadable 2007 annual report pdf file. The interpretation – about the shift toward youth in the upcoming chapter – follows significantly from this disappearance. However, in Summer 2012 a new iteration of the “Voices of Women” project that neglected to invoke any connection of literacy to the project appeared on
the website. This interesting developing and revolving presentations of the project on the site will be the focus of future research.

3 Ibid.

4 See Nelly P. Stromquist’s “The political benefits of adult literacy” (UNESCO, 2005) for a comprehensive literature review of studies conducted in India, the United States, Turkey, Nepal, and Bolivia. Most studies found small but not statistically significant correlations between literacy and social participation. In *A Longitudinal Study of the Effect of Integrated Literacy and Basic Education Programs on Women’s Participation in Social and Economic Development* Burchfield et al. (USAID, 2002) found increases in political knowledge and activity for women participating in literacy initiatives in Nepal and Bolivia. For an introduction to feminist critiques of development, see Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal’s “Transnational Feminist Cultural Studies,” *positions* 2.2 (1994). Swai’s *Beyond Women’s Empowerment in Africa* (New York: Palgrave, 2010) provides a recent critique of how postcolonial state and development regime claims of empowerment (with literacy figured as the first step toward development) work to eradicate women’s knowledge systems in Tanzania.

5 The United Nations Development Programme recognizes literacy rates vary dramatically between South Africa’s urban and rural areas. At the same time, the 2009 UN estimates the literacy rate for women ages 15-24 as high as 98.1%. My argument will challenge the processes of literacy intermediary organizations like the UN who construct ideologies of literacy, so I use these statistical figures critically and paired with direct observation of the PMP workshop held in 2008 in the Mpumalanga province. Of the 30 Mpumalanga workshop participants I will discuss shortly, 29 (or 96.7%), were able to compose a written narrative in their first language (Zulu, 9 Tsonga/Shangaan, 5 Pedi/Northern Sotho, 3 Swati/Swazi, and 1
Xhosa). Although this may reflect a higher than average literacy rate, the high literacy rate and linguistic diversity reflects the abilities women possessed who were recruited for the national quilt project.

6 I am open to the possibility of an individual as a powerful literacy intermediary, but definitionally it is hard for me to conceive of someone who is not connected to some network or structure of organizational reach or influence. For example, Oprah Winfrey’s role to establish a school for young women in South Africa is that of a literacy intermediary and she exemplifies this when she speaks publicly about her mission – but she has organizational structures beneath her that enact and enable these larger processes of mediation to take place.

7 As recently as August 30, 2012 – nearly two years after the last workshop collaboration between CAS occurred, PMP staff member Van Louw posted the news announcing the new “Voices of Women” blog that will continue the project online into perpetuity for the PMP, voicesofwomenproject.wordpress.com. It is not clear if they envision craft workshops or the blog to function as the sole space for discourse. I am very interested in examining this latest development in future research. I believe it has significant implications for a “projected online identity” of South African women that the PMP would like to suggest. In other words, if a country working towards securing basic services for a significant number of the population still projects their images online, it gives the illusion of Internet access and representation that simply does not exist.


9 Ibid., 352.
See Lamia Karim’s recent Microfinance and its Discontents (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011) for a recently published account I see critically aligning with my own. Her project questions the near-universal admiration the Grameen Bank and other micro-lending operations have received globally by engaging with ethnographic research in areas of Bangladesh.


Ibid., 166.

Influential studies of self-sponsored and school-sponsored literacies after Emig’s The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders (Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1971) include Shirley Brice Heath’s Ways with Words: Language, Life and Work in Communities and Classrooms (New York: Cambridge UP, 1983).

Brandt, “Sponsors,” 166.


Consider, for example, Lauren Marshall Bowen’s “Beyond Repair,” College English 74.5 (2012): 437-457, where she argues “curriculums of aging” work to structure digital literacy experiences for older or “senior” computer users.

Deborah Brandt, Literacy and Learning (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2009).


The study of codeswitching continues to explore linguistic practices of mediation, but scholarship hasn’t consistently engaged the term since the early 2000s. Previous scholarship has failed to identify literacy mediators as a kind of literacy sponsor and so subsequently, when scholar Alanna Frost offers the concept of the “literacy steward” in “Literacy Stewardship: Dakelh Women Composing Culture,” CCC 63.1 (2011), her argument misses out on making a valuable distinction between the “mediating for survival” processes that Malan describes compared to Frost’s “stewarding cultural and traditional literacy practices” for cultural autonomy and preservation.


22 See Mike Baynham and Helen Masing, “Mediators and mediation in multilingual literacy events,” in Multilingual Literacies, ed. Marilyn Martin-Jones and Kathryn Jones, 189-207.

23 Bourdieu, Distinction, 359.


25 At the same time, as with my example of the PMP website above, official governmental business is predominately and near exclusively conducted in English. According to the 2001 South African census, .5% of the population speaks something other than the eleven official languages at home. These languages are Zulu (23.8%), Xhosa (17.6%), Afrikaans (13.3%), Pedi (9.4%), English (8.2%), Tswana (8.2%), Sotho (7.9%), Tsonga (4.4%), Swati
(4.4%), Venda (2.3%), and Ndebele (1.6%). If assumed relatively constant, these figures suggest that prior to 1994, South Africa’s official languages of English and Afrikaans represented a little over 20% of the population.


27 Walsh, 53.


29 Trimbur, 104.


31 Interestingly, the “Voices of Women” project appears to be the only creative initiative they have facilitated with adult South Africans and as of now, the site no longer promotes the project. An increasing and intensifying focus on youth – figured both as “in crisis” and the country’s future – currently dominates the PMP interests as I discussed above.


33 To avoid confusion between the larger Amazwi Abesifazane project possessing 2300+ narrative cloths in response to the theme “A Day I Will Never Forget,” I will refer to the specific national collaboration between CAS and PMP as the “Voices of Women” project and continue to refer to the original project as Amazwi Abesifazane or the Amazwi project for short.

34 Andries Botha, interviewed by Martha Webber, tape recording, April 8, 2008.

35 One of the challenges of researching a current project is its ability to shift and change beyond what even project partners initially conceptualized. A recent development that I will explore in further research, for example, is the establishment of a “Voices of Women” blogspot
blog by the PMP on August 26, 2012, http://voicesofwomenproject.wordpress.com. Additionally I would also like to explore in future research the process of how a Facebook Group (now a Facebook Page) I created for CAS in 2008 was co-opted by PMP employees who asked for administrative capacities for the group/page. They edited the initial description I created (that emphasized the project’s origin in 2000 and its work to create an alternative history archive), literally erasing this early history to place the 2007 moment of collaboration with PMP at the top of the “About” page. Ultimately they phased out the original page to create a new group page as Facebook shifted. This experience – to witness the erasure of organizational history and purpose – was unsettling to say the least.


37 PMP covered room and board and compensated women 250 Rand for participation in the workshop and the production of the cloth. At the time this was worth a little under $30 US dollars with higher value on food purchases but not manufactured or imported goods. A team from CAS including myself stayed on in the Mpumalanga province in March 2008 after the PMP national quilt workshop to facilitate a CAS-sponsored “Day I Will Never Forget” workshop.

38 Brandt and Clinton, 350.


40 In fact, my return to work with CAS in early February also marked the delivery of the PMP translations of the thirty Mpumalanga province democracy narratives. In other words, PMP sent these translations to CAS for formatting and framing eleven months after the conclusion of the workshop.

41 Ross, 251.
Based on posters I observed the following week hanging up in a childcare facility in the township of Mahshu, it is clear the government prints some materials about constitutional protections and rights in Zulu and other official, indigenous South African languages. During my March 18, 2008 interview with Masenya and van Louw I did not inquire as to why they only brought English-based materials to the workshop.

Maureen Mashega, interviewed by Martha Webber, tape recording, March 17, 2008.


This has changed of course to reflect the “Voices of Women” project again as I discussed at the end of the section on framing meaning. However, in the forthcoming Uncivil Youth: Activism and Affirmative Governmentality (Durham: Duke UP, 2013), Soo Ah Kwon interrogates opposing representations of youth as categories of need for nonprofit and
governmental intervention and the ever-increasing forms of governmentality that structure civic life for youth.


57 PMP Website.

58 Helen Moffett, “Gender,” in New South African Keywords, ed. by Nick Shepherd and Steven Robins (Auckland Park: Jacana, 2008), 111.
Interchapter D: Research and Atonement

This interchapter focuses on events from my 2008 and 2009 research trips that shifted my perspective to question the ethics of research and the representational forms available to researchers (or at the very least, available to the dissertation format). Many participants who invited me to collect research about the *Amazwi Abesifazane* “Voices of Women” memory cloth project welcomed me into their lives and some their homes (I lived with a fellow CAS employee and her daughter for three months during my 2009 trip). As the introduction explains in a broader sense, we shared meals, laughter, occasional spontaneous songs, and significant events with one another. The prospect of stripping these experiences away since they didn’t focus on organizations and their rhetorical practices (the primary focus of the dissertation research) produced these interchapters. They complement and critique that organizational focus by highlighting the individuals participating in the organization as researchers, staff, or project participants.

Unlike the short time period of the previous interchapter, “Mahushu Township,” the following essay questions the practice of transnational writing studies research over a multiple year span as my research relationships formed strong bonds. This essay questions the practice of writing studies research that represents itself as atonement. In particular, research that makes uncomplicated claims to redress, recover, or empower the participants or historical subjects through research writing alone. In “Sponsors of Literacy,” Deborah Brandt shares a similar concern when she writes that writing studies scholars had “sometimes even managed to enhance the literate potentials of ordinary citizens” with the field’s focus on the individual and what would ultimately be understood as self-sponsored literacies.¹
It's early February in 2008 and I have only been in Durban for a little over a week. Upon my landlady's recommendation I have taken a taxi to Westville Pavilion, one of the largest shopping centres in Durban. I wander its levels and lengths of stores in search of a bookseller that carries academic publications from the major university presses of the continent. I sip an “iced coffee” – something I have happily discovered means “coffee milkshake” in South Africa. Not anxious to return to the summer humidity clinging to the day outside and with no day scheduled at the Create Africa South (CAS) office, I purchase a ticket for a screening of *Atonement*, a film released the previous December in the United States and just opening here.

The theater is dark and nearly empty – it's the middle of the day in the middle of the week and during the last twenty minutes of the film, I find myself crying. In this final section of the film the main character, Briony Tallis, reveals that she tries to put right with writing what she couldn't change in life for her sister, Cecelia, and her sister's lover, Robbie. Briony’s accusations as a young teenager have led to Robbie’s imprisonment and conscription in the British Army. A scene shows Briony visiting Cecelia and finding Robbie – the couple has made a life together amidst the loss of World War II. She apologizes to them about her actions and confesses what she really saw the night she falsely accused Robbie of raping her cousin.

But then we see the elderly Briony reveal she has composed this scene, and in it a visit where she has given the couple the love she took from them and empowered them not to forgive her. At the film’s end we learn that Robbie has succumbed to septicemia in Dunkirk and Cecelia has drowned in a tube station bombing, foreclosing the reality of Briony’s apology, but not her act of atonement: writing an ending she believes the young couple deserved.

This idea of writing as atonement – even in the face of that which is gravely untrue – clings to me. If *Atonement* is about composing a private narrative within a very public traumatic
event, then how might writing public research about encounters with literacy and organizations perform its own work of atonement? How might a researcher’s commitment to equity and empowerment encourage her to write it into her analysis, to a point where she may even “enhance the literate potentials of ordinary citizens,” in Deborah Brandt’s words?²

March 2008

17 lines and 2 circles, one forever looped around the other. This is how I will remember the story Eunice told to me. Scant markings that meant to represent the loss that surged from within her onto paper and then cloth. It is the second day of the Parliamentary Millennium Programme (PMP) workshop in the Mpumalanga province – the first “memory cloth” workshop I have co-facilitated with CAS. I spend much of the first day sitting at the CAS table in the corner of the room with Mrs. Gambushe because I am nervous. As the only white woman present, I don’t want to impose or insist. The workshop is not about my research or me. From the CAS table, I distribute pencils and thread and needles that first afternoon and begin to meet women who have been bussed in from all over the province to participate in the workshop.

But today I feel more confident moving around the room and visiting the women at the tables where they are working. Some are still sewing the borders around the cloth, others embroidering their names, and many have moved on to transfer their sketch onto the cloth with the crumbly colored pencils we brought with us from Durban.

Not everyone wants to talk to me though – even after they hear my speech inflected with an American accent– I understand why they are suspicious of me. By participating in the workshop the women already allowed PMP to use their likenesses and take their cloths by the week’s close, why perform for one more person's benefit? And what if that person only speaks English and can't respect them by engaging them in their primary language when it is indigenous
to the area? I defer to my limited Zulu and say “siyabonga” (“we thank you”) that day to many women before one finally laughs deeply and corrects me: “ngiyabonga” (I thank you). Even Morongoe struggles speaking with some of the women – somehow the PMP has recruited several Tshivenda speakers with no one to translate for them amongst CAS or PMP staff.

Mabel calls me to her table first – it is the one that contains the most elder (and therefore, most respected) women at the workshop. “Where are your parents?” Mabel asks me almost immediately, with a smile but also out of concern for me. Her table is closest to the doors, which remain wide open to allow the most breeze and the most light to help the women see when threading a needle or stitching. Eunice sits next to Mabel and says very little to anyone throughout the day. After I sit there for a long time talking with Mabel and threading needles or undoing knots for the women as they sew, Eunice asks me softly if I will transfer the sketch she has made of her story onto the cloth. She hands me the sketch and her cloth that has its border complete and her name stitched onto it and I pick up a colored pencil from the table to start drawing.

The sketch uses straight lines to convey the iconic shape of a square, Western house – this one contains two rooms – and lines to create the stick figure of a human body, with a circle for the head. The figure's feet don't touch the ground, rather they hover above the floor of the house, and another circle loops around the figure's head, with a line leading from the circle up to the top of the slanted line of the roof. 17 lines and 2 circles. Head and noose. 2 circles. My hand clutches the colored pencil and I hesitate to draw. I say to Eunice quietly, "this drawing… this must have been very hard on you, what happened this day."

Eunice tells me what she saw the day she opened the door to the one private room in the RDP house she shares with her daughter and son. Preparing an evening meal with her daughter
in the main room they remark several times that afternoon at the loud music coming from the bedroom. Growing tired of it, she knocks loudly on the door and enters to find her son. He has taken his life. I whisper that I am sorry and my eyes well up when we look at each other – deep brown pools paralleling each other.

That night I write, “tonight I’m thinking a lot about Eunice and what she will be feeling when she is sewing over the part where her son is represented.”

When I see her the next day she is laughing with Mabel and the other women at the table by the door. I visit with them and ask if I can see how their cloths are coming along. She has already sewn her son and the noose. The stitches are messier here than her border, messier than the stable lines of her house. She sees me run my fingers over the cloth and when I reach the two circles she says, “I wanted to sew that part quickly.”

February 2009

I've been back in Durban for less than a week after nine months away. I convince a close friend I have made the year before to have lunch with me at the "Mustang" Spur restaurant at Musgrave Centre in Durban. The Spur restaurants are populated with a garish collection of America Indian caricatures and Western United States clichés of steak and tumbleweeds: cow-printed fabric stretches across the booth seats we sit in to face each other. It's the second time I've seen my friend since I've returned to Durban this year: the first time a hurried exchange of hugs and mutual exclamations about the heat and the contrast between the size of her pregnant stomach and the tiny baby clothing I have brought with me from the States in anticipation of the birth of her first child. That first time, her husband waits impatiently for her in his truck, the motor idles and he waves distractedly at me and flashes a smile.

When we meet each other the following week at Musgrave Centre she has just come from
St. Augustine's, the private hospital in Durban she has attended for prenatal care over the last six months. She speaks excitedly of the impending birth now – the air conditioning in the restaurant and the prospect of lamb chops in the atmosphere – and relates the events of her doctor's appointment from that morning. She hands me her pregnancy record card and asks me to look at it – a map of numbers measuring the progress of this baby growing inside of her.

I glance at the many categories and notations printed across its sides: a doctor's scrawl in South Africa hints at an international struggle with handwriting for the profession. Under "Special Considerations" I think I see "mother is HIV+" but my eyes scramble the words, trying to deny their meaning. I can only think to say, pointing to the line I finally decode, "but the writing on here is so hard to read, what does this say?"

A long pause hangs between us until she says something. I don't remember exactly what she said or how she said it: I never took my notebook or pen out during that lunch. Life has changed dramatically in nine months. Her husband is not the honest man, the best friend she thought she had less than a year before. I can't recall what we talked about the rest of the lunch but I remember the novelty of the restaurant turning garish and trying to chew mouthfuls of meat turning to rubber. We depart after lunch and embrace deeply before each of us flag minibus taxis that take us to different ends of the city.

Research as Atonement

The workshop, the lunch at Mustang Spur – these experiences will elapse before I make the connection between Briony's actions and my own as a researcher. I find myself in quiet moments of study and writing choosing the best words to describe the "Voices of Women" workshops and the participants I have met through them. What stories are mine to research and how do I share them? If Briony empowered Cecelia and Robbie not to forgive her in that final
scene she gives them together, whom will I empower in my research when I narrow its focus and bundle it in drafted packages? Our landscapes are palimpsests that can never be scraped clean before the next action befalls them, or the next meaning is assigned.

Do the narratives of empowerment, individual and collective, we "identify" and then write up as researchers obscure and ultimately rewrite the oppression and powerlessness we witness but may not be able to reckon? Must our research proposals strike the appropriate balance between critical analysis and the empowering “light at the end of the tunnel” that we promise to find with further research? What happens when we spotlight one situated practice in our research – literacy – when it threads and weaves its way around these complex moments?

Writing about his time in graduate school in Lives on the Boundary, Mike Rose describes a moment for him “when the book lists and the literary critiques and the wordplay receded, the heart emerged.”

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Notes:


2 Ibid.
Conclusion:

Crafting Citizenship for Whom?

“We invest objects with tremendous power and then do whatever we’re capable of doing.”

The preceding study outlined rhetorical practices that organizations employ as intermediaries to multimodal composers, specifically for Black South African women creating public compositions in a post-apartheid era. Organizations like Create Africa South (CAS) and the South African Parliamentary Millennium Programme (PMP) invest considerable resources to centralizing and framing craft rhetoric projects like the “Voices of Women” project because they, like Gabrielle Burton above, have invested these cloths with tremendous power as objects. The preceding study also outlined a methodology I embraced that allowed me to develop reciprocal yet critical relationships with South African nongovernmental and governmental organizations as I explored ethical and meaningful ways to create and communicate my research. What my limitations in fluency as well as infrastructural challenges largely left out of this study was the meaningful input from the women participating as clothmakers in the “Voices of Women” project. What does that meaningful input look like? Besides a projective interview with each consenting clothmaker over the course of cloth production, it would also entail follow up over time to inform them of their cloth’s location and gauge the clothmaker’s sense of whether they had gained insights or skills from the workshop participation that still carried meaning to them. The PMP sponsored a project they claimed would increase participatory democracy, but failed to celebrate the complex understanding of the government the participating women possessed.

The democracy narratives from the Mpumalanga Province evoked an understanding of governmental structures the most frequently as a theme with 92 overall references that manifested both abstract understandings of freedom and democracy mixed with an understanding of the range of laws, policies, and initiatives technically available, even if women had difficulty
accessing them for themselves\(^2\). As I argue at the conclusion of chapter 3, what this level of understanding and reference suggests is that women who the PMP positioned as illiterate and isolated because of their rural position were by no means isolated by their indigenous language fluency or location to understand what the government could provide and how the local, provincial, and national governments offered a range of different services. The difference between positive and negative narratives was not one based on knowledge or lack of knowledge about these governmental structures: the attitude towards government was based on whether these structures were functional in that woman’s particular area and whether particular initiatives (such as Child Support Grants) were distributed equitably in their area.

The references to democracy and its related governmental structures in South Africa suggested that participating women conceived of their citizenship at a national level more vaguely than they conceived of their ability to be citizens within their local communities. No narrative referenced a conception of democracy or citizenship that extended beyond national boundaries (there were no references to globalization, for example, despite the constant influx of media available on television from the United States). The references to the national level – such as the equality of women in Parliament (mentioned once) were discussed more generally than references to specific and localized forms of democratic government. One participating woman had even held a democratically elected position of councilor for her township area in the recent past. Interestingly, few women referenced their tribal or linguistic affiliations, with only six references to “traditional” (what I might call pre- or para-colonial institutions) affiliation such as the role of area headmen, heritage, the royal kraal, or an accusation of witchcraft.

Unlike the transnational forms of citizenship the intermediary organizations have crafted for themselves through these projects, the women participating in the workshops conceived of
their citizenship within local and national boundaries.³

Not including the occurrence of the word “democracy” in the title of each narratives (which were all titled “What Democracy Means to Me” of course), I counted 19 references to democracy or the impact of democratic freedom amongst the narratives. From the narratives included references to laws and rights accorded to them 16 times and overwhelmingly referenced a number of aspects of government that existed to provide democracy, laws, and rights. These included references to government initiatives (15), government institutions (12), government broadly speaking (10), as well as governmentally elected officials (10). Although women conceived of government at local levels, there was far less reference to the community as a democratic structure (8 times) or to formal political party activity (only 2 references). This lack of a sense of community was one that I did not understand materially until the following week when I stayed in the township of Mahushu. As I described in Interchapter C - the physical formation of the township of Mahushu (and other townships in this rural area) is premised on proximity to the only paved highway in the area. In other words, it is likely challenging to form a sense of community or interconnectedness when townships developed to accommodate travel to and from towns for access to employment and other resources. Physically, most townships in the area resembled long yet narrow strips or tracts of development that paralleled the highway as opposed to possessing town commons, whether purely civic or commercial. But despite the range of civic literacies represented at the Mpumalanga province workshop, literacies that developed in response to and often in spite of local infrastructures, the PMP worked to discount and obscure them through the framing materials they produced.

The introduction began with a retelling of my first encounter with the Amazwi Abesifazane “memory cloth” project. My first encounter with what I came to understand as a
craft rhetoric project piqued my interest and, as a scholar in a field that is committed to understanding the processes of composition in addition to the meaning of its finished products, I sought to gain access and entry to CAS. I wanted to understand how nonprofit organizations assembled citizens together to create collective understanding and potentially collective action. Moreover, I wanted to understand a subset of organizations that seemed to recognize the rhetorical force in using handcrafted, material rhetoric to accomplish those forms of collective action across transnational boundaries. Underlying this interest was the recognition that nonprofit organizations had become an increasing force in the civic sector and that researching these organizations might offer insight into how citizenship may function in our contemporary moment in ways that looking to conceptions of citizenship based on the individual citizen as a unit of study may be too narrow a focus.

In the most recent report on the nonprofit sector, the National Center for Charitable Statistics of the Urban Institute shows that while the number of registered nonprofits increased by 19% from 1999 to 2009 in the United States, the number of “reporting nonprofits” (IRS-filing organizations with greater than $25,000 in gross receipts) grew 48% in the same period. In 2009, these nonprofits reported $1.87 trillion dollars in revenue alone – over $600 billion dollars more than the gross output of the entire retail industry in the United States for the same year.

When I looked beyond the United States and to transnational advocacy networks that circulated discourses of rights, democracy, and citizenship development between the Global North and South, I found the sphere of influence of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to be greater than I imagined. Moreover, most organizations seemed to embody a particularly puzzling conundrum: these NGOs that possessed very undemocratic operational structures were making claims to represent whole groups of people and interests. As James Ferguson describes
this phenomenon to explain unequal and privatized development in contemporary African nations, “substantial matters involving the policies of external donors have tended to be insulated from processes of representative democracy, often via the use of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), glossed as ‘civil society,’ as a kind of surrogate demos.”

Even with a professed mission to increase democratic abilities for the populations they serve, why would intermediary organizations based on a hierarchical, non-democratic operating model be uniquely positioned to foster democratic change and craft active, democratized citizenry? This critical question appears in the conclusion largely because I believe it is endemic to nongovernmental organizations operating in the United States and abroad. The United States Internal Revenue Service requires nonprofit organizations to possess a Board of Directors in order to be eligible for tax-exempt status (amongst several other necessary requirements), a structure in itself that is hierarchical.

Within the particular context of South Africa, through the intersection of the governmental with the nongovernmental that occurred when the PMP co-sponsored and ultimately co-opted the Amazwi Abesifazane project from CAS, I found a space where competing organizations worked to represent “marginalized” women of South Africa and position a craft rhetoric project as the ideal form of expression for them. Embracing a methodology of organizational ethnography, I was able to see the multiple populations and competing interests that these organizations worked to flatten for global consumption. Because this flattening of the civic sector was one based on an empowering message – that the voices of South African women were finally being heard after years of systematic oppression under the South African apartheid government and after – it was one that was appealing to believe based on CAS and PMP representation of it. Additionally, I found recent scholarship on South Africa in the field of rhetoric and composition reproducing
this flattening of the civic sector and failing to recognize what it meant for this democratic nation to shape itself in an age of privatization and global intervention. A moment from the closing ceremony of the PMP Mpumalanga Province workshop in March 2008 presents a compelling retort to the PMP’s claims to empower grassroots women through the “Voices of Women” project.

During the final morning of the Mpumalanga province workshop, the PMP organized a mid-morning tea that mirrored the opulence of the opening banquet held a few nights before. The tables and chairs in the Mthunzi Lodge hall were covered in white cloths; red vases filled with dyed orange and yellow tall grasses dotted each table and matched the red and orange napkin accents. At the front of the room a projector flashed images from the week’s workshop, memorializing an event that was still happening. Before PMP staff invited the women workshop participants into the room they ushered them outside for local and national media representatives to conduct one last photo shoot and interviews with participating women. It was hard not to think of the narratives that had emerged over the week and feel that much of the ceremonial aspects the PMP planned flaunted an affluence and access to resources that remained so inaccessible, particularly in a rural province like Mpumalanga. It would be an invited speaker who would voice this critique aloud and the question of representation during the ceremony.

When Cathy Dlamini, the Chairperson of the Women’s Council for Ehlanzani, got up to receive a plaque thanking her for her commitment to the “Voices of Women” project (she had worked to arrange for participants from her area to attend), she confronted PMP organizers Masenya and van Louw about the value of the project. She warned them that while this project seemed good, that the cloths may not really represent the rural areas from which they were produced – that there was a falseness to ask the women to come to the Lodge, rather than have
the Parliament travel to where the participating women lived. To truly see the conditions the narratives touched upon, she argued, the Parliament had to see for itself because reaching “60 women in Mpumalanga was nothing.” Near the close of her challenging speech she said, speaking for women she represented from Ehlanzani, “I would not really like a piece of cloth, a frame, whatever they are doing, I would really like housing.”

When Masenya, who was emceeing the tea that morning for the PMP, got up after Dlamini she was unphased and said to Dlamini directly: “you words were wonderful.” She also promised that the PMP would take note of her criticisms and the project’s limitations. However, in the report the PMP compiled about the Mpumalanga Province workshop, this recognition of limitation never manifests – instead the project unequivocally proclaims its ability to speak for women from the province and give a “voice to the voiceless.” Although Masenya encouraged the participating women to return to their communities and share what they had learned with others, what she and the rest of the PMP rarely acknowledged over the week were the local context may or may not foster opportunities or limitations for what they had learned.

Besides, what had they learned over the week, I wondered? What had this been about if, as Dlamini suggested and the democracy cloths from the workshop affirmed, basic services and equitable treatment for all South Africans was required for access to citizenship over a five day workshop model. Why had the PMP chosen the CAS workshop model as a conduit for democratic expression? And why would the project report that the PMP produced contain very few images of the cloths – a central focus of the week – and instead focus on individual snippets of narratives framed in polite requests for the various Portfolio Committees?

As the transportation arrived shortly after the conclusion of the tea, the women began to assemble based on where they lived in the province so the contracted vans could take them home.
The Mthunzi Lodge, though only a few hours away from where most participating women lived, was vastly far away from those locations in terms of resources (the plumbing, the electricity, the excess of food). After all of the participants had departed the PMP staff sat down with me for an interview as I questioned Masenya and van Louw about how the week and the collaboration with CAS was working for PMP. They declared both the workshop and the larger project an unqualified success. They would go on to take the raw materials produced at the workshop and send them out to staff within the PMP organization for translation, digital manipulation, and otherwise commit considerable resources for new content creation that would produce volumes of suggestions for Parliamentary Portfolio Committees couched in what these committees “could” do as opposed to what they should do.

In the previous pages I have offered a methodology in which to study not only handcrafted rhetoric projects, but one that can be applied to the study of organizational intermediaries working to represent targeted groups to the public sphere other organizations. By asking the field of rhetoric and composition to pay attention to and question how these intermediaries work to centralize material, frame meaning, and craft forms of citizenship, it also insists that the field needs to take into greater account what Edward Said described in Orientalism as “strategic formations of text” that work to create discourse. What his study of discourses the West produced about Eastern culture revealed is an insight that scholars can extend to the study of organizational rhetorics: that these discourses reveal more about the ways in which power works to shape knowledge and institutional discourses, and therefore reveal more about the organizations themselves than providing any “veridic discourse” about the subjects represented themselves.

In other words, my study of the Amazwi project – and its use of a set theme, set materials,
and set exhibition practices – revealed more about the beliefs and practices of CAS and PMP than it revealed any true or lasting insight into the women who participated in these projects over five-day workshops. In each instance the multimodal narrative genre and theme introduced to the participating women was a composition form they had no idea they would be asked to produce before the first morning of the workshop. Moreover, these women were given little time or information to process what it meant to be asked to embroider their names and have photographs of themselves attached publicly to narrative compositions that may reveal intensely painful memories or intensely vivid descriptions of what rights they continue to be denied in a democratic South Africa.

This discovery – that the craft rhetoric project that had moved me from afar was actually shaped significantly by processes of intermediation and unequal social relationships – challenged my beliefs fundamentally. It was not ethically possible for me to further the argument that the Amazwi project was intrinsically empowering for participating South African women. My method of organizational ethnography allowed me to recognize this revelation through the trust I was able to gain with research participants (in large part because I made myself vulnerable by telling them narratives about myself and how craft had influenced my life and relationship with my mother).

In order to identify the ways in which intermediary organizations perform the three related functions of centralizing material, framing meaning, and crafting citizenship, my dissertation argues that we need to examine rhetoric’s materialities and understand that distinctions between materiality may also distinguish project participants and organizational intermediaries. Rhetorical choices are structured by processes of intermediation that can both work to create a powerful, unified message at the same time it may work to erase or silence dissent or counter-
publics that may emerge within rhetorical movements. How aware is the public, for example, of Cleve Jones’ outspoken critique of the AIDS Memorial quilt after the Project NAMES Foundation terminated his position on the Board of Directors? Instead, with the passage of time, the organization has quietly worked to transform a craft rhetoric project from an activist text that offered on-site participation to an epideictic text. At the same time, my examination of the Clothesline Project reveals that not all intermediaries work to centralize material in the same way or work to shape “master archives” of meaning – instead, each distributed group that decides to make a clothesline may negotiate some choices about how they will structure participation for the project.

My research on intermediaries was largely one premised on access to the participating craft producers: language barriers and short term project engagement prevented me from understanding or researching completely why individual participants would choose to engage in this project and to what levels they actually feel connected to the crafted representations that organizations were reframing and intermediating on their behalf. The interesting thing about each of the craft rhetoric projects I research in this study is how much they work to distance individual participants from the audiences that engage with craft rhetoric projects. In all three of the case studies that I examined early on, the resistance arpilleras, the AIDS Memorial Quilt, and the Clothesline Project, the identities of individual crafters are purposefully and strategically removed from the crafted items. This is justified in part to protect anonymity – from retribution from the Chilean government, from the early and arguably continuing silence and stigmatization of the HIV/AIDS experience, and from the identification of women as victims of violence – but this anonymization also disables audiences from understanding the multiple motivations and composing decisions that may be behind project participation. Instead intermediary
organizations fill this anonymity up with collective and unified messages that participants may or may not have consented to with their participation. With the case of CAS and PMP – even with the name of the project participant stitched onto the cloth itself – the organizations capitalize on the knowledge they have picked a population to work with that rarely possesses the means or the access to advocate for project meaning within a public sphere, let alone travel to the exhibitions where their cloths are displayed. In our contemporary moment, it is easier for representations of the “vulnerable” or “marginalized” to circulate than it is for many citizens themselves, particularly of nations located within the Global South to circulate. That each craft rhetoric project I examined makes related claims that participation provides a healing process for participants who have endured trauma or loss without substantiating this claim with further evidence is also a problem, as Blair and Michel’s recent scholarship demonstrates.14

As much as I situate craft rhetoric projects within contemporary, neoliberal forms of citizenship, my research has revealed areas of further research into craft-based rhetoric projects that stretch back for at least 150 years and that have almost exclusively focused on women and children as subjects in need of development through them. Barbara Cruikshank’s The Will to Empower: Democratic Citizens and Other Subjects identifies the “will to empower” in the “shift from Christian charity to social work as a guiding principle of philanthropy in the nineteenth century.”15 I suspect strong connections between arguments made in the 19th century for home economics education and the disciplining of immigrant bodies through craftwork to contemporary craft rhetoric projects today.

At the same time I see a need for historiographical research into craft rhetoric projects in line with recent investigations into alternative sites of rhetorical education, I also see significant extension of this research in rhetoric and composition to ask us to question service learning
composition pedagogies that emerge as many of us ask our students to engage in writing about, for, or with nonprofit organizations situated in our campus communities and across the globe. Recognizing the reach and representational capacity that nonprofit and governmental organizations possess as intermediaries does not mean critiquing apart from them: instead my pedagogical practice advocates that as researchers we need to become more active in working with the organizations as we structure reciprocal learning and service experiences for students.

As much as I critique CAS in the second chapter, I continue to work with the organization at the same time my relationship with them has helped me develop criteria I may hold before becoming involved in future nonprofit administrative work. As someone who researches grants and other funding opportunities for CAS, I advocate for changes in organizational and representational practices as they continue to develop future goals and projects. In Spring 2011 I integrated my research with CAS into a community based course through the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign College of Engineering’s Learning in Community program. Over the course of the semester, undergraduate and masters students worked on three related projects: creating marketing materials, a database schematic, and a digital exhibition space for CAS. The course was structured around a syllabus of framing assignments that I could not set because of my position as a teaching assistant for a larger program, but that was not the only intermediating factor that hindered the “success” of this community-based project. I soon found myself concerned that the course and student dispositions that developed were "unwittingly replicate[ing] the social structures that are a part of the problem, defining some people as the knowledgeable servers while casting others as the clients, patients, or the educationally deficient – the served.”

This phenomenon, which I encountered frequently over my two years on the planning
board for the University of Illinois Alternative Spring Break organization, arises when those of us situated within university structures position ourselves as experts with knowledge to distribute or give to organizations or individuals that need our “help.” What my two years of service with Alternative Spring Break and my interactions with CAS had worked to teach me was that I did not yet have the critical curriculum to share with my students: how could I structure the service learning opportunities I wanted to continue developing so that participants doing the “service” would recognize that they were also doing much of the “learning”? I wasn’t convinced it was simply a matter of changing the terms from “service” to “community.” In other words, how could I more formalize the lesson I had to learn on my first day in the CAS office that it was more appropriate for me to ask questions than to advocate for whether or not the organization should be “correcting” the narratives of participating workshop participants?

My experience with a second section of a Learning in Community course collaborating with CAS in the Fall of 2011 that involved only three students revealed to me more largely that college-based service-learning has and continues to struggle with achieving a balance and interplay between the positions and desires of everyone involved. As I stepped back to assume the role of project partner in distinction to teaching assistant, I saw quickly that students producing drafts of grant proposals for me to critique were simply not accustomed to having to revise or redo work for an active purpose. On one occasion I provided feedback similar to the kind of feedback that I might provide in my first year composition courses during a first draft stage and I never received a revision for the grant proposal that had been started. How can a service learning course where community organizations or other respondents may provide challenging feedback (that a pamphlet a student has designed is not appropriate or needs further development, for example) if the dominant model of assignment completion for that student are
one-time assignments? Ultimately as we research and teach within institutions that are nonprofit organizations, we have to examine our own practices as intermediaries – as conduits for learning and representations of learning we accomplish across university and community sites.

Notes:

1 Gabrielle Burton, *Searching for Tamsen Donner* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 261.

2 Data based on a content analysis I performed on the textual narratives of the cloths.

3 This may make instances of xenophobic violence directed at non-South African Africans (including riots that took place in Johannesburg and Durban areas in May of 2008 shortly after my departure) more understandable. In other words, despite South African activist Steve Biko’s work with the Black Consciousness movement in the 1970s before his murder in custody by the South African police force in 1977, a universal Black or African identity was not apparent amongst the narratives.


7 In particular see my critique of Jacqueline Jones Royster’s recent research in Chapter 2.
She was referring to the overall number of women participating, which suggested to me that PMP had failed to differentiate to the presenters that day that only 30 were participating in the “Voices of Women” national project focused on the democracy theme.


Tshephiso Masenya and Illane van Louw, interviewed by Martha Webber, tape recording, March 18, 2008.


Ibid., 6.


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