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**Women's Work: Stitching New Identity Narratives in Conflict and Post-Conflict Settings**

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WOMEN’S WORK: STITCHING NEW IDENTITY NARRATIVES IN CONFLICT AND POST-CONFLICT SETTINGS

by

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B.A., Gustavus Adolphus College, 2001
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ARIELLE ANN SEMMEL, for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in COMMUNICATION STUDIES, presented on MAY 10, 2016, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: WOMEN’S WORK: STITCHING NEW IDENTITY NARRATIVES IN CONFLICT AND POST-CONFLICT SETTINGS

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Suzanne Daughton

Here, I bring communication theories into conversation with peace and conflict scholarship. Specifically, I explore how the ways in which women narrate their experiences of violent conflict through sewing collectives can inform conflict transformation work. I engage in this exploration within the framework of narrative theory, using Kenneth Burke’s dramatistic pentad to analyze the narratives presented in a selection of textile pieces created by women in Chile, South Africa, and Northern Ireland. I situate this project within literature pertaining to feminist approaches to rhetoric, discussions of bridgework in identity negotiation from intercultural communication, concerns related to conflict transformation, and work with socially engaged art. Finally, I bring these analyses into conversation with one another to consider how women rhetors may inform conflict transformation through their textile work. In particular, I discuss how each of these rhetors offers the narrative elements to reconstitute collective identities, providing an avenue toward peace in their own settings.

Keywords: conflict transformation, narrative, constitutive rhetoric, visual rhetoric, feminist rhetoric, identity negotiation, socially engaged art, sewing
DEDICATION

I offer this work in recognition of all the women who weave peace in the world, on the large and the small looms, especially those I have had the good fortune to have known.
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Suzanne Daughton, thank you for your care, empathy, and labor in guiding me through this project. And thank you for your calm confidence in response to my idealistic interpretations of the time-space continuum. Thank you Nilanjana Bardhan, Jonathan Gray, and Nathan Stucky for your inductions into communication theory and the welcome you have offered me from within it. Barbara Bickel, thank you for helping me realize the art of holding space.

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Thank you to my dear friends, too many to name here. From your gentle inquiries about my work to helping me dissect complex theory, your conversations have helped me formulate and develop my thinking on this project.

To everyone who has taught me to sew and everyone who has sewn with me, I think of you with every stitch, for your presence has fortified me.
PREFACE

Stories, whether they are the stories we tell or the ones we listen to, help us understand the world and our place in it. In the research I present here, I have attempted to engage with the stories of women who have done amazing, brave, and powerful work that has contributed to peace in this world. I believe that their examples may provide valuable resources for those who are looking to find their own place within the stories that surround them. At the same time, I acknowledge that this particular telling is my own. All stories are interpretations of past events, arranged in ways that provide order and meaning to the teller. Here, I have drawn from others’ stories, selected particular pieces from herstories and histories, and engaged with a variety of academic theories. I have arranged these narrative elements in a way that helps me make sense of the intertwining worlds of academia and peace work, and my place within those worlds. I offer this story, this particular telling, as a beginning. I look forward to the conversations with others that are to come, conversations that will add to and challenge this telling. I invite you, reader, to teach me new tellings of this story.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Like most days my sewing circle meets, I arrive earlier than the others. It has been a while since our last meeting and I am not quite ready to begin sewing again. Instead, I pause to plan my next panels, drawing the scenes that I will later sew into my memory cloth of events that shaped my life during my first year as a doctoral student. As the other members of my sewing circle enter I offer a quieter greeting than usual. I later apologize for my subdued welcome, explaining that I was drawing out my grandmother’s funeral, a scene I refer to in my mind as, “Grandpa will always have to be learning that his wife of nearly seventy years is dead.” I share my plans. Here is the casket; I will use a block of brownish fabric in this shape, but I will need to stitch lines along here to show dimension. Here are the yellow roses that sat on top of the casket; I will make those with thin yellow ribbon and use a new stitch I had seen in a book to make the leaves. Here is my grandfather in his wheelchair, in front of the casket where my aunts had put him; that day, all I could think as I watched him was that, on account of his dementia, he would spend the rest of his life always learning anew that Grandma had died. As I share the details of this panel, the telling of the story becomes a story in itself. It is a story that belongs not only to me, but to the other members of the sewing circle, as well, much like their stories have become mine. In this way, the group members and myself have come to belong to each other in this space. My memory cloth, once completed, will serve as a record of not only the events it depicts, but of the exchanges and changes that have occurred in the sewing circle as it was made.
I began hosting a weekly sewing circle in the spring of 2014, for many of the same reasons I began this research project. I was interested in how practices traditionally associated with the feminine, like sewing, could be used to create subversive spaces. In particular, although I live in a very different context, I am deeply inspired by women in a variety of conflict and post-conflict settings that have used sewing as a means to gather together, share their experiences of violence, and voice their visions for a different, more peaceful, future. I am convinced that these women offer valuable insights and methods for praxis in peacebuilding projects.

Unfortunately, a great deal of the research related to peacemaking focuses on official agreements signed by the leadership of conflicting parties. This focus means that the daily work of peacebuilding, the efforts to increase and improve communication among community members, is overlooked. In particular, the labor of women in these efforts is often dismissed or belittled. For example, while studying peace and conflict in Northern Ireland, I repeatedly heard that throughout the peace process negotiations there, on-the-ground cross-community work was often referred to as the “cucumber sandwiches” of diplomacy. That is, this work was seen as inconsequential women’s work, contrasted with the “real” peace work the men were conducting in drafting the Good Friday Agreement. While the contributions women make to peacemaking are gaining attention within the field of peace and conflict studies, research that investigates particular actions remains on the periphery. In addition, peace and conflict research tends to favor a practitioner’s outlook, focusing on the frameworks and processes that create opportunities for adversaries to interact with one another across differences. As a body, this research could benefit from incorporating communication theories to understand the nuances of what occurs during such interactions.
Here, I bring communication theories into conversation with peace and conflict scholarship. Specifically, I explore how the ways in which women narrate their experiences of violent conflict through sewing collectives can inform conflict transformation work. I engage in this exploration, using what literary theorist Kenneth Burke called dramatism to analyze the narratives presented in a selection of textile pieces created by women in differing conflict settings. I have chosen pieces from Chile, South Africa, and Northern Ireland, as each of these settings represents a different type of conflict, as well as different avenues for women’s involvement in sewing projects. I begin by situating this project within literature pertaining to feminist approaches to rhetoric, discussions of bridgework in identity negotiation from intercultural communication, concerns related to conflict transformation, and work with socially engaged art. From there, I discuss narrative as my theoretical framework and provide an overview of my research methods. I then turn to my analysis of the textile pieces. Finally, I bring these analyses into conversation with one another to consider how women rhetors may inform conflict transformation through their textile work. In particular, I discuss how each of these rhetors offers the narrative elements to reconstitute collective identities, providing an avenue toward peace in their own settings. Overall, it is my hope that centering the experiences of women who utilize the space of the sewing collective to negotiate and express a post-conflict identity, to offer new narratives for their communities, both highlights their labor and suggests a method to accomplish this work in other conflict settings.

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1 Here I use “socially engaged art,” unhyphenated, following the stylistic conventions of theorists in the field, particularly scholar Pablo Helguera who has written extensively on the practice.
Literature Review

In *The Subversive Stitch*, art historian Rosika Parker argues that women have long used needlework to make meaning in their lives. She laments the ways in which “embroidery and a stereotype of femininity have become collapsed into one another, characterized as mindless, decorative and delicate; like the icing on the cake, good to look at, adding taste and status, but devoid of significant content” (6). To counter the dismissal of needlework, Parker dedicates her work to chronicling ways in which women throughout history have spoken of, with, and back to their experiences through embroidery. Likewise, folklorist Linda Pershing, in her analysis of the Ribbon around the Pentagon anti-nuclear action, notes that Ribbon makers, whether or not they were conscious of it, were part of a long lineage of needleworkers using their piecework to respond to contemporary political and social issues. Moreover, she argues that:

> the expression of social and political concerns through the fabric arts represents an attempt by women to make themselves visible on their own terms, to re-present themselves. This tradition involves both *action*, by breaking the silence and reclaiming their right to express their views, and *style*, by using media that are not conventionally associated with political commentary by the dominant culture. (Pershing 184)

That is, in taking up the needle as a form of social action, women claim a forum in which to speak. The challenge for audiences becomes learning how to hear and respond to these women’s commentary in the context of broader society unaccustomed to recognizing this style of communication.

I find four bodies of literature particularly useful to understanding how women have used sewing to work toward peace. First, feminist approaches to rhetoric offer insights into the stylistic and strategic choices employed by women rhetors, including the validation of sewing as
a means of communication. At the same time, few examples of rhetorical criticism of sewing are available. Second, identity and identity negotiation have been core to intercultural communication scholarship from the inception of the field, moving toward a more recent focus on bridgework. While these discussions offer important theoretical grounding, they could benefit from more case studies demonstrating how these concepts can be operationalized. Third, conflict transformation research offers theoretical approaches to peace work; however, women’s roles in this work tend to remain on the peripheries. Finally, socially engaged art practice represents a useful frame to explore the role of creative endeavors, like sewing, in conflict transformation efforts. Bringing this work into conversation with the others offers a grounding of the theoretical approaches.

Feminist Rhetoric

Sewing collectives, whether informal gatherings or structured workshops, provide opportunities for individuals to come together, exchange stories, and pass on skills of the craft. In addition, they are significant spaces for world-making through communication, arenas in which individuals may develop and enact ways of relating to one another through their conversations and textile creations. Yet sewing is rarely considered as a site of academic inquiry, or, if it is, it is treated as a women’s interest “alternative” to mainstream study. Feminist rhetoricians have sought to address such exclusion of women’s communicative practices from mainstream academic study. According to communication scholar Michaela D.E. Meyer, feminist rhetoric represents:

- a commitment to reflexive analysis and critique of any kind of symbol use that orients people in relation to other people, places, and practices on the basis of gendered realities or gendered cultural assumptions. (3, emphasis original)
Meyer goes on to identify two primary approaches to feminist rhetoric: 1) “writing women in” to the rhetorical canon and 2) “challenging rhetorical standards” to expand theory (2).

Writing women into the rhetorical canon challenges the androcentrism of traditional approaches to rhetoric that privilege men as rhetors and present masculine communication styles as most worthy of attention. In addition, the inclusion of women in the canon increases the visibility of women’s public address and thereby forces an expansion of the types of speakers and artifacts that are considered rhetorical (Campbell “The Rhetoric of Women’s Liberation”; Meyer 2-4). This positioning of women as rhetors allows for the expansion of existing rhetorical theory, such as the argument for a “feminine style” of address. An example of such work can be found in Karlyn Kohrs Campbell’s study of early feminist rhetoric, Man Cannot Speak for Her. In this work, Campbell argues that activist women around the turn of the twentieth century developed a particular rhetorical style in response to the social conventions of that time (12-15). Beyond acknowledging the social constraints placed on women rhetors, such work reclaims a history of radical activism and highlights the limitations of an androcentric approach to public address (George, Weiser, and Zepernick 12).

This work from Campbell and others (see, for example, Dow and Tonn; George, Weiser, and Zepernick; Gring-Pemble; Griffin; and Tonn) has validated women as rhetors. At the same time, Meyer notes that adding women into the canon can become reduced to simple tokenism and that the majority of the women “written in” to the canon have been White (7, 4). In addition, most of these studies focus on verbal communication – written or oral – as the primary mode of public address conducted by women, leaving out a wide range of other communicative activities. Taken together, these critiques highlight the limits of writing women into the rhetorical canon in terms of disrupting dominant, androcentric approaches to rhetoric.
Other feminist scholars have focused on this very issue, using their research as a means to challenge rhetorical standards. These scholars are interested in reviewing the criteria used to assess rhetorical acts and artifacts as a means to investigate why some rhetors are considered significant while others remain excluded. Their work investigates how and why women who adopt more masculine communication styles and forms are more likely to be considered “effective communicators” (Biesecker 145; Meyer 5, 8). Offering a challenge to rhetorical standards includes noting that the rhetorical strategies women employ in both public and private settings call for an expansion of the field of public address and current rhetorical theory to reflect the experiences of women rhetors (Foss and Foss 29-32; Foss, Foss, and Griffin 7).

An example of such work can be seen in Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin’s proposal of invitational rhetoric. Foss and Griffin question the presumption that persuasion, an expression of domination and control, should necessarily be seen as the goal of all rhetorical acts. Drawing from analysis of the rhetorical acts performed by women (and often others speaking from a variety of marginalized identities), they propose invitational rhetoric, which:

…constitutes an invitation to the audience to enter the rhetor’s world and to see it as the rhetor does…Ideally, audience members accept the invitation offered by the rhetor by listening to and trying to understand the rhetor’s perspective and then presenting their own. (5)

Through the two primary forms of “offering” and “creating external conditions” to encourage audience engagement, the goal of invitational rhetoric is mutual understanding (7, 5). Importantly, because it operates outside the domination often implied by persuasive rhetoric, invitational rhetoric “enables rhetors to disengage from the dominance and mastery so common to a system of oppression and to create a reality of equality and mutuality in its place, allowing
for options and possibilities not available within the familiar, dominant framework” (17). While this sort of challenge to dominant approaches to rhetoric opens up many possibilities for rhetorical theory, Meyer points out that attempts to reposition rhetorical theories can be viewed as overly idealistic and risk categorically defining feminine communication as good and masculine practices as bad (8).

The study of sewing as a feminine communicative practice can be connected to both approaches to feminist rhetoric. Several scholars have argued for the expansion of rhetorical theory to incorporate sewing and sewing collectives as legitimate areas of study. As Marsha Houston and Cheris Kramarae state in relation to sewing, weaving, and embroidery, “rather than call them ‘alternative means of expression’ let’s call them expression” (395). In Women Speak: The Eloquence of Women’s Lives, Sonja and Karen Foss discuss quilting, highlighting the collaborative and relationship-focused nature of women’s communication in such work (268-273). Cheris Kramarae relates sewing to technology, outlining the variety of meanings women have ascribed to the activity over time, the role it has played in providing a communal space for women to communicate with one another, and the role technological advancements in sewing machines have played in disrupting those women-oriented spaces (147-160). While these works make a compelling case for sewing as a common communicative practice and therefore worthy of rhetorical criticism, there are few studies actually offering that criticism. That is, while the criteria of the rhetorical canon are challenged, the canon itself remains unchanged.

A few scholars in other fields have addressed this lacuna. In The Subversive Stitch, art historian Rosika Parker traces the history of how the act of embroidering came to signify ideal femininity. However, she warns against an oversimplified view of embroidery as a symbol of
women’s oppression and instead argues for a nuanced reading of the art (13). In particular, she calls for more attention to the iconography employed by women, noting that:

the enormous popularity of certain images at different moments indicates that they had specific importance and powerful resonance for the women who chose to stitch them…What a picture conveys often relates to the needs of a woman’s class as much as to her experience as a woman at that time, as well as to the dominant concerns of contemporary paintings and to the history of embroidery. (12)

Throughout her study, Parker investigates individual textile pieces to discuss the ways in which each piece conforms to and/or resists contemporary constructs of femininity.

Linda Pershing, a folklorist, provides a comprehensive analysis of women’s participation in the Ribbon around the Pentagon project. The project invited individuals to contribute textile panels that were connected to form a ribbon to wrap around the Pentagon in a demonstration against nuclear weapons. The Ribbon encircled the building but was carefully arched over doorways in a mutually agreed-upon accommodation that met the needs of those working in the building while respecting the intentions of the Ribbon organizers. In outlining antecedents to the Ribbon, Pershing notes:

Embedding social and political expression in seemingly innocuous or artistic activities can disguise the fact that such endeavors may have deeper and more subversive meanings than the obvious ones. Although at times the fabric arts have conveyed explicit political messages, even in these situations the messages were muffled or at least mediated by the form. Dissent, patriotic support, or critical commentary are somehow softened when expressed through fabric. (185)
Building on work from Joan N. Radner and Susan S. Lanser, Pershing argues that sewing represents a form of coding in which rhetors use particular signifiers that protect them from negative responses that more direct expression of their views might attract (185-187). To support this, Pershing decodes the messages sewn into several Ribbon panels. She pairs her analysis with interviews with several women who describe their choice to participate in the Ribbon as connected to a feeling that it was non-confrontational, did not add fuel to people’s anger about the nuclear arms race, and avoided direct criticism that the women were stepping outside of their boundaries. Ribbon organizers spoke to the value of this approach in their interviews, emphasizing their desire to create a project that was inviting to women who had felt alienated by the negative and confrontational nature of anti-war protests of the 1970s. While the form of a quilted ribbon appeared non-confrontational, Pershing demonstrates in her analysis of the panels that many of the encoded messages that the women sewed were in fact quite radical in nature (Chapter 7).

The two approaches to feminist rhetoric – writing women in and challenging rhetorical standards – often appear at odds with one another, with scholars debating the values and risks of each. However, these approaches need not be mutually exclusive and, in fact, can benefit from one another. The more women are positioned as significant communicators, the more opportunities scholars have to consider how women’s communicative practices call for revisions to rhetorical theory. At the same time, an increase in rhetorical theories that reflect a range of women’s communicative practices could provide more opportunities for increased diversity in the representation of women rhetors. Here, I draw upon and seek to provide further support to the expansion of rhetorical criteria to include sewing as a powerful form of public address. In doing
so, I hope to also expand the rhetorical canon by recognizing the women who have worked in various conflict settings as significant communicators.

Identity Negotiation

As sites to enact meaning-making through communication, sewing and sewing collectives can serve as spaces for individuals to develop, change, and express their personal and group identities. The field of intercultural communication has addressed questions of identity since its inception. In particular, theorists have focused on the role of difference in the formation and communication of identity. Early work addressed how individuals experience difference in intercultural communication settings (see Collier and Thomas; Leeds-Hurwitz; Kim; and Ting-Toomey). Later scholars, influenced by postmodern and postcolonial movements, explored the ways in which experiences of being and being seen as different actually serves to shape cultural identity (see Hecht, et al.; Muñoz; Stuart Hall “Cultural Identity”). More recently, several scholars have pointed to the limits of difference-based identity constructs in intercultural communication, particularly in relation to bridge-building across differences. They point to the negative connotation that has been constructed around the idea of difference (Sarup; Warren) and note that this negative construction has bred an oppositional identity politics that has stagnated in the same binary logics that produced it (Grossberg 88). These critiques have birthed a variety of proposals for moving forward.

Stuart Hall has written extensively on this matter from a cultural studies perspective. In his introduction to *Questions of Cultural Identity*, recognizing identity as socially constructed, Hall calls for theorizing that focuses less on delineating the characteristics of particular identities and more on the process of identification itself; that is, he asks for theory that explains the means through which individuals identify with others. For example, in “Old and New identities, Old
and New Ethnicities,” he argues for a politics of living identity through difference based on an understanding of identity as fluid. Living identity through difference allows for strategic alliances with others to form and dissolve as needed. In “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” Hall explains how the fluidity of identity can be understood through Derrida’s notion of différance. For Hall, différance suggests that when we ascribe meaning to something in a present moment, we leave out many other meanings that could be ascribed to that thing, although the potential for those other meanings to be called upon for a new interpretation at another moment remains (“Cultural Identity” 229-30). In the countless alternate meanings that remain, the notions of difference and sameness become fluid and entangled. This understanding of the constant breaking and remaking of identity gives individuals the opportunity to come together in strategic alliances that emphasize sameness for political purposes without committing to a rigid identity for the long-term. Hall does caution that these moments of alliance need to occur with the recognition that varying experiences of group members create a multiplicity of differences within any given identity marker around which groups of individuals choose to organize (“Old and New” 57-58; see also Weedon Chapters 6-7).

Other theorists have moved away from conceptualizations of identity and agency as rooted in the individual. As noted above, communication scholar Lawrence Grossberg highlights the ways in which common understandings of identity are built upon modernist logics that create a binary of opposition: identities of the oppressed in opposition to identities of oppressors. This binary thinking leads to a politics of resistance tied to identity; one can only address power imbalances from an identity that one may only claim through the embodiment of specified characteristics. This binary thinking, Grossberg claims, “cannot tell us how to interpellate various fractions of the population in different relations to power into the struggle for change”
That is, identity restricted to embodiment and opposition severely limits opportunities for building connections across differences. Grossberg argues instead for a logic of singularity, where identity is not internal, contained within an individual body, but rather external. This external identity is comprised of an individual’s belonging to a community through conviction and action, not biology (including the socially-constructed cultural meanings of biology) (102-05).

Intercultural communication scholar Aimee Carrillo-Rowe takes this notion of identity through belonging further, arguing for a “differential belonging” to engage in a politics of relation that opens space for the renegotiation of social hierarchies. Carrillo-Rowe calls on readers to move away from their identities as individuals and toward identity as situated in connections with, in leaning toward, others. For Carrillo-Rowe, belonging involves identifying to whom one is (or desires to be) accountable, and belongings are many and changing. Belongings may even be contradictory, but ultimately, “belonging is about where you long to belong” (27). Importantly, “who[m] we love, the communities that we live in, who[m] we expend our emotional energies building ties with – these connections are all functions of power” (16). This means that spaces of belonging can function as spaces of resistance to hegemonic manifestations of power, spaces to create a power with rather than a power over, through critical reflection on the nature of belonging. That is, belonging creates opportunities to renegotiate social relationships.

Belongings that enable members to communicate across traditional boundaries of identity – race, gender, class, sexuality, ability, etc. – “are political because they provide a forum in which to rework power through critical and intimate modes of relations across lines of difference” (Carillo-Rowe 23). Identity as belonging creates opportunities for bridge-building
that embraces differences, allowing “us to remake our assumptions and widen our vision of the political field” and enact a politics of relation that “asks us to interrogate how we may hold ourselves accountable for who we are (becoming, as a function of belonging), and the collective conditions out of which our agency, experience, and consciousness emerge” (36, 15). That is, the act of holding oneself accountable to others requires an engagement with the interconnectedness of self and other and the recognition that the self we become is formed by the others to whom we belong. Intercultural communication scholars Miriam Sobré-Denton and Nilanjana Bardhan build on this line of thought in their theorization of cosmopolitan peoplehood. They argue that differential belonging, through its leaning toward the edge of the self, allows the self to be decentered and open to “critical self-transformation through non-violent entanglements between Self and Others” (65).

While intercultural communication scholars have devoted much attention to developing theoretical approaches to the formation and expression of identity, fewer have focused on the spaces in which these activities take place. Fewer still have given considerable attention to sewing as a site of identity work. A notable exception to this is communication scholar Dwight Conquergood’s consideration of the performativity of sewn objects. In “Fabricating Culture: The Textile Art of Hmong Refugee Women,” Conquergood provides an ethnographic account of Hmong story cloths, drawing on research conducted at refugee camps in Thailand and in refugee communities in Chicago. In this account, he argues that the act of sewing itself represents a performance in that the cloths serve to communicate within and across cultural contexts. In addition, textile pieces like the Hmong story cloths are a part of a larger performance by prompting an oral telling of the events depicted in the stitches. Conquergood notes that the themes of the narratives depicted by the story cloths have shifted based on context, from a
functional role in ritual before conflict to a means to describe the refugee experience after, from speaking to an intracultural audience to an intercultural one. In this way, the Hmong story cloths represent “an open-ended text that draws together a complex weave of historical, economic, artistic, social, and political forces” (210).

Conquergood’s study serves as an important example of how sewn texts can be analyzed as a means to understand how identity may be shaped and changed by the experience of conflict. Following this thread, I aim to provide texture to theoretical discussions of identity work through an exploration of sewing. However, Conquergood focuses on how textiles perform culture rather than on how they may be used to intentionally develop new cultural narratives. I explore this sort of intentional use of sewing as bridgework in my own project.

*Conflict Transformation*

In her introduction to *Stitching Resistance: Women, Creativity, and Fiber Arts*, poet and human rights activist Marjorie Agosín notes that women in a variety of conflict settings turned to fiber arts to heal, to empower themselves, and to express their visions of a more peaceful future (x-xi). These activities are essential elements of peacebuilding efforts. The field of peacebuilding has been developing as a body of theory in response to violent conflicts at the global, regional, and local levels since the 1950s, led by practitioners in social justice movements and theorists in international relations and organizational management (Francis 6). Peace theorists typically understand conflict as the outcome and cause of change, and particularly as a means to change oppressive relationships toward more just relationships (Francis 27; Lederach *Little Book* 4). Conflict is recognized as a natural and inevitable component of human relationships, but, sometimes in contrast to other approaches (see, for example, Marean), peace theorists argue that destructive and violent responses to conflict are not inevitable. For example, Elise Boulding and
Daisaku Ikeda, whose work focuses on the development of a culture of peace, argue that, while conflict is an element in all societies, it is socialization rather than biology that leads people to turn to violent solutions to their conflicts (115-116).

Culture, however, should not be seen as the sole cause of violence. Likewise, it is not culture alone that leads parties involved in conflict to turn toward peace. Often, the dynamics of conflict itself play a significant role. In *The Structure of International Conflict*, international relations scholar Christopher Mitchell argues that as conflicts escalate, they eventually reach a stalemate in which it becomes clear that neither party will be able to achieve their goals (Chapter 8). This stalemate was later referred to as a “hurting stalemate” by conflict theorist William Zartman to highlight the fact that, in addition to an inability to “win,” both parties often come to realize that the continuation of violence is actually hurting their cause, as their material resources and popular support dwindle (252). In conflict theory, the (hurting) stalemate is typically seen as the point at which those involved in the conflict begin to seek out alternatives to violence; this is the optimal time to initiate peacemaking and peacebuilding work. Peacebuilding entails the various practices and processes aimed at the prevention of, reduction of, and recovery from violent conflict (Francis 36). The work involves engaging in conflict through nonviolent means, decreasing direct violence and its impact on individuals, changing relationships through dialogue, and building the skills needed to carry the work forward (Schirch and Sewak 98).

Peacebuilding work is informed by Johann Galtung’s nuanced definition of peace. Galtung, an early pioneer in the field of peace studies, begins with the premise that peace entails generally agreed-upon social goals, acknowledging that those goals may be complex (9). He goes on to differentiate between negative and positive peace, where the former is the absence of direct violence and the latter is the presence of social justice, evident in the absence of structural
or systemic violence (13). For peace theorist John Paul Lederach, positive peace is “centered and rooted in the quality of relationships” (*Little Book 20*), both personal and systemic. Lederach calls for a moral imagination to engage in peacebuilding work that addresses both negative and positive peace. The moral imagination is comprised of several key components: the ability for individuals and communities, particularly those engaged in conflict, to view themselves as in relationship with one another; a relational mutuality that recognizes that this interconnectedness is the context in which the self is formed; humility to take personal responsibility for these relationships; and the willingness to take risks within those relationships. For Lederach, the moral imagination is the foundation for envisioning, and thereby making manifest, a more just social order (“Moral Imagination” 16-18).

Lederach’s moral imagination is connected to the approach to peacebuilding known as conflict transformation. The term “conflict transformation” is intended to recognize that 1) conflict is not something that can easily be resolved, managed, or avoided and 2) multiple and complex processes are required to address conflict in ways that create opportunities to form more just societies (Francis 6-7). As a field, conflict transformation is less a single strategy or theory and more a collection of theories, proposals, and practices (Kriesberg 52). In *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation*, Lederach discusses several elements of this collection. More than a prescribed set of techniques and practices, Lederach states that conflict transformation includes a different way of looking at social conflict, both its immediate circumstances and the background context (9-11). Overall, conflict transformation takes into account how conflict impacts and is impacted by personal, relational, structural, and cultural experiences. It seeks to minimize destruction and maximize productive responses to conflict at each level (Chapter 4).
Conflict transformation differs from traditional approaches to peacebuilding based on conflict resolution or conflict management. These approaches are often limited to resolving a specific issue or making a conflict more bearable rather than working to change relationships to be more just. Typically, they involve specific processes of mediation that may address the needs of those involved in a conflict, but fail to address power imbalances that may have contributed to the conflict. Peace activist and scholar Diana Francis argues that the practices involved in conflict resolution and conflict management overemphasize the choice involved in reaching a peace agreement and lead to the assumption that conflicting parties will naturally see themselves as interdependent (37-39). On the other hand, conflict transformation focuses on long-term, systemic change by working for the transition out of violent conflict and the reorganization of social relationships, including the redistribution of power (Francis 7-8; Kriesberg 50). Or, as Lederach describes it: “Resolution’s guiding question is this: How do we end something that is not desired?” and “Transformation’s guiding question is this: How do we end something not desired and build something we do desire?” (Little Book 29, 30, emphasis original).

Dialogue is central to building what is desired by establishing new social relationships. Conflict transformation begins with changing the way those involved in a conflict interact with one another (Kriesberg 54). Conflict, particularly violent conflict, often inhibits communication, making attempts at reconciliation difficult. For this reason, creating opportunities and spaces for individuals to engage in dialogue is integral to peacebuilding work (van Tongeren, Verhoeven, and Wake 87-89). The local organizations and activities that comprise civil society play an important role in this aspect of conflict transformation. The sector is particularly suited to the kind of grassroots bridge-building efforts for radical social change that brings individuals together across divides. Conflict transformation facilitator and trainer Catherine Barnes notes
that interest in the potential for civil society to contribute to peacebuilding efforts grew in the 1990s, as non-governmental organizations, donor agencies, and others increased their collective initiatives to address violent conflict (7-9). She defines this sector as “the web of social relations that exists in the space between the state, the market (activities with the aim of extracting profit), and the private life of families and individuals” (7). This web can be formally or informally structured and includes a range of actors, from those working through incorporated organizations to a gathering of private citizens. Civil society can function to foment or escalate violent conflict when members do not see other means to meet their needs, but it can also be a force for non-violent change (7).

Globally and locally, civil society fills a role in peacebuilding that other sectors cannot. Working outside traditional politics, civil society actors are independent and therefore more flexible and able to become involved in projects in which politicians are either unable or unwilling to participate. In addition, civil society can work to mobilize populations to put pressure on high-ranking officials to work for peace and to monitor peace processes (Barnes 15-16). Civil society also expands opportunities for engagement for a variety of actors from all sectors of society, particularly those who have been excluded from participation in formal institutions (van Tongeren, Verhoeven, and Wake 84). Finally, civil society plays an important role in engaging populations to envision what the future should look like to provide direction for conflict transformation. As Barnes notes:

Through the process of engaging with each other, people can determine how they will live in the world they share and give consent to the process through which they agree to be governed. This act of making and keeping agreements in all realms of life and the
willingness to coexist and engage peacefully and, occasionally, even joyfully is at the center of the roles played by civil society in working with conflict. (7)

Overall, small-scale projects sponsored by civil society actors make significant contributions to the reformation of social relationships that is necessary in peacebuilding initiatives.

Civil society actors can be limited in terms of political clout, scope, and technical skill (Barnes 21-22) and the support of governments, non-governmental organizations, donors, and other formal institutions is vital (van Tongeren, Verhoeven, and Wake 84-85). Still, most observers argue that a multi-track approach that incorporates high-level officials, mid-level leaders, and grassroots activists is necessary to transform a conflict (Barnes 22; Francis 246; Kriesberg 56; van Tongeren, Verhoeven, and Wake 85-86). That is, engaging all levels of society is essential, as the shifts in perceptions that leaders undergo in the course of peace talks do not always translate to the people who are affected by any agreements that may be signed (Francis 9). Formal documents and legislation are important, but incorporating the ethos of conflict transformation into people’s everyday lives is needed to ensure a lasting peace (Barnes 23; Kriesberg 55-60).

While women are rarely included in formal peace processes, as active participants in civil society they have always played a role in peacebuilding and their work in conflict transformation is receiving increasing attention. Peace theorists Lisa Schirch and Manjrika Sewak outline several key insights gained from such attention. In particular, they point to the realization that experiences of conflict are gendered and instigate changes in traditional gender roles and the acknowledgement that women and women’s networks are integral for creating lasting peace (99-100). While women are active in all levels of peacebuilding work, the simple actions they lead can often be the most powerful in terms of engaging individuals to highlight the dignity of all
(van Tongeren, Verhoeven, and Wake 90). For example, Schirch and Sewak point out that activities that bring women of different backgrounds together represent significant bridge-building opportunities (103). Sewing collectives have created opportunities for women to engage in identity negotiation in a variety of conflict and post-conflict settings. The scope of some of these projects may have been limited, but they nonetheless made significant contributions toward transforming the conflicts from which they grew. It is my hope that the current study will shed light on some of those contributions.

**Socially Engaged Art**

In discussing the Ribbon around the Pentagon project, Pershing notes that, unlike those who join in most protest events, the women who participated in the Ribbon formed relationships that extended beyond the day of the event. Gathering to share their skills with threads and needles, the women also shared their concerns about nuclear warfare and their hopes for the future, bringing them closer to one another across their differences (173). Intentional dialogue is difficult work that, particularly in conflict and post-conflict settings, calls for designated spaces (physical and cognitive) and processes to assist in the efforts. Socially engaged art projects have the potential to respond to this call. Beginning with the counter-establishment movements of the 1960s, artists began experimenting with new forms of art practice that drew on interdisciplinary understandings of critical theory, feminist critique, and pedagogy. Out of this mix grew what practitioner and theorist Pablo Helguera terms socially engaged art (SEA), an art practice that is marked by “its dependence on social intercourse as a factor of its existence” (2) and that “exists somewhere between art and non-art” (8). The form of SEA may vary from artist to artist, but the core component of engagement with others remains a constant. Socially engaged art is a collaborative art process that, according to artist Markuz Wernli Saitô, creates “a sense of
possibility – that is the space and opportunity to consider differently what life offers, and how to build alternative paths” and “promotes [the] citizen’s right and responsibility to be socially, personally active…and cultivate a critical engagement” (n.p.).

Socially engaged art often extends beyond traditional, gallery-friendly media. In many ways, SEA projects are process oriented, where the process itself is the product of the practice (Lacy 321). These “art projects that, in a much more humble way, offer a time and space for congregation and developing relationships also can serve an important role in helping diverse groups of people – neighbors, students, a group of artists – find commonalities through activities” (Helguera 18). That is, held space provides an arena for individuals to come together; the holding of this space becomes artwork. Critic Steven Durland suggests that such projects represent an ideal role for art. He argues that art relies on intimacy and presence, characteristics that counter mediated mass culture, and thus art “gives a voice to a local culture for a local culture” (149).

With deep connections to community, it can often be difficult to distinguish between social work, which “aim[s] for the betterment of humanity and support[s] ideals such as social justice…and the strengthening of human relationships,” and socially engaged art, which often “enhances tensions around those subjects, in order to provoke reflection” (Helguera 35). In other words, social work aims to enact positive peace in the form of social justice, understood as the equal distribution of power, resources, and equal access to participation in social institutions regardless of identity (Choules 463). Meanwhile, SEA is a collaborative art process that, according to Saitô, creates “a sense of possibility – that is the space and opportunity to consider differently what life offers, and how to build alternative paths.” Saitô goes on to state that SEA “promotes [the] citizen’s right and responsibility to be socially, personally active…and cultivate
a critical engagement” (n.p.). That is, SEA projects invite community members to engage with one another and envision new modes of being in community.

Socially engaged art projects are more than simple community-building activities. Artist Carol Becker laments the ways in which the private and public spheres have merged in the twenty-first century, where private disclosures have become spectacle, decontextualized from public discourses. At the same time, she points to how “artists have taken on the task of creating microutopian interventions” that “attempt to create physical manifestations of an ideal ‘humanity’ in an inhumane world” (“Microutopias” 71, 68) by disrupting this process. Such disruptions provide insights into the potential of holding space as an art practice and challenge common notions of what participation in community does and can entail. Importantly, such disruptions also impact the personal relationships of those involved and foster a sense of identity through connection and accountability to one another. This can occur not just across differences, but can influence the ways in which we perceive and perform those differences.

Since the process is the product in this art, conversation becomes a core medium in SEA. Helguera notes how the goal of a SEA project may be “to create a space in which any conversation can take place…in most dialogic art projects, however, artists are not satisfied with having just any conversation” (44). Art critic Michael Brenson differentiates between manipulative and productive conversation in his reflections on the medium. Brenson acknowledges that a conversational tone can often be used to limit, control, or evade authentic dialogue. However, at their best, conversations facilitate engagement rather than avoid it, prompting an exchange of sharing and probing aimed at attaining mutual understanding rather than persuasion. This approach is not unlike the ideals of Foss and Griffin’s invitational rhetoric discussed above. Power is shared and relationships are constantly open to transformation. And
while memories of the specific content may fade over time, such conversations become “a tissue of connectedness that may turn out to be more substantial and enduring than any intellectual resolution it may have achieved” (Brenson 124-125).

Art historian Grant Kester expands on this notion of dialogue as a means to establish connectedness through art, or what he terms a dialogic aesthetic, in “Conversation Pieces: The Role of Dialogue in Socially Engaged Art” and Conversation Pieces: Community and Conversation in Modern Art. Kester situates dialogic projects within avant-garde art for the latter’s emphasis on disrupting conventions. However, Kester’s history of the avant-garde gives particular attention to artists’ distrust of language as a mediator of meaning and their belief that art can serve as a medium to transcend language. Through jarring works that challenged expectations and compelled viewers to see familiar objects differently, avant-garde artists of the twentieth century looked toward, and ultimately sought to establish, an egalitarian society in which the meaning of these objects would be understood by all. Kester takes issue with the avant-garde reliance on individual moments of shock to effect social change and instead suggests dialogical interaction as a means to build community and transform the notion of identity over time (Community Chapters 1-2).

Dialogic SEA projects shift art from a product to which the audience reacts toward a process of exchange (Bhabha “Conversational Art” 41; Brenson 124-125). Kester outlines three primary characteristics of such projects. One, they are durational. The dialogic aesthetic takes a long view of time and recognizes that present actions accumulate to create future change. Two, they involve spatial imagination. The interconnections of complex social systems, “the invisible forces that pattern human and environmental existence” (68), become visible through the dialogic aesthetic. And three, the temporal and spatial elements are brought together through
dialogue and collaboration with others (Community 68-69). Kester reminds readers that not every conversation is a work of art, noting, “what is at stake in these projects is not dialogue per se but the extent to which the artist is able to catalyze emancipatory insights through dialogue” (Community 69, emphasis original).

Conversation in SEA projects can serve a variety of “emancipatory insights,” including fostering a shared sense of community, an identity of belonging. Kester draws on Jürgen Habermas’s theories of discourse to describe how conversation can lead to a collective understanding of identity, a sense of belonging to community. For Kester, the dialogical aesthetic provides opportunities for individuals to engage with one another by establishing norms of communication that provide a provisional knowledge, enabling the negotiation of present and future communicative moments. These co-constructed communicative norms provide the foundations for a shared communal identity. However, Kester is concerned with Habermas’s failure to address listening in his theories, noting that Habermas explains how an individual may speak her or his own views in the public sphere, but does not give much consideration to how one may hear the ideas of others (108-113).

Kester incorporates listening into the dialogic aesthetic through Mary Field Belenky’s notion of “connected knowing,” or knowledge gained through attempts to identify with another speaker rather than through debate. Connected knowing takes into account the social context of communication and relies on empathetic identification. For Kester, this means “we can learn not simply to suppress self-interest through identification with some putatively universal perspective, or through the irresistible compulsion of logical argument, but literally to redefine self: to both know and feel our connectedness with others” (Community 114). Kester acknowledges that the empathetic identification involved in connected knowing is never a complete identification.
However, he does see this kind of connection as a foundation for communicating across differences to create a fragile but shared identity that is appropriate to the particular context from which it emerged (*Community* 112-15).

Through a context-bound shared identity, art that employs a dialogic aesthetic can contribute to transforming relationships toward identities of belonging in conflict settings. Similar to Pershing’s argument that sewing offers women a coded outlet for expression, Kester argues that art is given a certain latitude in society, providing the opportunity to engage in questions and social critique that would be deemed inappropriate in other arenas (*Community* 68). Dialogic art works can leverage that latitude, emphasizing intersubjectivity through discourse (112). As Kester notes, “a dialogical aesthetic requires that we strive to acknowledge the specific identity of our interlocutors and conceive of them not simply as subjects on whose behalf we might act but as co-participants in the transformation of both self and society” (79).

That is, when dialogue becomes the medium of art, art becomes a “generative process that can help us speak and imagine beyond the limits of fixed identities and official discourse” (“Role of Dialogue” n.p.). Identity becomes fluid and interconnected.

The ability and spaces to work across differences is crucial in post-conflict settings. As a body of literature, SEA creates an opportunity to weave together the aspirations of conflict transformation, the theoretical foundations of identity negotiation, and the validation for women’s communicative practices of feminist rhetoric. As a framework, SEA practice presents an approach to understand the bridge-building work that women in conflict and post-conflict setting engage in through sewing collectives.
Conclusion

In this project, I investigate how women’s use of sewing in their narrations of experiences with conflict may impact conflict transformation work. I began this investigation by stitching together communication theories with peace and conflict scholarship, situating my research within literature pertaining to feminist approaches to rhetoric, discussions of bridgework in identity negotiation from intercultural communication, concerns related to conflict transformation, and work with socially engaged art. I hope that my work both offers a materiality to these theoretical discussions and recognizes and celebrates the role women play in bringing these theories into practice. To move forward with this goal, I next provide an overview of my approach to this study, including a discussion of narrative as my theoretical framework and dramatism as my method for visual rhetorical analysis.
CHAPTER 2  
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODS OVERVIEW

Having situated my project within relevant literature, I now turn to a discussion of the theoretical framework and methods I employ in this study. I approach this project using a narrative lens. Storytelling is a powerful means to make, solidify, and contest meaning in particular social contexts. The stories people tell shed light on how they understand themselves, as individuals and as collectives, in broader society. Importantly, stories relate to and inspire action in the world. This connection between stories and action is strikingly salient in areas of violent conflict, where identity narratives based on antagonistic relationships with others fuel hostilities and linger long after formal peace agreements are signed. While narrative can be a lens to understand the nature of a given conflict, it can also be a tool employed to disrupt and challenge old, conflict-driven identity constructions and to offer new scripts.

Women in various conflict settings have used sewing as a site to renegotiate their identities. While exchanging personal stories across communal divides within sewing collectives, these women have created new identity narratives based on common experiences of the conflict, rather than divisive histories, to offer to broader society. The textile pieces that the women create in their sewing collectives can serve as means to share these new identity narratives with a wider audience. That is, memory cloths and quilts can be seen as a visual mode of public address aimed at constituting a particular identity. For this project, I conduct a dramatistic analysis of these pieces in order to explore the narratives the women present in their textile works. Through pentadic analysis of the visual narratives of the textile pieces, I explore the structure of the narratives presented by these rhetors. This exploration provides insights into the nature of the identities these women are advocating through their sewing.
Theoretical Framework

First, it will be helpful to contextualize my analysis within narrative theory. I begin by discussing narrative as a world-making activity. From there, I consider how narrative may function in the formation of collective identity, drawing from Charlan’s notion of constitutive rhetoric. I then investigate the role identity narratives play in conflict settings. Finally, I consider the possibilities presented in new narratives like the ones created by the women who are the focus of my study.

Narrative as world-making

Anthony Paul Kerby and Donald E. Polkinghorne both study narrative as a pervasive form of human communication. While Kerby explores its role in the formation of the self and Polkinghorne investigates its epistemological uses, both highlight narrative’s function as a system of meaning-making. Narrative is predicated upon the ability to use language, that is, the ability to establish meaning through the shared use of symbols. As such, it is an inherently interpersonal form of communication; people use language to share stories with others and hear others’ stories in return (Polkinghorne 14-16). In these interactions, narration does not simply recount events, but serves as a core means by which humans constitute their selves, their relationships to one another, and the realities they share (Kerby 2-4). Narratives accomplish all this by establishing connections among disparate events into a story that signifies meaning over time (Kerby 3; Polkinghorne 6). Interpretation is an important component of this process; stories are built upon interpretations of past events rather than a strict adherence to what took place (Kerby 28-29). Thus, as Polkinghorne contends, meanings are always open for negotiation and narrative is an important way to engage in that negotiation (16). Kerby concurs, adding that the
meaning of past events is in a constant state of negotiation, always being reformulated to reflect present needs (7).

While the meaning of past events can be negotiated, the kinds of stories that can be told, the worlds that can be made, are circumscribed by social, cultural, and historical contexts. Because narrative is interpersonal and relies on a shared system of symbols, those symbols must be used in a way that is legible to others. Cultural norms and historical narratives of a society shape the structure of the plots, characters, and roles available to individual storytellers. However, within these constraints, individuals may choose to conform to or resist these plots and roles in their personal narrations (Kerby 6; Polkinghorne 20). Whether a person chooses conformity or resistance, that person’s individual story is inevitably tied to collective narratives, relating to and participating in them (Kerby 93).

Stories are more than abstracted thought processes. Narratives and the meanings derived from them relate to action in the world. In a narrative frame, people not only explain past actions but also use those explanations to predict and interpret their own and others’ behavior. Narrative also becomes a prompt for action. Interested in continuing the story, individuals act in ways that align with and further the plot (Kerby 20; Polkinghorne 135). As Polkinghorne argues, “action itself is the living narrative expression of a personal and social life” (145) given that all actions take place within a larger social narrative (a shared system of meaning).

The world-making function of narrative can be particularly powerful for women. In *Women’s Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*, developmental psychologists Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule take issue with the masculinist bias in epistemology. They note that women have historically been excluded from the male-dominated public sphere that prizes objectivity and go
on to argue that women have developed different ways of knowing based on subjectivity (6), supporting this claim through analysis of the narrative accounts women give of their own cognitive development. That is, Belenky and her colleagues investigate the ways in which narratives communicate women’s understanding of their worlds. Such investigations find their roots in the consciousness-raising groups of the Women’s Liberation Movement, where women gathered to exchange stories of their personal experiences, develop collective narratives of the experience of womanhood, and plan actions to express or disrupt that experience for a wider audience (see, for example, Hanisch). While the notion of a generalizable experience of womanhood based primarily on the experiences of the middle-class, White women who dominated consciousness-raising groups has since been criticized, the use of narrative as a means of empowerment in feminist projects remains prevalent.

In her study of women in Rhett Syndrome organizations, a typically male-dominated arena, communication scholar Elizabeth M. Goering demonstrates how women’s empowerment through storytelling operates on three levels. First, the story itself establishes empowering possibilities through the characters and the plot (47-49). Second, the act or performance of storytelling allows women to create meaning and connections between their personal experience and the institutional memory of larger organizations (49). Finally, telling stories about storytelling, recounting the moments in which storytelling proved an effective means of communication, reaffirms the empowerment gained through the first telling (49-50). In addition, Goering notes that storytelling can be most powerful in times of uncertainty when the old order has ended and the new one has not yet begun. In those liminal moments, the content of narratives and the act of telling them helps individuals and organizations make sense of the instability and establish “an empowered/empowering reality” (50).
Collective narratives and constitutive rhetoric

While Kerby and Polkinghorne each focus on the role narratives play in individuals’ meaning-making, both only touch on the connection between individual and collective narration. Rhetorician Maurice Charland explicates the connection further with his notion of constitutive rhetoric. Through the case study of the “peuple Québécois” (the people of Quebec) and their efforts for secession from Canada in the 1980s, Charland demonstrates how narrative is used as a means to establish a collective identity or sense of peoplehood (see also Delgado for a similar study investigating the ideographs of Chicano/a identity). He begins with Burke’s conceptualization of identification. For Burke identification, or the perception of joined interests among individuals, is a key function of rhetoric. That is, Burke argues that rhetoric serves to persuade audiences to identify the speaker and/or themselves with something or someone else (A Rhetoric of Motives 19-29). However, Charland points out that this approach assumes that the audience is already constituted in itself, a given, and is free to make autonomous decisions regarding persuasive messages. To address this gap and investigate how rhetoric serves to constitute audiences, Charland proposes constitutive rhetoric as a rhetoric that “calls its audience into being” (134).

Charland argues that a collective identity, an identity upon which individuals will act, must first be talked into being (136-37). Narratives, which provide order and meaning to individual events through interpretation, are the primary means of accomplishing this. As Charland states, “in the telling of the story of a peuple, a peuple comes to be” (140). Charland weaves together three interlocking ideas to explain this process. One, a narrative speaks to an implied audience, or what rhetorician Edwin Black has termed the second persona (Black 111). Two, audiences respond to the narrative by identifying, in Burke’s sense, with that second
persona, or as Althusser says, they are interpellated (Althusser 170) as the implied audience (Charland 137-38). Three, once an audience is interpellated, constitutive rhetoric must then “require that its embodied subjects act freely in the social world to affirm their subject position” (141). That is, constitutive rhetoric not only invites identification, but demands that individuals contribute to the continuation of the narrative through action in the world (139). In addition, successful constitutive rhetorics go further, rendering otherwise disparate or contradicting events and related actions meaningful through participation in the narrative (142).

Due to the demand for a particular kind of action, Charland argues that constitutive rhetorics are ideological in nature; he identifies three effects arising from this condition. First, constitutive rhetorics assert the historical existence of a people as a people, and thus a collective identity with whom individuals may identify. In the case of Quebec, this meant a narrative history of suffering, perseverance, and an ultimate desire to be self-governing (138-139). Second, they establish transhistorical connections between previous members of a group with contemporary ones. In the case of Quebec, this meant positioning modern people living in Quebec as connected to early French settlers (140). Three, they provide the illusion of free action; subjects of a narrative must follow through on the logic of the narrative, even as the narrative itself paints them as free agents. For the Québécois, to truly participate in the collective required a particular action – a vote in support of the referendum for sovereignty (140-41).

Helen Tate, a feminist rhetorician, draws on Charland’s work to investigate the effects of a failed constitutive rhetoric, that of White lesbian feminism, particularly in terms of creating space for competing rhetorics, in this case, anti-feminism. Tate begins by critiquing Charland’s (and Delgado’s) limited study of successful constitutive rhetorics as based upon a small number of texts without consideration of contemporary competing rhetorics. According to Tate, such
work does not account for the larger, and more complex, rhetorical culture in which constitutive rhetorics are presented (8). Noting that constitutive rhetoric functions as “a contested site of political identity” (18), Tate cautions that the narratives of a particular constitutive rhetoric are heard not only by the audience they seek to interpellate, but also by others in broader society. Those others have the ability to pull elements from that narrative to create competing narratives that call for the disruption of the original (28).

Conflict Narratives

Communication scholars have long studied conflict, including intergroup conflict (for an overview of such work, see Martin and Nakayama Chapter 11). However, much of this research addresses conflict on the interpersonal level (for an overview of this work, see Oetzel and Ting-Toomey). Haggai Kupermintz and Gavriel Salomon, who study the possibilities peace education presents in areas of intractable conflict, argue that peacework in such settings requires more than interpersonal conflict resolution skills. They contend that peacework must instead attend to the collective narratives, and the identities they imply, of each group (Kupermintz and Salomon 293-94; Salomon 277). Salomon notes that collective narratives are built from a group’s history, but that history is socially constructed based on interpretations of past events (275). Similar to Goering’s finding in her study of women in Rhett Syndrome organizations, Salomon goes on to argue that collective narratives are particularly important in difficult circumstances, such as those present in violent conflict, stating, “it helps to know who we are, what we are suffering for, who are the despised others, and where does all this lead to” (276). That is, like Charland, Salomon believes that collective narratives provide individuals with a particular role, a social identity, through a sense of shared identity (275).
In intractable conflicts, the collective narratives of each group mirrors the other’s in form, while simultaneously delegitimizing it. Salomon provides the example: “If ‘we’ are right, ‘they’ are surely wrong, and if ‘we’ are victims, ‘they’ are obviously the perpetrators” (277). Such antagonistic, mutually-exclusive identity narratives can both provoke violent conflict and ensure its continuation (Kupermintz and Salomon 294; Salomon 274). These narratives, for Salomon, represent the sociopsychological aspect of conflict, as opposed to the sociopolitical aspects encapsulated in institutional structures. Many peacebuilding projects work to address the latter by bridging political interests. Salomon argues that in addition to this, peacebuilding must also address the sociopsychological aspects of conflict, the narratives of each group, by working toward mutual understanding (274).

Kupermintz and Salomon see peace education as a site for building such a mutual understanding. They review a number of Palestinian-Israeli peace education programs to consider how narratives could be addressed in areas of intractable conflict, particularly in terms of acknowledging and developing a more nuanced understanding of the identity narrative of the other group. Among the more successful approaches they identify is the “to reflect and trust (TRT)” approach developed by mediators Ifat Moaz and Dan Bar-On. For Kupermintz and Salomon, the value of TRT is two-fold. One, participants from both sides are brought together to share their personal experiences with the conflict, reflecting on how those experiences are connected to the collective narrative of their own identity group. Two, while exchanging these personal accounts, participants are simultaneously developing interpersonal relationships based on empathy and trust that enable them to engage with the identity narrative of the other group (298).
Psychologists Mary M. Gergen and Kenneth J. Gergen provide insights as to why storytelling approaches like TRT can be so effective. They identify five reasons that narratives can aid in conflict transformation: receptivity, familiarity, witness trust, empathetic witnessing, and recreating the self. First, they argue that storytelling in general has positive associations, which makes listeners receptive to hearing others’ stories. Second, the general structure of narratives – a beginning, middle, and end all arranged about a particular point – is shared in a variety of contexts; the familiarity makes narratives easier to understand than complex or abstract arguments. Third, Gergen and Gergen contend that witnesses are generally seen as trustworthy; as witnesses to their own experiences, narrators are lent this credibility. Fourth, listeners visualize stories as they are being told, “witnessing” the events secondhand and building empathy with the storyteller in the process. Fifth, as listeners visualize the story, they also play out each of the characters, drawing connections to their own experiences and opening up new ways to understand themselves (117-18). In addition, Gergen and Gergen note that in the context of conflict these factors serve a particular purpose. In such settings the goal, similar to Foss and Griffin’s invitational rhetoric, is not to persuade the opposing side to adopt a new position but rather for each narrator to foster a deepened understanding of the other’s positions (116).

In these ways, narrative can be transformed from a source of fuel for a conflict to a means of dousing the flames. Salomon argues that acknowledging the narrative of the other side, and the painful memories and trauma it provides structure and meaning to, can be a powerful means to move beyond violent conflict (278). She therefore suggests that mutual recognition of collective narratives should be the goal of peace education (278). However, others raise concerns about an emphasis on mutual recognition in some contexts. Political scientist Landon E. Hancock, writing about Northern Ireland fifteen years after the Good Friday Peace Agreement
was signed, notes that ongoing debates about which community can rightfully claim victimhood, particularly among mainstream politicians, continue to impede attempts at reconciling the disparate narratives between the Protestant and Catholic communities. This translates into a sort of continuation of the mirrored, mutually-exclusive narratives in Salomon’s example cited earlier: “we” acknowledge that narratives are constructed realities, but “they” still refuse to acknowledge ours. What seems called for in the interest of peace, according to Hancock, is not continued discussion of the merits of each community’s narrative, but rather acts that contribute to ways to narrate identity that emphasize common experiences of living through the conflict (463-64).

*Developing and selecting new narratives*

The significance of narrative in organizing social life has prompted interest in understanding how new narratives come to be and why some are adopted while others are rejected. Such lines of inquiry may have important implications for narrative interventions in conflict transformation. Gergen and Gergen investigate the relationship between narrative theory and narrative practice in therapeutic, organizational, and conflict settings. They begin by noting that such interventions are informed by the belief that “narrative is the problem” and that changing narrative constructs presents a way to improve people’s well-being, whether individually or collectively (113). Gergen and Gergen go on to outline three major theoretical approaches that inform most narrative intervention practices, intentionally or unintentionally. The first, which understands narrative as a cognitive structure, holds that personal stories guide individuals’ actions and that by embracing new narratives, individuals will take different actions. Gergen and Gergen note that this approach fails to account for external circumstances that may impact an individual’s choice to act in a particular way (113). The second, which views narrative
as discursive action, holds that narratives emanate from larger social discourses and are merely utilized as tools by individuals; to alter relationships among individuals requires altering the larger social narratives. Gergen and Gergen point out that this approach, while accounting for context, leaves out the internal workings of individuals. The third approach, which depicts narrative as within social relationships but incorporated into the personal functioning of the individual, bridges the two previous approaches. Here, the influence of the larger social context on individual action is recognized, while an individual’s agency in changing her/his relationship to that larger narrative, and thereby influencing changes in that narrative, is acknowledged (119).

What most theorists and practitioners agree upon is that narratives, whether individual or collective, can be changed. This capacity for change is rooted in the interpretive nature of narratives. Kerby reminds readers that all narratives, even those that are repeated and accepted as true, are in actuality only interpretations of past events (38). However, such reinterpretations cannot be created arbitrarily. Gergen and Gergen note that in the context of narrative therapy the new narrative must be believable and actionable and that this is accomplished by repositioning elements of the original story into new relationships with one another (113). Likewise, in discussing collective narratives, Charland states that new constitutive rhetorics build upon previous constitutive rhetorics, noting that “they capture alienated subjects by rearticulating existing subject positions so as to contain or resolve experienced dialectical contradictions between the world and its discourses” (142). That is, when individuals are dissatisfied with their social identities as created through existing narratives, successful new constitutive narratives draw on elements of the failed or no longer useful narratives to address that dissatisfaction.

The development of new narratives, the telling of old stories in new ways, presents audiences with competing narratives from which they must choose. Communication scholar
Walter Fisher argues that stories hold a narrative rationality based on narrative probability and narrative fidelity. Narrative probability refers to the coherence of the story. Does the general structure hold? Does the content seem plausible given the treatment of the same material in other stories? Do the characters behave in a way that is consistent with their values? Narrative fidelity considers the story’s relationship to prior knowledge. Is this story consistent with previous experiences (47)? According to Fisher, these guidelines offer a means for audiences to assess rhetorical claims without privileging any one form of argument over another.

Others offer an approach that focuses more on the practical and intuitive nature of narratives. For Kerby, narratives satisfy a psychological need to understand the past in a way that enables a person to function in the present and thus “narrative truth is…a matter of adequacy and fit to what is otherwise given” (91). That is, a narrative will be considered true and selected not because it accurately recounts particular events, but because it serves practical purposes. “True” stories are the ones that aid in survival (Kerby 97). Likewise, Charland argues that individuals respond favorably to constitutive rhetorics not through persuasion but rather through a process “…akin more to one of conversion that ultimately results in an act of recognition of the ‘rightness’ of a discourse and of one’s identity with its reconfigured subject position” (Charland 142). That is, individuals choose to become members of the collectives called forth in constitutive rhetoric because they see themselves in, or identify with, that particular narrative.

Kerby notes, “a self-interpreting animal is one that can define itself anew, that can discard or embellish its old definitions. As self-interpreters we therefore have responsibility for our selves, for the selves we were and the selves we would wish to become” (52). That is, human ability to interpret the world through narrative implies that humans also must be accountable for the narratives they tell. This notion is particularly salient in violent conflict. Work to change
dominant, conflict-driven narratives in that context is a key element in transforming the conflict. Thus, understanding how women in sewing collectives develop new narratives that express a renegotiated identity is particularly valuable.

**Methods**

The purpose of my study is to explore how the ways women narrate their experiences of conflict through sewing can inform conflict transformation work. More specifically, I investigate the narratives presented by these rhetors in their textile pieces, using the following three questions to guide my inquiry:

1. What sort of identity, based on the actions advocated, do these rhetors as a whole seek to constitute?
2. What is the relationship between the identity these rhetors seek to constitute and the dominant identity narratives of the conflict?
3. How might the narratives these rhetors offer contribute to transformation of the conflict?

The first question relates to Charland’s notion of constitutive rhetoric. It entails an investigation of the collective narrative with which the rhetors are inviting audiences to identify, and what sort of action in the world is being called for as a demonstration of that identification. The second question entails a consideration of these new identity narratives in the context of the dominant identity narratives that have shaped and been shaped by the conflict. For this consideration, I discuss my own analysis of textile pieces in relation to the summaries of identity narratives provided by peace and conflict researchers, primarily coming from the disciplines of history and sociology. The final question connects narrative to conflict transformation. It involves a reflection on the revised social relationships for which the narratives of the textile pieces advocate.
Visual Rhetoric

In any study of sewing, it is nearly impossible to overlook the materiality of textile pieces. As I work on my own memory cloth, I cannot help but notice the ways in which edges of the events I stitch there, both joyous and sorrowful, blur into one another, warm and soft. Each thread brings dimensionality to these memories, from nearly imperceptible puckering of fabric at the edges of stitches, to pillowed patterns created when batting is secured through the layers of a quilt. Textile pieces welcome touch, a running of fingers over the changing textures of silk and cotton and burlap. This materiality invites audiences to connect directly with the piece and, through the piece, indirectly with its creator.

This connection may stem from what art educators Renee Jackson and Suzanne McCullagh term aesthetic-empathy, or the connection with the emotional experiences of others, the sense of becoming one with others, through physical, cognitive, and spiritual reactions to the visual (182-187). In addition, artists Michael Fisher and Barbara Bickel, drawing on matrixial theory, argue that empathy derived from the aesthetic can foster greater consciousness of the interconnectivity of individuals within society, particularly in terms of communal responses to trauma. In a sense, the material quality of textiles could be seen as fostering a relationship similar to Carrillo-Rowe’s notion of belonging between those who create the pieces and those who view them. That is, the materiality of the textile pieces itself can be understood as a powerful form of communication between rhetors and audiences.

At the same time, for this study, I have chosen not to engage with the materiality of conflict textiles, for two reasons. One, the skill level of the women who created the textiles in my study vary greatly, from those picking up a needle for the first time, to those who sew for employment, to those working with the support of professional artists. This, coupled with the
variation in fabric and thread available to each, could make it difficult to consider the relationships among these rhetors if I were to focus on materiality. Instead, I wish to follow Foss and Griffin’s invitational rhetoric by incorporating the notion of immanent value, or the recognition “that every being is a unique and necessary part of the pattern of the universe and thus has value,” as part of my feminist approach to rhetorical study (4). That is, I wish to treat each artifact as equally worth of attention and analysis, despite widely varying “artistry” in their material construction and design. My second concern is connected to my interest in treating these rhetors as significant communicators. Art critic Lucy Lippard, in her study of women’s hobby books, critiques the ways in which sewing, particularly the sewing done by women, is often disparaged as low-art and a trivial undertaking for women of leisure that serves no practical purpose. And as Pershing notes in her study of the Ribbon Around the Pentagon, it was often the very softness of textile work that contributed to the muting of the messages the Ribbon contained. At the same time, she, as well as Parker, has pointed to the fact that women may intentionally leverage this dismissal of textiles to express radical commentary on the societies in which they live. While I recognize this connection between the mode and the message, it is the latter that I have selected as the focus for my current study. For these reasons, I will focus on visual, rather than material, rhetorical criticism.

Visual rhetorics, such as those presented in these textile pieces, have gained increasing attention from communication scholars in recent years. The study of visual rhetoric recognizes the significant role that the visual plays in cultural life and public action, both in terms of address and audiencing (Olson, Finnegan, and Hope 1). Communication scholars Tony Shirato and Jen Webb note that the reading of visual texts is an inherently communicative process; images can be understood to present rhetorical statements that are then interpreted by the viewing audience.
Beyond simple images, visual rhetorics have the ability to establish and communicate narratives. Visual communication scholar Robin Hoecker, in her study of visual truth and reconciliation projects in Guatemala and Peru, argues that “visual representations are powerful vehicles for the transmission of collective memory and the processing of traumatic events” (260). That is, the visual not only tells a story for audiences, but offers audiences a guide for engaging with that story. Visual rhetorical criticism not only investigates what the narrative of an image is, but also how it conveys that narrative to audiences (Hart and Daughton 189).

Importantly, scholars have noted that the emphasis on the verbal, whether spoken or written, in rhetorical criticism has meant that a great many rhetorical practices (and the rhetors who employ those practices) go unnoticed. Several scholars, in agreement with the feminist rhetoricians discussed earlier, also note that many rhetors who have relied on visual rhetoric have been excluded from participation in dominant forms of public address due to their gender, race, class, and/or other marginalized identities (Goggin 88-89). For some, the study of needlework, as a rhetorical practice utilized by members of these identity groups, can be an important means of addressing these exclusions (Foss and Foss; Goggin; and Kramarae). The focus of needlework studies may vary. For example, communication scholar Maureen Goggin has offered a study of samplers that focuses on some of the more technical aspects of their creation, such as stitch work and the development of alphabet patterns. Others, like Rosika Parker, have called for an investigation into the iconography of needlework. Parker notes that, even when women work from embroidery patterns, the selection of particular images and the degree to which the women adhere to or depart from the patterns provides important insights into how the women perceived themselves in relation to broader society (12). It is this latter approach, investigating
iconography, with which I align my own rhetorical criticism of the textile pieces created by women in conflict settings.

Selection of Artifacts

Women have sewn their responses to violent conflict in a variety of places and times. Here, I focus on the work of women in three contexts: Chile, South Africa, and Northern Ireland. My reasoning for selecting these regions is two-fold. One, each represents a different type of conflict. Two, how women came to be involved in their sewing collectives is also different in each location. This selection provides a means to consider how context impacts the women’s narrative work. I believe that common lessons can be drawn translocally across these sites as a means to inform future conflict transformation work in other conflict settings. Specifically, despite the variety in the structure and content of their work, I believe these women all provide the narrative elements that can be used to reconstitute collective identity narratives in their particular settings in ways that foster peace.

From each of the conflict settings listed above, I selected three representative textile pieces to analyze in depth. In making my selections, I have drawn on Kenneth’s Burke’s notion of the representative anecdote. In A Grammar of Motives, Burke acknowledges that researchers must limit the scope of their inquiry into any given subject. This limited scope, which focuses on particular aspects of the subject as a stand-in for the whole, allows for the creation of a vocabulary with which to discuss that whole. In many ways, a limited scope places boundaries on the study and results in a partial understanding of human motives in general in favor of a deeper understanding of a particular aspect of human behavior. Setting these boundaries is a creative process that authors (and I would add critics) engage in (85-86). In order to ensure the usefulness of this process, Burke contends that one must endeavor to select a truly representative
anecdote (78, 326). That is, a representative anecdote summarizes the underlying narrative that is embedded within a given literature or discourse; it is a representation of the particular story structure or set of themes that can be found throughout the discourse. Specific artifacts that typify this representative anecdote can then be studied to gain insights into this underlying narrative.

The pieces I have selected for this study typify the themes of the identity narratives put forth by women through their sewing in each setting. For a variety of reasons, access to the textile pieces from these regions can be difficult to secure and so I relied on curated collections for my study. The act of curation implies the exclusion of some pieces and therefore presents an initial limitation of scope for my study. However, each of these collections has been compiled by scholars with extensive experience working with textile responses to the particular conflict in question. Therefore, I trust that the conflict textiles in each collection are eloquent and powerful representations of their genres. For this study, I engaged with each of these collections, noted common themes and structures presented through the textiles in each setting, and selected three pieces from each collection that I felt most clearly demonstrated those themes and structures.

In addition to access to the pieces themselves, the curated collections, through the text that accompanies each piece, also assist me in negotiating the complicated relationship between the creators of these works and myself as a viewer. One, they provide a (mediated) introduction to the women themselves, as individuals or collectives. Two, they help me appreciate the rhetors’ individual contexts, which is particularly important as I have not experienced any of those contexts directly. As Shirato and Webb point out, individuals learn to see in ways that are shaped by their own cultural contexts and this seeing informs how individuals read rhetorical artifacts (58 – 59). They state that:
…we must take into account the socio-cultural status of the fields, groups and individuals producing visual texts, and the ways in which different fields, different individuals within fields and different ways of negotiating the fields affect the degree to which the meanings made are seen to be authoritative, or “true.” (67)

I do not share a cultural identity with the women in any of these settings, nor do I share their experiences with violent conflict. I have varied relationships with each of these locations, having lived in Northern Ireland, visited Chile, and only encountered South Africa through study. Still, I am reading these rhetorical artifacts from a US-American lens, more than fifteen years after formal hostilities came to a close in each of these regions, learning the background to each conflict through the interpretations of historians, sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists and other scholars. The complicated relationship between the rhetors and myself develops from the fact that these artifacts were created to be viewed by local and international audiences, including audiences much like myself. Still, given my different cultural context, I am grateful to the curators of each of the collections for their assistance in my reading of these artifacts. The curators have included a brief text to accompany each textile piece. While my analysis is focused on the visual narratives presented in each piece, I also draw on these brief texts as I work to negotiate the differences in cultural context. Below, I provide an overview of each conflict setting, the nature of the sewing collectives that developed in response to that conflict, and the curated collection I draw from for my study.

The conflict in Chile was dominated by a government that engaged in state-sponsored terrorism. A military junta under the leadership of General Augusto Pinochet took power in 1973. The regime was characterized by extremely repressive tactics, including mass “disappearances” of citizens. Chilean women began sewing their resistance to the Pinochet
regime organically. As the majority of the disappeared were men, it was women who flocked to
detention centers, courts, and local community aid groups in search of lost family members and
economic relief. These were the women who started the first *arpillera* workshop, which then
served as a model for all subsequent workshops (Agosín, *Scraps of Life* 48-50; Chuchryk 68-69;
and Maloof 130). *Arpilleras*, appliquéd tapestries, initially depicted intimate narratives. As their
work progressed, the *arpillерistas* began to sew broader denunciations of the government that
were inevitably seen as political sites of resistance (Agosín, *Scraps of Life* 11-16; Chuchryk).

*Arpilleras* were always intended for an external audience. They were exported for sale
not only to provide an income to their makers, but also to garner political support for the pro-
democracy movement in Chile (Adams 36-37). Because the *arpilleras* were sold abroad (a textile
diaspora, if you will), it can be difficult to locate images of them with sufficient information
about their creators. In addition, the Pinochet regime established a counter-campaign through
pro-government workshops; it can sometimes be difficult to authenticate a given tapestry as
coming from a true *arpillera* workshop (Maloof 131). For these reasons, I turn to the curation of
Marjorie Agosín. Agosín has written several monographs chronicling the work of the Chilean
*arpillерistas*, including the collection I draw from for this project, *Tapestries of Hope, Threads of
Love*. Throughout my analysis, I make use of Agosín’s captioning for the otherwise untitled
*arpilleras* she includes in her collection. These captions are based on her interviews with the
*arpillерistas* who created each of the pieces.

In South Africa, apartheid, the national policy of segregation, was brutally enforced by
the White government, leading to violent resistance from Black activists and lost histories on
both sides. The end of apartheid ushered in a nation-building project to reclaim the country’s
suppressed histories. That process included the government-sponsored Truth and Reconciliation
Commission (TRC) that coordinated the testimonials of individuals who were victimized or vicitmizers under apartheid. However, the TRC definition of victimization focused on politically-motivated attacks, which excluded the testimonies of individuals who suffered due to the general climate of oppression, particularly indigenous women. Create South Africa, a Durban-based socially engaged art organization, addresses this exclusion through its *Amazwi Abesifazane* (Voices of Women) project, which invites indigenous women to contribute a brief narrative and a hand-sewn memory cloth to the historical record (Becker “*Amazwi Abesifazane*” 2-4).

The narratives and memory cloths are intended to be shared with larger audiences through the *Amazwi Abesifazane* website, traveling national and international exhibitions, and a planned museum in Durban. The hope is that through this sharing these women’s stories will be included in the public record of South Africa’s history (*Amazwi Abesifazane* n.p.). I analyzed memory cloths drawn from the selection posted on the *Amazwi Abesifazane* – Voices of Women Museum website. The Museum’s postings include the brief narrative provided by each woman who contributed a cloth. I used those narratives as an entry point into my reading of the memory cloths.

Northern Ireland is a divided society marked by a long history of tensions and comprised primarily of those who identify as Irish Catholics and those who identify as British Protestants. The most recent violent conflict, known commonly as “the Troubles,” lasted for nearly thirty years, until the Good Friday Agreement was signed in 1998, bringing a formal end to the conflict (Stover 439-40). While the Agreement was brokered by high-level officials, various local organizations have worked to foster cross-community dialogue since the outbreak of the Troubles (see Morrow and Wilson; Blood and McAteer). Women were and continue to be at the
forefront of this work (Carr “Women in Northern Ireland” n.p.). One manifestation of this woman-led, peacebuilding work has been the creation of cross-community initiatives that have turned to quilting in their work. The groups enable women to share their experiences of the Troubles and use those stories to create quilts depicting key events in the conflict to mourn, commemorate, and envision new possibilities for the future (“The Irish Quilts” n.p.).

The Northern Ireland quilts have been displayed in a variety of locations throughout the world. These displays are often accompanied by commemorative ceremonies and educational workshops that are intended to attract a greater audience to view the quilts (“The Irish Quilts” n.p.). The Conflict Textiles website\(^2\) hosts a database of textile responses to conflict that is curated by artist and researcher Roberta Bacic. This collection includes a selection of quilts from the conflict in Northern Ireland along with a brief description of each piece. I make use of these brief descriptions in my analysis of the quilts.

Method of analysis

Communication scholars have studied the narrative qualities of textile pieces from a variety of perspectives. For example, Dwight Conquergood explores the performative qualities of Hmong story cloths that depict the refugee experiences of their makers. Sharon Taylor-Tidwell approaches the Chilean *arpilleras* as *testimonios gráficos*, exploring the ways in which the *arpilleristas* were following a Latin American communicative tradition of bearing witness to trauma and injustice as they created their tapestries. In my study, I approach the narratives presented in each textile piece as examples of constitutive rhetoric. That is, I explore the ways in

\(^2\) Conflict Textiles is an associated site of CAIN (Conflict Archive on the Internet), an on-line database of documents pertaining to conflict, particularly in Northern Ireland. CAIN is hosted by the University of Ulster and is associated with INCORE (International Conflict Research Institute) and the ARK (Access Resource Knowledge) public policy database.
which these narratives are inviting audiences to participate in a collective identity by engaging in particular actions. Exploring the ways in which the women have structured their narratives, what they emphasize and what they de-emphasize, can provide insights into the nature of the identities, embodied through actions, for which these rhetors are advocating. I find Kenneth Burke’s theory of dramatism a particularly useful lens for entering into this exploration.

Communication scholars have utilized dramatism to investigate a wide range of phenomena, from mapping discourses (see, for example, Anderson and Perlli; and Meisenbach, Remke, Buzzanell, and Liu) to teasing out the implications of individual instances of public address (see, for example, Birdsell; Ling; and Xiaoyan and Street). Here, I use dramatism to analyze each of the textile pieces as individual rhetorical artifacts before considering the shared implication of the artifacts as a collection.

Dramatism is a method of rhetorical analysis developed by Kenneth Burke, most thoroughly delineated in his book *A Grammar of Motives* and later clarified in “Questions and Answers about the Pentad.” Burke sees language use (and symbol use in general), like that employed in narration, as a mode of action and finds the theatrical metaphor of drama a useful lens in analyzing and explaining the motives for that action (*Grammar* xxii-xxiii; “Questions and Answers” 332). The grammar, or set of principles, guiding this use of language is summarized in the dramatistic pentad: act (what), scene (when/where), agent (who), agency (how), and purpose (why) (*Grammar* xv-xvii). These five elements function in relationship to one another in what Burke terms ratios. Burke discusses three ratios that are particularly useful here. The scene-act ratio describes how the scene contains the act, or how the setting impacts what actions are available (*Grammar* 3-7). The scene-agent ratio relates to how the scene contains the agent, or how the setting defines the characters in the narrative (*Grammar* 7-9). The act-agent ratio
explores the relationship between the act and the agent; that is, it asks to what extent the actions define the characters or the characters define the actions (*Grammar* 15-16).

For Burke, these ratios help explain a narrator’s motives. Discerning what the rhetor emphasizes – act, scene, agent, agency, or purpose – in relation to the other elements of the pentad provides insights into the type of action the narration is meant to represent and inspire in the world (18-19). Charland’s description of constitutive rhetoric emphasizes the action in the world that is inspired by collective narratives. The dramatistic pentad offers a means to investigate how women in sewing collectives have positioned or repositioned themselves in relation to the conflict (scene-agent ratio), what sort of actions they believe are called for in response to the conflict (scene-act ratio), and what sort of identity they believe will be constituted by such actions (act-agent ratio). I conduct my investigation under the presumption that the women who have made the textile pieces under study share a general motive with their audiences; all are interested in bringing an end to the violence that has marked each conflict. The question they address, then, is not whether to end the violence, but rather how. Investigating the “how” that these women propose through their narratives connects to my larger research question. That is, exploring the identities that these women seek to constitute can provide insights into how the ways in which they narrate their experiences of conflict might contribute to conflict transformation work.

*Research questions*

My research questions are based upon the terms of the pentad, which Burke notes are necessarily ambiguous. For Burke, the pentad is not intended to remove ambiguity from rhetorical acts by pinning down their exact meaning. Rather, pentadic analysis serves to highlight the spaces in which rhetors have strategically leveraged ambiguity in their narratives to
encourage change (xvii). According to Burke, “it is in the areas of ambiguity that transformation takes place” (xix). That is, in the case of constitutive narratives, pentadic analysis brings to the fore the ways in which rhetors may enter into ambiguity to rearrange the elements of existing narratives as they work to create new ones. Burke goes on to state that the role of the rhetorical critic is to identify the terms that are most appropriate for a particular study and to delimit the boundaries of those terms within that study (xxi-xxii). I focus on the scene-agent, scene-act, and act-agent ratios in my analysis because I believe that their emphasis on the relationship between action and identity within context could provide insight that can be particularly helpful in conflict transformation work. I use the following questions to guide my reading of the narratives presented in each of the textile pieces, focusing on the iconography utilized by each rhetor.

1. Scene: how does the rhetor define the conflict?
2. Agent: whom does the rhetor establish as the actors in the conflict?
3. Act: what actions does the rhetor present as significant?
4. Scene-agent ratio: how does the rhetor characterize the relationship between the conflict and the people involved in or impacted by that conflict?
5. Scene-act ratio: how does the rhetor characterize the relationship between the conflict and the actions she is depicting in her cloth?
6. Act-agent ratio: how does the rhetor characterize the relationship between the actions depicted and the identities represented in her cloth?

After investigating these specific elements of each artifact, I then consider the three pieces from each conflict setting as a whole. In this consideration, I return to my broader guiding questions:
1. What sort of identity, based on the actions advocated, do these rhetors as a whole seek to constitute?

2. What is the relationship between the identity these rhetors seek to constitute and the dominant identity narratives of the conflict?

3. How might the narratives these rhetors offer contribute to transformation of the conflict?

**Organization for Dissertation**

This dissertation is comprised of six chapters. In my first two chapters, I have framed my study in relation to the relevant literature and from there moved on to describe my theoretical approach and methods. Next, I offered my analysis of the conflict textiles from Chile, South Africa, and Northern Ireland. In Chapter 3 I discuss how *arpilleristas* have depicted a renegotiated social role for women through a redefinition of mother as a social activist, challenging the Pinochet regime’s attempt to engender docility among the population through mothers. In Chapter 4, I explore how participants in the *Amazwi Abesifazane* – Voices of Women project have contributed to South Africa’s transition out of apartheid and into democracy by stitching their daily experiences with structural inequality. In Chapter 5, I examine how quilters in Northern Ireland have shared alternative visions of a common identity as a means to reconcile the identity narratives within their divided society. Finally, in Chapter 6 I bring these theories and analyses into conversation with one another. I contextualize my analysis within narrative theory and offer my observations of the variations and common themes among the settings. I also discuss the implications of this study for feminist rhetoric, conceptualizations of identity negotiation, conflict transformation theory, and socially engaged art practice, including considerations for future research.
CHAPTER 3

FABRICATING MOTHER:

REDEFINING THE SOCIAL ROLE OF MOTHER IN PINOCHET’S CHILE

Having described narrative as my theoretical approach and dramatism as my analytic lens, I now present my analysis of the narratives in women’s conflict textiles, starting with *arpilleras* from Chile. The Chilean *arpillera* workshops were an organic response to the violence of state-sponsored terrorism, established by women as a means to alleviate economic hardship and to resist the oppressive tactics of the Pinochet regime. As Chilean novelist and human rights activist Isabel Allende notes, “with leftovers of fabric and simple stitches, the women embroidered what could not be told in words, and thus the *arpilleras* became a powerful form of political resistance” (xi). One manifestation of this political resistance was a direct challenge to the regime’s limiting definition of mother, a renegotiation of women’s identity in relation to that of the government and broader society. In this chapter, I investigate narratives of three *arpilleristas* to understand this renegotiation of the role of mother. To do so, I have selected three *arpilleras* that address mothering under the Pinochet dictatorship in different ways: as impossible to achieve under the regime, as public activism, and as the site of hope for a different future. Together, these pieces represent an *arpillerista* narrative of mother that redefines the role of mother away from traditional domestic and submissive notions and into the sphere of public activism.

**Setting Block: The Pinochet Regime and Arpillerista Resistance**

On September 11, 1973, Chile experienced a *golpe del estado* that overthrew the democratically-elected Marxist government of Salvador Allende. The military *junta* that took power, under the leadership of General Augusto Pinochet, was characterized by extremely
repressive tactics, including mass disappearances of citizens. As the majority of the disappeared were men, it was women who flocked to detention centers, courts, and local community aid groups in search of lost family members and economic relief. The women soon began organizing themselves around such causes. These were the women who started the first *arpillera* workshop, which then served as a model for all subsequent workshops (Agosín, *Scraps of Life* 48-50). The workshops began as a means to alleviate the financial difficulties suffered by the families of the *arpilleristas*, the women who sewed *arpilleras*, due to the poor economy (Agosín, *Scraps of Life* 12; Chuchryk 68-69; Maloof 130). In conjunction with local churches, the women purchased their materials and sold their products abroad, as the *arpilleras* were soon banned within Chile (Agosín, *Scraps of Life* 12). Initially, these textile portraits were mainly purchased abroad by middle-class people with an interest in Latin America, crafts, or charity. Soon the pieces were collected and displayed in gallery spaces as works of art (Bacic n.p.).

The Chilean *arpilleras* have become famous for their artistic and political value. *Arpillera*, coming from the Spanish word for “burlap,” was the name given to these small wall hangings because the appliquéd figures and scenes are sewn onto burlap or similar material. Initially, these works commonly depicted intimate narratives, such as evidence of the family’s missing person: empty houses, photos, and the night of the disappearance. As their work progressed, the *arpilleristas* began to sew broader denunciations of the government: soup kitchens, water and electricity shortages, closed schools and health centers, eviction scenes, and unemployment (Agosín, *Scraps of Life* 11-16). These depictions were inevitably seen as political and a site of resistance. The Chilean government’s reaction to the *arpilleras* testifies to the power of this resistance. Not only did the Pinochet regime ban the making and selling of the *arpilleras* within Chile, but they also established state-run manufacturing of similar craftwork that was pro-
government to be sold abroad in competition with the smuggled works of the *arpilleristas* (Allende xii; Chuchryk 71; Maloof 131).

*Dominant Identity Narratives: Women and The Role of Mother in Pinochet’s Chile*

Chilean political leaders had relegated women to marginal roles within Chilean society throughout the nation’s history. Even Allende’s government-sponsored Mothers’ Centers of the 1960s and early 1970s, while ostensibly intended to empower women, emphasized “the domesticity of women and their roles as supportive housewives, good mothers, and patriotic citizens” (Boldt and White 32). This emphasis likely grew out of the notion of *marianismo*, the Latin American expression of the cult of femininity that is the cultural counterpoint to the more widely-recognized (outside of Latin America) *machismo*. Communication scholar Valeria Fabj, in her rhetorical study of the Argentinian Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, explains, “the Latin American woman is expected to be a good daughter, wife, and most of all, mother, to be submissive and yet strong, and to care for her family above all else” (5). Fabj goes on to describe how the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo leveraged cultural commitment to *marianismo* as a rhetorical device to challenge government-initiated disappearances in Argentina’s dirty war through their demonstrations and public statements. The respect for the social role of mothers mean that the men in the Argentinian government had to, at the very least, appear to respond to the women’s concerns. At the same time, the sanctity ascribed to mothers offered the women a protection against reprisal that was not available to Argentinian men. In Chile, *arpilleristas* drew upon the mythos of *marianismo* in a similar fashion. In keeping with *marianismo*, it is the women who have the strength to carry the family in times of tragedy; they draw on their maternal strength to take action. Moreover, the values of *mariansimo* offer women some protection from government reprisals for their actions, a protection that was not available to men,
whose public acts were automatically held suspect by the military 
junta. In acting on behalf of the well-being of their children, the 
arpilleristas were fulfilling the social role the government itself proposed for them.

When Pinochet took power, the 
junta 
established other governmental institutions to enforce the regime’s own conservative brand of gender roles. The regime used the Mothers’ Centers to propagate the idea that women’s core responsibility was to serve as mothers of the nation, defending family, faith, and fatherland (Maloof 128-129). Such a manipulation of the role of mothering is not idiosyncratic to Chile.

Feminist scholar Mrinalini Sinha highlights the invocation of “the supposedly ‘traditional’ roles of women – as mothers, as objects of reverence and of protection, and as signifier or markers of a group’s innermost identity – in projects of nationalism” (230). In such projects, women are not just the symbol of the nation, but are the literal reproducers of the nation, “not just in biological reproduction but in the larger social and cultural reproduction of the national collectivity” (238). That is, women serve to pass on the cultural norms and values of the group to subsequent generations. In Chile under the Pinochet dictatorship, “the ideology of motherhood was manipulated by the military government to serve its own purposes” (Maloof 129).

Political scientists Kelley Boldt and Timothy White contend that the regime’s efforts to situate women with the domestic and familiar arenas were intended to engender deference to Pinochet as a patriarchal figure (32). In turn, women, as biological and cultural reproducers of the Chilean nation, could be relied upon to inscribe this deference onto future generations.

Sociologist Patricia Chuchryk argues that Pinochet’s attempts to depoliticize women through a circumscribed role of mother was in fact an attempt to depoliticize the entire Chilean population:
Through their self-sacrifice and self-abnegation, through their suffering, through their dedication to the family, and through their unwavering loyalty to the patria, women – in Pinochet’s plan – would ensure that Chile’s sons and daughters grew up to be patriotic citizens, which meant progovernment and nonpolitical. (73-74)

In many ways, Pinochet relied on women’s collusion with the authoritarian regime to maintain control over the nation. In order to ensure that collusion, as Boldt and White note, “the government enforced a gendered dichotomy of society, causing women to fear the collapse of their beloved Chilean culture if the traditional gender roles were not upheld” (32). That is, women were encouraged to see strict gender roles as the lynchpin that kept Chilean society in motion and to hold that lynchpin in place at all costs. Ironically, the regime’s policies of repression and economic austerity reversed the gender roles it emphasized so strongly. As men either lost their jobs due to a suffering economy or were jailed and disappeared through state-sponsored terrorism, women increasingly found themselves in the role of primary breadwinner for their families. For women to return to the domestic role of mother, as Pinochet himself promoted, challenging the regime whose policies placed the women in men’s roles became an imperative (Boldt and White 32-33).

This imperative led many women, particularly poor women, to translate their private struggles into public activism. However, rather than re-inscribe traditional roles like that of mother, they redefined them. Women may have entered into collectives like the arpilleria workshops as a means to respond to the immediate need to care for their families, but these spaces became arenas for education, empowerment, and political organizing (Boldt and White 29; Chuchryk 69). Like many women who come to question traditional gender roles as a result of their experiences participating in resistance movements (Sinha 241), the arpilleristas began to
see connections between the repression of the Pinochet regime and women’s secondary status in Chilean society as a whole (Chuchryk 94). Chuchryk notes that through their participation in collectives, *arpilleristas* and other Chilean women “challenged the state’s right to define their political identities” and became “capable of moving beyond the limits a patriarchal society imposed on them…, transforming women’s traditionally defined roles” (94, 70). In this sense, *arpilleras* themselves can be seen as rhetorical texts, in that their makers used them to communicate their challenges to the circumscribed, apolitical role of mother put forth by Pinochet and supported by broader Chilean society. The *arpilleristas*, through the narrations of the conflict expressed in their textile work, offered a new definition of mother that emphasized active and social political participation.

**Hoops and Needles: A Framework for Analysis**

The *arpilleras* itself is a popular form of handicraft that can be found throughout Latin America and, as noted by communication scholar Sharon Taylor-Tidwell in her treatment of *arpilleras* as *testimonios gráficos*, the *arpilleras* has a long tradition in Chile. It is not surprising, then, that workshops for the production of this handicraft were initially established to generate income. In addition, as Taylor-Tidwell argues, the *arpilleras* also serves as a readily available and readable rhetorical form for women to turn to as a means to communicate their experiences to a wider audience (45). That communication was originally intended for an internal audience but soon, as the sale of *arpilleras* was banned within Chile, the *arpilleristas* shifted their address to an external audience. Sociologist Jacqueline Adams explains that these artifacts were created for sale abroad as a means to garner political support for the prodemocracy movement in Chile (36-37). The *arpilleristas* took the interest of international community in purchasing and viewing the
tapestries as an indication of solidarity, an interpretation that sustained them in their work (39-40).

I first learned about the *arpilleristas* in 2004 while involved with another textile project. In the intervening years, I have come across well over 200 *arpilleras* in a variety of contexts, from personal interest to academic study. The majority of these were illustrations in monographs, book chapters, and academic articles on the subject. I have pored over images of the tapestries posted by individuals and curators on the Internet. Once, I had the great pleasure of coming upon piles of *arpilleras* of different sizes at a small fair trade shop in Buffalo, New York. The Chilean owner wore a bemused expression as I excitedly wove between Spanish and English to ask him about how he came to be selling these pieces and to tell the friends I was with about the history of this work. As I purchased an *arpillera* for myself, I was proud to become part of the international network supporting Chilean women’s activism. Because the *arpilleras* were sold abroad, it can be difficult to locate images of them with attendant information about the *arpillerista* who created them. In addition, the presence of the pro-government workshops can sometimes make it difficult to authenticate a given tapestry as coming from a true *arpillera* workshop. For these reasons, I relied on the curated collection from *arpillera* scholar Marjorie Agosín in *Tapestries of Hope, Threads of Love* for this study. Here, I refer to Agosín’s captioning of each *arpillera* for these otherwise untitled works. Since Agosín based the captions on information gleaned from her interviews with the *arpilleristas*, I draw on this captioning in my analysis.

The stories women tell through their *arpilleras* reflect their personal experiences of life under Pinochet. As noted above, they may depict scenes of economic hardship and failures of the government, such as power shortages, soup kitchens, and factory closures. Beyond failures, the
arpilleras speak to the abuses of the military junta. Some depict scenes of torture and mass killings. Many indirectly point to the loss of family members that have been disappeared or exiled while others show the scene as the loved one was taken away, all asking where the loved ones are and when they will be able to return to their families. Another common theme is that of women’s activism. Arpilleristas stitch themselves protesting in the streets and outside of detention centers, as well as gathering in their workshops to sew, exchange stories, and support one another. Some pieces celebrate the gains from the women’s activism, such as a scene of young girls attending a newly-opened women’s health center opened by the local community, or envisioning a brighter future, such as a scene of children playing in a local park. Arpilleristas have continued to work through Chile’s return to democracy after Pinochet relinquished power. These later pieces continue the original themes, highlighting the need for employment and community development, maintaining calls for accountability for the disappearances, celebrating the return of Chilean exiles, and envisioning new futures for the Chilean people.

Generally, the arpilleras do not address common identity markers directly, though matters of identity are addressed indirectly. Rather, their work tends to focus on the relationship between the Chilean people and their government. That is, though the arpilleristas may not have sewn direct commentary about the identity of poor and working class Chileans, the ways in which they share their experiences with poverty speak to class dynamics within Chile. Likewise, while their work did not include feminist calls for consciousness-raising among women, they nonetheless address women’s roles in Chilean society through their visual narratives. For this

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3 I have seen an exception to this in a number of post-Pinochet arpilleras that advocate for indigenous rights, a continuing struggle even after Pinochet left power. For example, my own arpillera includes figures holding a banner that reads “Los Mapuche sigue de pie,” or “the Mapuche continue marching.”
study, I have chosen to narrow my focus to the ways in which *arpilleristas* narrate their relationships as women and mothers to the Chilean government, and by extension broader society, given the dominance of women and mothers as regular characters in many *arpilleras*.

The regular character, a term for a figure (not necessarily a human being) that is featured regularly in a given genre of visual rhetoric, is particularly helpful in the study of *arpilleras* (Pierce 205-251). For visual rhetorician Dann Pierce, in his investigation of those featured in political cartoons, the power of the regular figure comes from its easy recognition through repetition (252). Taylor-Tidwell notes how, as the *arpilleristas* became increasingly aware of their international audience, they began to develop standardized iconography and regular characters to assist viewers in understanding the narratives contained within each tapestry. For example, the Andes provided geographic confirmation that the *arpiller* was made in Chile, as well as a means to convey constancy; the sun was used to symbolize the hope of a new day (145-148).

Two regular figures feature prominently in *arpilleras*: that of “mother” and that of “*los desaparecidos*” (the disappeared). Mothers are typically depicted as feminine figures, often in skirts or dresses, with their arms upraised. Often, these women are shown in groups of various sizes, emphasizing the social character of this role. In addition, they are often accompanied by some sort of indexical sign that points toward the absence of a loved one; for example, a mother might wear the symbol of the Association for the Families of the Detained and Disappeared or appear under the words “*dónde están*” (where are they?), referencing inquiries as to the whereabouts of missing family members. This connects these mothers to another regular figure of *arpilleras*: *los desparecidos*. These individuals are referenced not by their presence, but
through indexical signs pointing to their absence, such as an empty chair or a shadow figure (Agosín Scraps of Life 12-16).

The regular figures of mother and los desaparecidos can be understood as important elements in women’s narratives of their experiences with conflict in Chile. I now turn to pentadic analysis to investigate how three arpilleras utilize these regular figures as they position the scene, act, and actors in relationship to one another in their narratives. I have chosen three pieces for study that typify a representative anecdote of arpilleras in relation to women’s roles in Chilean society. That is, these three pieces address the common themes of loss of family members, women’s social activism, and visioning for the future. Each of the three arpilleras challenges Pinochet’s definition of mother in different ways: as impossible to achieve under the regime, as public activism, and as the site of hope for a different future. I argue that, together, these arpilleras express a redefinition of the social role of mothering, a renegotiation of social identity, in the context of disappearances in Pinochet’s Chile.

**Appliqué 1: Mother as Impossible to Achieve Under the Pinochet Regime**

In her 1976 piece, arpillera Doris Meniconi depicts the scene as “a mother throws a letter to the wind” (Agosín, Tapestries of Hope 66; see fig. 3.1). Sewn through appliqué in flat relief, the scene includes four feminine figures, some only partially shown, with their arms upraised. The figures are arranged in the foreground, within a gate that encloses them, a church, and a home. Beyond the gate, which stands slightly ajar, at increasing distances, are an empty expanse, a cityscape cut from one geometrically patterned piece of cloth, and the snowcapped Andes. Above all of this a white, unaddressed envelope, detailed in red thread, hovers at an upward angle (Meniconi 66).
Scene

Meniconi depicts a conflict marked by a separation between the personal sphere of the home and the impersonal bureaucracy of the government. In the foreground, four feminine figures stand together outside a church and what is presumably a home. Each of these elements is brightly colored and created from several individual pieces of fabric. This portion gives viewers the sense of a community rich in individual but shared experiences. A gate stands ajar; one wonders if this open gate is Meniconi’s commentary on the violation of this community, a breach in the wall, or her call to others to step beyond whatever comforts and safety might be found within it. Perhaps it is both. Whichever the case, the gate seems to imply an unfulfilled connection between the community and the city that lies in the distance. The gate opens to a dirt road that connects the two, a road that is empty, unused or unsafe. The lack of use is unsurprising, given Meniconi’s treatment of the cityscape beyond, perhaps a representation of the Chilean capital of Santiago. Cut from a single piece of cloth, the buildings that comprise the skyline are undifferentiated. In addition, the grid pattern of the fabric, which could denote windows in the buildings, also evokes the empty pages of a ledger, as well as security bars. Together, the single piece of cloth and its pattern give viewers the sense of an impenetrable monolith that is withholding an account for what it contains. Behind the city stand the snow-capped Andes, towering above the buildings as if to say that there is a greater power that is part of Chile’s history and will be its future.

Meniconi has sewn the entire landscape along strange and slanting angles. All the elements are askew, conveying a distressed and unsettled emotional state. Furthermore, all the elements are in strange and unexpected relation to one another. Viewers gaze at a world gone topsy-turvy. What should be solid, like the great Andes, is now uncertain in Pinochet’s Chile.
Act

Mothering is a central act in Meniconi’s *arpillera*; however, it is an unconventional mothering. In the foreground, four feminine figures, the regular figures of mother, stand together, their backs to the viewer as a single envelope floats above the entire scene. Their upraised arms, arms that should be holding a child, are empty and supplicating. This motherly supplication is a social activity; while only one mother throws a letter, presumably the central figure in red, all four women throw their hands to the wind together. But this mothering, with empty arms, is an unfulfilled act of mothering. The envelope, unaddressed, points toward the disappearance of a woman’s son, the act that preceded this one. With this context, the cloth envelope could represent the inability of Chilean mothers to perform a normally mundane act of mothering - communicating with their children.

At the same time there is a small sense of hope in that envelope. While the majority of the scene slants downward in various angles, the envelope floats upward. Meniconi, herself, as a mother of *un desaparecido*, could only attempt to communicate with her son by throwing a letter to the wind, which she did regularly (Agosín, *Tapestries of Hope* 66). Meniconi perhaps placed herself as the central figure in red, the mother who is assumed to have thrown the letter. This is the only element in the *arpillera* that appears to be on solid ground. In this piece, it is as if communication sent on the wind, an incomplete act of mothering, is the only means to set the world straight again.

Agent

Meniconi’s feminine forms can be seen to represent the *arpilleristas* as women who have suffered the loss of a loved one, mothers whose children have been disappeared. These are the only agents viewers see in this piece. However, through the envelope, Meniconi hints at other
actors – the missing children. The woman’s son, the intended recipient of the letter within that envelope, is in this story, but he does not act. It is as if Meniconi is telling viewers that *los desaparecidos* cannot act for themselves and so it falls to mothers to carry the story forward.

*The ratios*

Meniconi’s narrative seems to consider the act of mothering as central to the formation of a woman’s identity in Chile and to transforming the conflict there. The act of communicating with their children is one way that women are constituted as mothers. However, the setting of conflict under Pinochet’s rule impedes the ability of mothers to perform this act. Meniconi’s *arpillera* presents a story of mothers disconnected from the larger society and, more importantly, cut off from their children, unable to fully enact the role of mother on account of the repressive tactics of the government. However, it is through acting as mothers, even if this is impossible to fully achieve, that the women bring hope for restoring balance to Chilean society.

**Appliqué 2: Mother as Public Activist**

Irma Muller, in her 1990 *arpillera*, sews “a woman dreaming and wondering about her son” (Agosín, *Tapestries of Hope* 67; see fig. 3.2). The appliquéd scene shows a cozy bedroom, complete with curtains in relief. Under the curtains is a dresser, upon which sit a few small items and what appears to be a framed portrait of an individual. In the foreground are two chairs, flanking the bed. In one chair sits a figure, hunched over, head in hands, leaning toward the other chair that stands empty. The bed is centered in the piece and a head peeks out from under the covers. A thought bubble that fills the top left corner grows from the head of the sleeper, depicting a dream of a large group of women who face a building or cityscape, empty arms upraised, under several stitched iterations of the phrase “*dónde están*” (Muller 67).
Scene

If Meniconi’s piece hints at the opening of the borders between the private and the public under Pinochet, Muller’s *arpillera* highlights the blurring of those boundaries. This narrative is set within a bedroom, what could be considered one of the most private spaces of a home. In one sense, this is a space of comfort, with soft drapes and cheery wallpaper. Small rugs lay on either side of the bed, a warm touch for bare feet climbing out of bed in the chill of the morning. At the same time, there is a sense of loss that has invaded this private space. A simple portrait sits on the dresser, perhaps a reminder of the woman’s missing son. An empty chair alludes to his absence. Though there are two chairs that flank the foot of the bed, only one of the chairs is occupied, leaving the scene unbalanced, as if Muller is also commenting on domestic disruptions in the wake of the disappearance.

This private space of comfort and loss is permeated by thoughts of a public space. In the sleeping mother’s dream, a group of women stand outside, facing an impersonal block. Cut from a single piece of fabric, the block could be a cityscape of undifferentiated buildings. However, the pattern of the cloth, in tans and browns, evokes the stonework of a fortress wall. Muller may be placing the women outside one of the infamous prisons in which countless people were tortured and killed, or she may be commenting on the feeling of being stonewalled by Chilean authorities. Perhaps it is both. Whichever the case, viewers are left with the sense that the woman are facing an impenetrable and faceless other. And yet, despite the lack of response, they continue to demand an answer to their single question: “where are they?”

Act

Public protest, the demand to know the whereabouts of the missing, is a prominent act in Muller’s narrative. The family members in the home grieve, but they are immobilized in their
grief; one figure crumples in a chair while another lies alone in her bed. Meanwhile, the women in the dream appear to move energetically. Their arms take to the air in various positions, as if waving furiously. Their skirts tilt up toward the left, as if their wearers are marching in rhythm together. The sleeping mother escapes the bedroom, this private space that houses so much loss, through her dream of activism. While Agosín’s caption indicates that this is a depiction of a mother wondering about her disappeared son, the dream image is not of the son himself, but of a group of women asking for information from an impersonal bureaucracy (*Tapestries of Hope* 67). Rather than supplicating, as in Meniconi’s piece, Muller’s women’s empty arms are demanding. Privately, in the home, mothering is about dealing with loss; publically, mothering is accomplished through activism.

*Agent*

There are two sets of agents in Muller’s story, the family and the women. The family appears disrupted, its members frail and disconnected. The mother sleeps alone as the father grieves alone. They do not comfort each other; instead the space between them is heavy with the absence of their son. While the portrait on the dresser may represent this son, it also resembles the symbol of the Association for the Families of the Detained and Disappeared, a group dedicated to discovering the whereabouts of missing victims of the Pinochet regime (Agosín, *Tapestries of Hope* 50). This resemblance links the sleeping mother to the women in her dream.

In contrast to the frailty and disconnection of the family, the women in the dream evoke strength. As with Meniconi’s piece, it is women who dominate Muller’s narrative in the place of men for whom it is too difficult, for sorrow and for safety, to act. The notion of *marianismo* offers a strength and protection to the women that is not available to men. The strength of Muller’s women can be seen in their figures. These women stand tall, their dresses cut from
fabrics in bold patterns and vibrant colors. Muller sews these figures overlapping one another, giving viewers the impression of a unified mass of demonstrators. These mothers join together to occupy a public space.

The Ratios

Muller’s *arpillera* provides insights into the effects of disappearances on family life. Like Meniconi, Muller emphasizes the act of mothering, but for her this act has a concrete address. She sets a scene in which women are suspended between their domestic duties in the home and their activism outside government institutions. This pull toward an identity that crosses between the public and the private seems to be an inevitable outcome of having a missing family member. That is, for Muller, to be the mother of *un desaparecido* is to be drawn out of a private sphere of loss and into a particular social role of mothering through public activism.

Appliqué 3: Mother as Site of Hope for A Different Future

“Mother and young daughter” (see fig. 3.3), as captioned by Agosín, features a rarity: typically, mothers appear without their children in *arpilleras* (Agosín, *Tapestries of Hope* 50). In this piece by an unknown artist, however, viewers witness two feminine figures, one larger than the other. Their arms are not upraised, as women are often portrayed in *arpilleras*. Rather, their arms are undefined, perhaps hanging at their sides. The larger woman, centered in the piece, wears the symbol of the Association of the Families of the Detained and Disappeared on her chest. The young girl stands slightly to her left, the viewers’ right. The two figures stand together, as if for a portrait, in front of an undefined background and flanked by drapes. Together, the pair seem slightly off center in the scene, as if a third figure were needed to provide balance.
Fig. 3.3 “Mother and young daughter” by unknown artist from Tapestries of Hope, Threads of Love: The Arpillera Movement in Chile, 1974 – 1994. By Marjorie Agosín. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996. 50. Print.
*Scene*

Many *arpilleras* depict detailed backgrounds, indicating specific locations and times. However, the setting for this *arpillerista’s* story is unclear. The two figures are sewn atop a single piece of solid red fabric with simple grey drapes on either side. In my own memory cloth, I have noticed the ways in which the background of each panel is influenced by the sense of certainty I have with a particular scene. Chicago, where I lived for many years, is rich in detailed patches of the lakeshore, prominent buildings, and the train that carries me to and from the city. In contrast, images of my encounters with insurance and drug companies as I worked to piece together treatment for a chronic illness float on a solid black background. Perhaps this unknown artist is conveying a similar uncertainty. It appears as if this scene of a mother standing calmly with her daughter does not yet have a place or time. Perhaps, instead, this is a hoped-for future that the mother must work to create. In a sense, the passage of time itself could be considered the setting of this piece. One could read this passage, as one’s gaze moves from left to right across the panel. A missing son represents the past, the activist mother stands centered as the present, and a young girl hints at the future.

*Act*

Through a simple scene, this unknown *arpillerista* has communicated the difficult act that many mothers found themselves required to perform during the Pinochet regime: working simultaneously for the preservation of the past and the future. Here, the mother retains the memory of her missing family member. The symbol of the Association of the Families of the Detained and Disappeared worn on her chest points toward continued public activism. The space for the third figure to her right (the viewers’ left) evokes a continued sense of unbalance in the families of *los desaparecidos*. However, unlike the women in both Meniconi and Muller’s
arpilleras, this mother does not raise her arms to supplicate or demand, but stands as a still witness to the atrocities of the past.

At the same time, this arpillerista has sewn a mother who supports the future. The mother figure stands behind the young girl, as if to brace her for what may come next. However, the mother does not embrace this child. It is as if the security of this relationship is uncertain. Perhaps the memory of her missing family member makes the mother hesitant to connect with this young child. Perhaps she is afraid that her arms cannot hold the girl. Or perhaps she is trying to avoid tying this child to the past, wanting to leave her free to embrace a new future instead. Perhaps all these emotions and more are flooding together as she stands behind her daughter.

Agent

There are two actors in this arpillerista’s narrative, the mother and the daughter. The larger figure of the two, the mother, is centered in the piece, giving the impression that she is the central character of the story. On the left, where a third figure might fit, she shares a seam with the drapes. Perhaps this points to the ways in which her role in society has been revealed, thrust upon her through the disappearance of her loved one shifting her into a more public position. While standing in front of the drapes, she stands behind her daughter, hinting at a familiar responsibility to put her children first. Her brown, drab clothing seems to tell viewers that this is all exhausting work. At the same time, she engages viewers, looking directly at us, demanding to be seen and inviting us to connect with her story. Her expression appears tranquil, perhaps even holding a faint smile. Perhaps this is an expression of the calm and hope that she finds in such connections.

The young girl, on the other hand, draws viewers’ attention to what cannot be seen. She is positioned in front of her mother, hinting at a familiar role in which she is to carry forward the
work of women. However, she stands behind the drapes, as if to say that the form of this work, what sort of place she will hold in broader Chilean society, has not yet been revealed. Her clothing is cut from bright, floral patterned fabric, evoking a sense of spring and new life. Her eyes look toward the edge of the tapestry, at something that is either behind the drape or out of the frame, something that viewers cannot see. It is something that perhaps her mother, frozen forever in the present of this portrait, caught between the past and the future, also cannot see. Perhaps the girl looks at what is to come.

*The Ratios*

This simple portrait provides a powerful, yet unfinished narrative of Chilean womanhood. Viewers see mother represented through the acts of preserving the memory of *un desaparacido*, the past, while also attempting to provide a different, more secure future for her children. However, the piece also hints at a hope for a different kind of social role that may be available to women in the future but for now, like the daughter, is waiting to be fully unveiled. Perhaps the unknown woman who created this *arpillera*, like the mother who gazes out from its center, is calling upon viewers to join her in weaving together the next chapter of this story.

**Fasteners: Chilean Arpilleras and Conflict Transformation**

After offering my analysis of each of these *arpilleras* separately, I now consider the narratives they contain as a collection. I first summarize what type of identity, based on action, these rhetors advocate. Next, I discuss the relationship between this new narrative of women’s identity and the one promoted by the Pinochet regime. Finally, I reflect on the role of these women’s new narratives in conflict transformation in Chile.

To begin, all three women seem to advocate for social identity for women based on public activism. This activism is rooted in the cultural values that comprise *marianismo*, where
women’s strength provides for the care and well-being of their homes and families. However, for these rhetors, the context of the disappearances during the Pinochet regime requires women to step outside of their homes and into the public sphere. This public activity is social and it is political. In these narratives, to be a good mother is to join with other women, whether as groups of protestors or through matrilineal heritage, to challenge the oppressive tactics of the government.

These narratives of mothering through resistance to oppression are a subversion of the Pinochet regime’s narrative of Chilean society. Pinochet attempted to propagate a conservative brand of Chilean womanhood in which women were relegated to the private sphere of their homes and families. The goal of this narrative was to ensure a docile populace that would unquestioningly accept the authority of the military junta, and particularly Pinochet himself. Initially, many women in Chile supported this interpretation of their national identity. However, these rhetors show that women were soon called to enter the public sphere as the regime disappeared more and more citizens.

This entrance into the public sphere represents a shift in relationships within Chilean society. In these rhetors’ narratives, it is the women who are strong and actively engage in politics while the men, if not entirely absent, are immobilized through grief and fear. Importantly, Pinochet’s authority as the national patriarch is challenged. While neither the general nor his agents appear directly in any of these arpilleras, their presence is made known through the monolithic buildings they occupied and references to the disappearances they carried out. The women in the tapestries call out to the government, demanding answers and accountability. It is as if this is the only act that can re-establish balance in Chile and bring a conclusion to the conflict. While the stories presented by Doris Meniconi, Irma Muller, and an
unknown *arpillerista* highlight the change in the relationship between women and the
government that occurred during Pinochet’s reign, they only hint at a changed relationship
between women and broader Chilean society. Following the gaze of the young girl who looks
beyond the embroidered borders of the tapestry, it is as if these women expect a different future,
even if they cannot yet envision it.

The women who stitched these three *arpilleras* have made powerful claims about the
social identity of women as mothers under the Pinochet regime. Together, they point to the
difficulties in performing the role of mother, the reliance on activism to fulfill that role, and the
hope for the future that activism represents. Importantly, they also represent a formidable
leveraging of and challenge to traditional narratives of women promoted by the Pinochet regime.
*Arpilleristas* acted in accordance with their responsibility to care for the future of Chile as wives
and mothers, a responsibility that Pinochet emphasized. But in doing so, they gained a political
consciousness that led them to resist not only the regime itself, but also the limiting roles for
women that it imposed, including a circumscribed role of mother. As rhetors, the *arpilleristas*
not only used their tapestries to narrate their new definition of mother as public activist, but also
enacted that definition through their very creation of the *arpilleras*. In so doing, they invite
viewers to join them in determining the future direction of that narration.

Next, I turn to South African memory cloths sewn by women as part of the *Amazwi Abesifazane – Voices of Women* project. Like the *arpilleristas*, women in South Africa have
used sewing to renegotiate their relationship to their government and broader society. In the next
chapter, I discuss how *Amazwi Abesifazane* participants have expanded conversations about
national identity and citizenship in South Africa through their personal narratives of inequities in
daily living.
CHAPTER 4
STITCHING CITIZENSHIP:
BROADENING THE SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL IDENTITY NARRATIVE

The end of South Africa’s policy of segregation, apartheid, ushered in a nation-building project to reclaim the country’s suppressed histories in order to establish a new national identity narrative. That process included the government-sponsored Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which coordinated the testimonials of individuals who were victimized or victimizers under apartheid. However, the TRC operated from a limited definition of victim, which excluded the testimonies of individuals who suffered due to the general climate of oppression, particularly marginalized women. This exclusion has fostered an incomplete national identity narrative that compromises the inclusivity of South Africa’s developing democracy. Create South Africa, a Durban-based organization, addresses this exclusion through its Amazwi Abesifazane – Voices of Women project, which invites marginalized women to contribute a brief narrative and a hand-sewn memory cloth to the historical record. In this chapter, I provide my analysis of three narratives and memory cloths that contribute differing experiences of South African citizenship: struggles with mothering amidst widespread violence, reliance on broken family structures, and the lasting trauma of rape. Together, these stories invite a broader conversation about citizenship in South Africa.

Setting Block: Apartheid and Nation Building Through Story

The roots of contemporary structural inequities in South Africa extend back to the colonial era. As the first European settlement developed into an independent nation, Africans and other people of color were increasingly subjected to discriminatory laws. These laws rested upon and were justified by a racist ideology that placed White culture and interests above the culture
and interests of others and culminated in the national policy of segregation known as apartheid. Apartheid, which literally translates into English from Afrikaans as “apartness,” was instituted by the all-White government in 1948. The policy categorized all South Africans according to one of four races: White, Colored (mixed race), Asian (predominant Indian), or African. Legislation was passed to ensure the separation of these races in all aspects of life, from career and education to transportation and residential areas, from leisure activities like sport and theater to personal relationships involving sex and marriage (Eades 3-13). Supporters of apartheid argued that the various racial groups living in South Africa had significantly differing traditions, interests, needs, and capabilities and that each race should be left to develop according to those differences. However, apartheid’s “separate development” was never intended to imply “equal development.” Rather, Whites were seen as morally responsible for overseeing the development of other races, who were considered incapable of governing themselves. In overseeing this development, Whites in leadership positions established a system that ensured the social oppression, economic exploitation, and political domination of people of color, particularly Africans (Lötter 23-31).

The results were devastating. Forced removals from residential areas; pass laws that restricted the mobility of Africans, Asians, and Coloreds by requiring special permits, or “passes,” for travel throughout the country; and industry patterns that favored migrant workers caused massive disruptions of social and family structures. While many White South Africans benefitted economically from apartheid, the rest of the population, particularly Blacks, faced increasingly extreme poverty (Eades 78-79; Lötter 18). In the face of such strain, Black South Africans began to engage in various forms of resistance, moving from nonviolent action into violence (Lötter 53-66). The White government responded with increasing brutality in its attempts to maintain apartheid. Ultimately, the system proved too costly to maintain, both in
terms of economic resources and international reputation. In 1990, the government initiated the process of dismantling apartheid and transitioning to full democracy. The following four years were marked by an increase in violence, as the paramilitary wings of various political parties (both conservative and revolutionary), government, and activists all vied for influence leading up to the 1994 elections (Eades 70-77). At the same time, public dialogue and negotiation were increasingly being employed to determine and implement the changes that would take place in the “new South Africa” (Lötter 75). The most widely-recognized institution representing this turn is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The TRC was established with a mandate “to promote national unity and reconciliation in a spirit of understanding which transcends the conflicts and divisions of the past” (South Africa TRC 55). It was to do so by investigating the abuses perpetrated during apartheid and developing recommendations and mechanisms to provide reparations to victims and amnesty to perpetrators. Overall, the TRC was an attempt to address the trauma of the past in order to create a shared sense of national identity for the new South Africa that included, for the first time, the voices of those who had previously been oppressed (South Africa TRC, 55). While the TRC played a significant role in South Africa’s transition to democracy, critics have also raised a range of concerns (see van der Mrewe and Chapman). In particular, many have critiqued the procedural exclusion of certain types of narratives (Blum; Grunebaum; McEwan; Ross). The TRC developed its processes for narrative collection by operationalizing limited definitions of what constituted “victim” during apartheid. The result was that the project inadvertently excluded certain voices, particularly those of indigenous women.

In order to address these omissions, civil society organizations have developed projects to complement and complete the TRC process and findings. Among these, Create South Africa’s
*Amazwi Abesifazane* – Voices of Women project has worked to create a space for marginalized women, particularly African women, to contribute their voices to the national archive. Through a written account and embroidered memory cloth depicting their experiences, these women provide an important supplement to the testimonies recorded by the TRC (Becker “*Amazwi Abesifazane*”, SAIC 2-4; Botha 134). For the project’s founder, sculptor Andries Botha, the inclusion of women’s daily experiences under apartheid provides a more complete understanding of the scope of the challenges facing South Africa today, with a particular focus on the complex impacts poverty has on individual and community lives (139-40). Moreover, Botha states:

identifying women as vital, yet politically marginalized elements within the prevailing cultural debate, assumes that true democratic process can only be realistically achieved if women are acknowledged as essential elements of the social and cultural process that must be economically affirmed and politically empowered. (133).

That is, the inclusion of marginalized women’s voices in South Africa’s narrative of national identity is an essential component in that country’s transition to democracy.

*Dominant Identity Narratives: Establishing the Identity of South African Citizen*

For many observers the TRC’s mandate was, in essence, a narrative project. At its core, the TRC process was about collecting individual stories to weave together as the narrative of South Africa, a new narrative of a democratic nation for all people living within its borders. In the face of historical suppression of marginalized voices, the intentional underdevelopment of education in marginalized communities, the disruptions in social histories created by migrant labor patterns, and the destruction of official documents, the TRC turned to testimonies from individual South Africans as a means to establish a historical record (Becker “*Amazwi Abesifazane,*” Art 117; Botha 133; McEwan 742-43). This historical record, in turn, would be the
foundation upon which a national identity could be constituted. Social scientist Fiona Ross notes that while the TRC served as an archival project, “it was also something more: a specific, public form of bearing witness to violence and its consequences, a process of remembrance and a forum in which identities were articulated, negotiated, and reformulated in the aftermath of institutionalised Apartheid.” (214) That is, the TRC used the documentation of the negative impacts of separate identities in the past as a means to forge together a unified identity for the new South Africa.

This was an important project in the transition from apartheid. The racial codification within apartheid legislation in actuality collapsed into just four broad labels the identities of people with a wide range of historical connections to South Africa, cultural values and traditions, political perspectives and aspirations, and socio-economic positions (Eades Chapter 2). Apartheid, by physically and socially separating the population, also created distinct experiences of South Africa as a nation. For example, Africans did not have the government that protected their relative social and economic security that Whites had while Whites did not witness the violence and poverty experienced in African communities (Lötter 21-28). The process was also essential in fortifying the transition to democracy. In a country in which national identity had been based upon stratified exclusion from the rights of citizenship, establishing an inclusive national identity served as a non-violent means of bringing the wider population into the process (Blum 22; Grunebaum 31).

Political scientist Michael MacDonald, in his study of the role and impact of race in South Africa, discusses the ideological relationships among states, national identities, and citizenship. MacDonald points out that democratic citizenship is not simply a list of specific rights and responsibilities, but rather is fundamentally about a sense of identification, a belief
that the people within a given state belong together within that state. He notes that democratic states are seen as legitimate because they rest on the consent of “the people,” but that whose consent matters is an important distinction. States do not rely on the consent of all people, just the ones who are considered to comprise the nation that the state is established to represent. That is, “national identities identify who is and is not to be enfranchised as citizens in states, who belongs together and who belongs apart, and which state should control what territory” (161-62). According to MacDonald, states whose citizens have a shared sense of national identity have the ability to develop more democratically and peacefully, responding to citizen’s interests through non-violent means rather than spending resources on defining citizenship and enforcing that definition through coercion and violence (Chapter 8). Within the logic of apartheid’s separate development, African, Colored, and Asian South Africans were neither considered full citizens of the state dominated by Whites nor were they allowed to participate as full citizens in their own communities. In order to successfully transition out of the injustices of apartheid and into democracy without the state falling apart entirely, the narrative of South African identity had to change in a way that could provide a sense of common belonging for all people living within the country’s borders, across all their differences (6-9). This national narrative needed to address citizenship in terms of both rights and belonging, to become a national story of a “new South Africa.”

Researcher and activist Heidi Grunebaum notes that the national identity narrative developed by the TRC, the narrative of the “new” South Africa, implies an “old” South Africa. Grunebaum explains that a move away from apartheid meant rejecting the use of race, ethnicity, or geographic origin as legitimate means for South Africa to distinguish itself as a nation. In their place, the TRC utilized the past as the cultural Other with which to construct a common identity
by contrast (31-32). In the process of documenting the legacy of apartheid through storytelling, the TRC relegated apartheid’s atrocities, injustices, and acts of resistance as distinct events that pertained only to the past (2-4). Within that frame, lingering disparities and extreme poverty found in contemporary South Africa are untethered from historical context and depoliticized, characterized simplistically as growing pains in the process of democratic transition and economic development. At the same time, citizen responses to those disparities, acts of resistance that were commonly utilized in the past like mass demonstrations or strikes, appear anachronistic and inappropriate in the new South Africa, leaving citizens with little political recourse (23-28).

What is of most concern for Grunebaum is the normative nature of the TRC narrative. As the most prominent institutional mechanism to address national consciousness, the TRC created a grand narrative through which individuals understand and make meaning of their own personal experiences (23). However, as Grunebaum notes, the TRC’s narrative “authorizes, archives, and thus, legitimizes selected aspects of lived experience of colonial and apartheid atrocities” and in doing so excludes a significant number of South Africans whose daily experiences do not align with this new national identity (28, emphasis original).

The effects of this selectivity based on the punctuation between past and present are particularly gendered. In its work to collect the written and oral testimonies of life under apartheid, the TRC employed a definition of “victim” that emphasized “gross violations of human rights” for political purposes, such as torture and assassination (South Africa TRC 59-60). As the majority of political violence was directed against men, there were few testimonies about women, even when women provided the testimony. When women did testify about their own experiences, their stories were often shaped in the course of the hearings and through media interpretations to emphasize a particular moment, such as sexual violation, rather than the larger
context to which the women were speaking. The TRC also failed to recognize and make accommodations for the social and physical risks that women faced for speaking publicly (Blum 24-25; Grunebaum; McEwan 745-46; Ross 216-17, 226). Moreover, their definition of victim meant that the TRC was unable to account for the everyday brutalities of life under apartheid, leaving individual instances of violations disconnected from larger social structures and patterns. The cumulative result was that the testimonies from a large percentage of the South African population were not included in the TRC proceedings or report, and much of the history the TRC sought to uncover remained hidden. This also meant that the kinds of identities possible were limited in the TRC narrative, given that the project circumscribed both who told stories and what stories could be told (Ross 231-33).

The consequences of this gap in the historical record are material. Cheryl McEwan investigates the intersections of cultural, political, and development geographies. In her study of sewing projects that work to record women’s narratives of daily living in South Africa, McEwan emphasizes the fact that without those narratives South Africa’s national archive, and by extension the national narrative, is incomplete. The omission of marginalized women’s stories from the national narrative makes those women’s citizenship, their belonging in South Africa, questionable. That is, if the women’s experiences do not fit into the national identity narrative, then the extent to which the women themselves fit into the nation becomes a question. This directly impacts the ability of the South African government to operate as a democracy of the sort described by MacDonald. For example, McEwan notes that while South Africa does have legislation that provides women with specific legal rights, sexist and patriarchal structures remain in place that inhibit women from accessing those rights. Without consideration of and
access to information about women’s own experiences, the legislation has failed to address the needs of the women it was intended to support (McEwan 740-741).

As McEwan, Ross, and other scholars have noted, the *Amazwi Abesifazane* – Voices of Women project serves as a mechanism to address the absence of women’s stories in the national archive and bring their experiences into conversations about national identity. *Amazwi Abesifazane* provides a platform for women to assert a broader definition of citizenship within the national narrative of South African identity. McEwan argues that through telling their stories in a public forum, recorded in writing and in hand-embroidered memory cloths, marginalized women “claim a space in the imaginings of the nation, both historically and as citizens in the present” (756). They do so by asserting the everydayness of injustice and inequity in South Africa, an everydayness that challenges the past / new distinction within the TRC’s narrative by making visible the threads that belie that distinction. McEwan notes that the very materiality of the pieces, the medium of the memory cloth, also disrupts the temporal divide. Through beads and stitches, the women draw on traditional modes of expression used by marginalized people throughout South Africa’s history and into the present (748).

One of the strongest testaments to the potential impact these women’s narrative contributions can have in democratic processes may be the South African government’s own recognition of that potential. The Parliamentary Millennium Programme (Programme) was established by the South African government with the mandate of increasing democratic participation to support the country’s nation-building efforts. In 2007, the Programme adopted *Amazwi Abesifazane* as a means to hear from and engage marginalized women from African, Colored, Asian, and White communities. After collecting the oral and stitched testimonies from women across South Africa, Programme staff analyze the content of those narratives to identify
common themes, develop policy recommendations based on those themes, and share these findings with local and national legislative bodies. Baleka Mbete established the partnership between the government and the memory cloth project during her first tenure as Speaker of the National Assembly. She describes her reasoning for doing so in an interview in the documentary film entitled *Amazwi Abesifazane – Voices of Women*, stating:

> A healthy democracy depends on truth. A healthy democracy depends on the realities of people influencing what those in power, in driving the democracy, understand, prioritize – what they do about the information at their disposal. (n.p.)

In other words, Mbete recognizes that *Amazwi Abesifazane* participants, in creating their memory cloths, provide information to politicians and gain political agency, both of which are vital to South African democracy.

**Hoops and Needles: A Framework for Analysis**

Whether through the original Create South Africa project or in later workshops sponsored by the government, all women who participate in *Amazwi Abesifazane* follow essentially the same process. First, with the support of trained facilitators, each woman responds to the prompt “a day I will never forget.” (As both the project and South Africa’s democracy have developed, women participating through the Parliamentary Millennium Programme are invited to choose to respond to the original prompt or to describe “what democracy means to me.”) Each woman’s response, whether a story of something she experienced directly or something she witnessed, is recorded through a written transcription in her native language. She then draws a visual representation of her story, which is transferred to fabric typically measuring roughly ten-by-twelve inches. Finally, she embroiders along the lines of her own drawing, using thread and beads to tell her story. Each woman’s written testimony (in her native language and English
translation) and her memory cloth are archived together with her photograph and biography, emphasizing the importance of authorship and the personal quality of the experiences represented in each narrative. Designed as a complement to the TRC, Amazwi Abesifazane narratives were always intended to supplement the national archive, to be viewed and engaged with publicly. The pieces have been exhibited in galleries and universities throughout South Africa and the world. As part of the Millennium Programme, the pieces were also displayed in South Africa’s Houses of Parliament and local legislatures and several were featured in the reports submitted to those legislative bodies (Amazwi Abesifazane n.p.).

The Amazwi Abesifazane – Voices of Women Museum is currently in the process of making the full archive available to scholars, educators, and artists through their website. At present, marginalized women throughout South Africa have contributed over three thousand narratives to this archive. In the course of my research, I have encountered roughly seventy of these. Some appeared on the Amazwi Abesifazane – Voices of Women Museum website or in materials from previous gallery exhibitions, others accompanied academic articles on the social function of the Amazwi Abesifazane – Voices of Women project as a whole. Florence Mdlolo, one of the original participants in the project, published twenty-two of her memory cloths to accompany her autobiography Ngiyalizwa Izwi Lomntanami (I Could Hear the Voice of My Child). Several women’s cloths that responded to the prompt of “what democracy means to me” were featured in the Parliamentary Millennium Programme reports.

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4 At the time of writing, the Amazwi Abesifazane – Voices of Women electronic archive is inaccessible via the Internet. I extend my gratitude to curator Coral Bijoux, who took the time to discuss my research with me and shared the images of several exemplar pieces based on our conversations and her intimate knowledge of the collection.
A variety of themes emerge in the women’s narratives. A few cloths are celebratory, particularly those from the Parliamentary Millennium Programme that consider the impacts of democracy. These depict happy scenes from rural life, celebrations of the end of apartheid, and highlight the strength of women. However, the majority of the cloths I have seen share experiences of trauma. In general, they speak to the patterns of abuse, poverty, violence, and deprivation that characterize lives at the margins of South African society, both during and after apartheid. As artist and activist Carol Becker has noted, “these are stories of senseless violence enacted from the outside against helpless people, and stories about the senseless violence that oppressed people enact on each other” (Becker *Amazwi Abesifazane, Art* 134). Some draw attention to the politics behind the violence that marked the early 1990s or the devastation to a poor rural family caused by an event that would have been easily overcome by a family with more access to resources. Many depict home, emphasizing women’s domestic and community roles while also revealing the myriad ways women’s homes have been lost or violated through poverty, violence, domestic abuse, and illness. Organizers of the Millennium Programme have noted regional differences in themes, pointing to the different experiences marginalized women have based on their identity and geography. In some provinces healthcare and the HIV/AIDS crisis is preeminent, in others drug and alcohol abuse is of primary concern. Many African women share narratives of extreme poverty while the silenced histories of domestic abuse often appear in White women’s cloths (*Amazwi Abesifazane* n.p.).

In engaging with the *Amazwi Abesifazane* narratives, it is important to remember that the project was designed and implemented with the TRC in mind. Although the TRC invited narratives from victims and perpetrators of atrocities, the majority of testimonies came from those who had been victimized. The TRC intended to create a process of empowerment not
through the stories themselves, but through the contribution those stories made to an honest accounting of the nation’s history and the use of that history in future decision-making. In the same way, while the *Amazwi Abesifazane* narratives do include contributions from women who had been perpetrators of violence, the vast majority of them focus on the experience of victimhood. Though the women often express a sense of little agency in their individual narratives, the act of contributing to a more inclusive historical record is an empowering one. That is, I do not believe that the majority of the women who participate in the *Amazwi Abesifazane* project are advocating for others to engage in the actions they depict in their narratives. Rather, they are highlighting the need for the inclusion of these particular stories within the larger narrative that constitutes South African identity.

Unlike the TRC testimonies, the narratives from *Amazwi Abesifazane* participants are brutally everyday in their nature and their telling. Each narrative refers to a specific time, and yet there is also a sense that it could have occurred in any time or that the incident extends beyond the indicated timeframe, a sense of out-of-timeness. The narratives of personal tragedy point toward the failures of larger social structures and are not bound by the context of the particular social structure of apartheid. It is the very everydayness of these narratives and the hardships they contain that challenges the limited notions of citizenship inherent in the TRC narrative for the new South Africa. In contributing their personal experiences, *Amazwi Abesifazane* participants expand possibility of identities that can be found in the national narrative of the new South Africa, thereby creating a more inclusive notion of South African citizenship.

In working with these pieces it should also be noted that the verbal and visual narratives presented in the *Amazwi Abesifazane* project are intertwined. In his study of Hmong story cloths, Dwight Conquergood noted that these textile pieces were created in relation to oral traditions,
prompted by and prompting verbal storytelling. In a similar fashion, within the *Amazwi Abesifazane* project each woman’s biography, written narrative, and memory cloth are intended to be read together. Here, I include images of the display format utilized by *Amazwi Abesifazane* – Voices of Women Museum, which incorporates each of these elements for each of the narratives under study. I consider the relationship between the verbal and visual narratives in my analysis, referring to each woman’s “verbal narration/narrative” and “visual narration/narrative,” and both together as her “narrations/narratives.” Rather than attempting to establish a false separation between the two narrative forms, I investigate the ways in which each woman’s visual representation provides insights into her story that she does not include in her verbal narration.

I selected the contributions of three women for the present study. These women’s narratives serve as representative anecdotes in that they address the common themes of communal and domestic violence, disrupted family structures, and the loss of individual agency. In addition, each story points toward larger social structures. Bathini Xulu examines her struggles with mothering within the context of widespread violence. Zandile Mavuso describes her experience as a woman who has been run off by her relatives with few other avenues of support. Zanele Mkhize depicts the lasting impacts of having been raped as a child and the failure of the legal system to offer her assistance. Together, these stories describe specific incidents while also disrupting distinctions between past and present in their delivery, inviting a broader conversation about citizenship in South Africa.

**Appliqué 1: Mothering amidst violence**

Bathini Xulu offers her reflections on violence through her narratives. In her verbal narrative, she explains that she lives in Umbumbulu. In 1986, violence broke out and she was forced to abandon her property. She now lives in a “staggering” house and supports her two
children, Lungi and Nkululeko. Xulu includes only a handful of elements in her visual narration, organized in rows on a black background (Fig. 4.1). Her name is stitched in white thread, centered at the top of her cloth. In the top row, from left to right, there is a blue house outlined in purple and white thread, a triangular burlap patch outlined in white thread, and a circular beadwork figure in white with red and green accents. The bottom row features a large red flower-like shape outlined in white thread in the center; on either side is a beadwork patch that contains a human figure. The images are contained within an inner line of red, blue, black, gold, and green beads and an outer frame of blanket stitches in white thread. Individual beads in various colors embellish the background within these frames.

**Scene**

In her verbal narrative, Xulu references the violence that took place in her municipality in 1986. The violence, unconnected to a specific incident or violent act, is abstracted into a general setting. This is reflected in her visual narrative, which seems to focus not on the violence itself but rather her primary concerns in relation to that violence. Her “staggering” house is askew and appears to be in disrepair (Fig. 4.2). Two stitches cross one another in the left window like glass panes while the right window is bare, as if to indicate its glass has been broken. The change in thread color from purple to white may point to unfinished or chipping paint. It is unclear what the triangular burlap patch is meant to represent. Perhaps it is the dislodged roof of one of the houses she lost in the violence or a granary representing access to food. Perhaps it represents the mountainous landscape of her home. Whatever the case, this patch, abstracted in a way that resists easy identification, is set at an angle in relation to the other images. Indeed, most of the fabric elements in this memory cloth appear disjointed, askew, and out of proportion with one another. Most notably, the flower looms large in comparison with the house. Perhaps here Xulu
Fig. 4.1. Xulu, Bathini. “Untitled.” n.d. Embroidery with text. *Amazwi Abesifazane* – Voices of Women Museum, Durban. Photograph courtesy of Coral Bijoux.
Fig. 4.2 Bathini Xulu “Untitled,” house detail.

Fig. 4.3 Xulu Bathini “Untitled,” child in beadwork detail
is thinking of a garden that may have been among the “beautiful houses” she gave up, a memory that makes her current home seem yet smaller. Or perhaps this is a growing flower, a commentary on the tenacity of life to continue to grow even among chaos. In either case, the flower’s size and position suggest that this was a significant part of Xulu’s memories of the time period.

In contrast to the fabric patches, the beaded elements appear far sturdier. The beads, hard and shiny in contrast to the softness of the matte fabrics, evoke a sense of solidity. The circular figure in the top right corner, perhaps a sun, shows a certain deliberation. The rays, which are not uniform in shape or direction, suggest motion, perhaps pointing to the passage of time marked by shifts in the sun’s light. Meanwhile, the center of the figure holds strong. In addition, the pattern of the beads, the rings of white, red, and green on the inner circle and the red and green tips of the rays, would have required planning to achieve. Xulu’s beaded representations of her two children are the most structured in this piece, squared off and carefully detailed throughout, from the figures to the fringe (Fig. 4.3). These structural differences between the fabric and beaded patches may be attributed to Xulu’s differing skill levels in each of these media. However, her choice to represent certain elements in beadwork, which takes additional time if not skill, seems telling. Perhaps Xulu is commenting on what appears most stable to her in this scene. Her sense of home, beauty, and nourishment seem unsteady in the context of this violence. The passage of time and her own children appear to be the only certain elements as Xulu sets the scene of her visual narrative.

Act

In her verbal narrative, Xulu refers to several distinct acts, emphasizing the act of leaving her previous home during the violence and the act of supporting her children. However, she does
not directly depict these acts in her visual narrative. The house points toward her leaving home, perhaps representing the abandoned houses or the poor state of her current house. The care she has taken with the beaded iconic representations of her two children is perhaps also a symbolic reflection of the act of supporting those children. However, Xulu does not describe or represent any specific acts of mothering. Unlike the depictions of mothering presented in the *arpilleras* discussed in the previous chapter, Xulu’s acts of mothering are unseen in her visual narrative.

**Agent**

Xulu is the protagonist in her verbal narrative, in which she delivers several declarative statements: “I support…I hope…I imagined…I live.” Yet, she does not include herself in her visual narration. Rather, in her memory cloth, Xulu is an implied agent, most notably constituted through the act of mothering. Her two children do appear in the memory cloth. In contrast to the abstraction of the burlap triangle, these figures are clear and detailed. Different colored beads show eyes and mouths, patterned clothing, and even clearly defined feet. These children stand strong, looking out at viewers. Perhaps Xulu is expressing her hope that her children will grow to become upstanding citizens. Yet, in this moment, they are characters who stand still rather than act. In her verbal narrative, Xulu shares that she imagines her choices to have been good ones and hopes that they will benefit her in the future. Her absence in her own visual narrative may point to the hope that the support she has given to her children, acts of mothering unseen amidst the chaos of violence, will enable them to have more agency in their lives than perhaps she has experienced in her own.

**The ratios**

In these narratives, Xulu positions herself as a mother. In her verbal telling, she indicates that she is trying to do the best for her children. However, neither of her narratives gives
examples of specific acts that might constitute the identity of mother. Instead, Xulu uses her memory cloth to depict the aftermath of acts. She shows a dilapidated house, the aftermath of having left a nicer home. She shows her children strong, the aftermath of her supporting them. Xulu herself and her actions are not pictured. Her struggle is unseen, invisible to onlookers, who only witness the disarray that is the context of her actions. Xulu’s absence in her own visual narrative suggests that drawing the connections between the family role of mother and the outcomes of the choices one makes as a mother is difficult in the context of large-scale violence. Unable to control larger social forces, individuals seem to disappear from their own stories.

**Appliqué 2: Run off**

Zandile Mavuso’s response to the prompt “a day I will never forget” is the story of when she was sent away from her sister’s home. In her verbal narration, Mavuso, who was staying with her sister and brother-in-law, shares that she had had a child and become ill. Her sister and her sister’s husband claimed that Mavuso was not contributing to the household food and violently expelled her from their home. With no parents or grandparents to turn to, Mavuso explains that she sought shelter from an aunt. Her visual narrative provides rich detail of this day (Fig. 4.4). Brightly colored threads are stitched onto cobalt fabric. On the left side stands a house, tidily outlined in yellow thread and filled in with different colored blocks. Next to this house is a figure wearing a multi-colored dress, presumably Mavuso’s sister, standing with one hand on its hip while the other waves in the air. To her right is a figure wearing trousers, likely the brother-in-law, waving both arms in the air, a stick in one hand. A third figure stands on the far right, wearing a dress or a skirt, her arms outstretched; this is likely Mavuso herself. Around the house and these figures are various designs that seem to represent plants, some embroidered with thread, others with beads, and others with both. Mavuso’s name appears in red thread,
underlined in green, across the top of the panel. Below her surname are the letters B, A, I/L, E, K, A.⁵ A yellow border of zig-zagged stitches runs along the edges of the cloth.

Scene

Home comes through clearly as the setting for this narrative. The house is tidy, sturdy, and colorful. The yard seems full of healthy plants, beadwork highlighting the ripeness of seeds and fruit (Fig. 4.5). The blue background, bold thread colors, and beadwork all lend warmth and texture to the scene. This home carries with it the sense of stability and security. However, Mavuso stands on the edge of this setting, her feet poised to carry her into an unknown space beyond the edge of the cloth. She is prevented from truly belonging to this scene by the figures of her brother-in-law and sister, who stand between her and the refuge of the house.

The facial expressions and postures of the three figures seem to highlight this contradiction between the security of this home and the violence with which she was expelled (Fig. 4.6). All three faces appear to be smiling. The eyebrows of Mavuso’s sister and brother-in-law are softened, angled down toward the ears in an open expression, as opposed to angled down toward the nose in what typically denotes anger. Their waving arms could be seen as greetings of welcome; Mavuso’s open arms could be seen as awaiting an embrace. However, Mavuso tells viewers in her verbal narration that, in fact, her sister and brother-in-law had beaten her as they

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⁵ It is difficult to make out the meaning of these letters. They are likely Xhosa words, but the meaning varies depending on how the letters are grouped. “Baieka” or ba ieka” could be translated as “delays,” “baie ka” as “automatically,” and “ba ie ka” as “the fabric of.” While in some ways all of these translations may fit the narrative presented in this piece, given the spacing of the letters and what appears to be a different-colored thread for “ie,” my own interpretation assumes the last of these to be correct, as in, roughly, “Zandile Mavuso’s [memory] cloth.” Alternatively, the third letter may be an “l.” “Baleka” in any combination appears to translate as “run away,” perhaps signifying the idea that Mavuso was “run off.” I explore this possibility further below.
On 2 of 1987 I was staying with my sister and her husband. I had a baby and I got sick. I was at Coronation (BaQulusini) area at number 9. My sister and her husband beat me up and chased me away from their house. They had claimed that I was not buying food. They told me not to ever show up there. I went to seek shelter from our mother’s older sister, as we had no parents nor did we have grand parents.


Fig. 4.4 Mavuso, Zandile. The day I will never forget. Voices of Women Museum, Durban. Amazwi Abesifazane – Voices of Women Museum. Web. 5 March 2016.
Fig. 4.5 Zandile Mavuso “The Day I will Never Forget,” house and beaded flower detail

Fig. 4.6 Zandile Masuvo “The Day I Will Never Forget,” embroidered figures detail
expelled her from their home. Knowing this, the signs of greeting become a brandished stick and hands ready to slap; Mavuso now holds her arms out to defend her body. But the smiles remain, incongruent with the story. Perhaps Mavuso is revealing the contradictions of family life as the setting of both protection and aggression in her visual narration. Perhaps the smiles reflect the love of her family, even as they turned her away in violence. Perhaps Mavuso is demonstrating the conflation of time, with memories of happier times represented simultaneously with the painful memories. Perhaps Mavuso is communicating all three sentiments together.

**Act**

Mavuso’s narratives center around the act of sending someone away. Her visual narration emphasizes this point from her verbal telling. The lettering under Mavuso’s name may spell “baleka,” Xhosa for “run away.” This could carry two meanings in memory cloth, the first of which is the idea that Mavuso’s family members run her off. As noted above, her sister and brother-in-law stand between Mavuso and the house. They threaten her with their hands and a stick to keep her away. Here, the sister and brother-in-law engage in direct action. This is in opposition to Mavuso’s portrayal of her self in relation to this act. As her family members run her off, Mavuso herself is run off. Her figure is smaller than the other two, perhaps indicating her distance from the scene. Mavuso, the narrator of this story, by placing herself in the third person, emphasizes the sense that she was acted upon rather than acting on her own accord.

Mavuso expresses some of the uncertainty that results from this act of running off. The feet of all three figures are pointed toward the right, away from the home and toward an unknown space outside the borders of the memory cloth. Mavuso has no parents or grandparents to assist her. Turned away from her own sister’s home she “went to seek shelter” from an aunt. It
is unclear whether or not she obtained shelter, as her verbal narrative ends with the uncertainty of “seeking” shelter and her visual narrative does not contain a new home.

Agent

Mavuso’s narratives contain three actors. (While Mavuso mentions a baby early in her verbal narrative, there is no mention of the child later in the story and it is not depicted in the visual narrative.) Her visual telling provides insights as to the agency she attributes to each. The most prominent figure is that of the sister. She wears a dress printed in a complex pattern and stands assertively with one hand on her hip. Centered in the scene and positioned closest to the house, she appears to have a fair degree of control of her own and others’ actions in this story. Her husband stands not just next to her, but slightly behind her. Perhaps his position indicates support of his wife’s control of the domestic sphere of the home. His stick and his physical strength give him his own power, as well. Although he may be acting in support of his wife, the brother-in-law also displays his own agency.

Mavuso, by contrast, is smaller than the other two figures and farthest from the house. She holds her arms out, rather than holding a firm stance like her sister. She has no weapons to fend off attack from her brother-in-law. With no other recourse, she leaves the scene. She seeks aid from another family member but the outcome of that request is unclear. In these tellings, Mavuso is an agent who is acted upon, a protagonist with little agency.

The ratios

In her narratives, Mavuso is seeking the security and stability of a home. She has been run off by one set of relatives. Her only recourse is to request assistance from others. In these narratives, Mavuso is a woman at the mercy of the whims of her family members. This identity is constituted not through her own actions, but through the actions of others. This is a story of
how she became a woman who has been run off. This is also a familial story; at no point in either of her narrations does Mavuso suggest the possibility of turning to the state for assistance. These narrations point toward the ways in which indigenous women, with government resources unavailable or inaccessible, have little option but to rely on the benevolence of family members in times of need. At the same time, such family support is unstable within disrupted family structures. Mavuso offers no explanation for the absence of her parents and grandparents, and her verbal telling indicates that food security was a concern for her sister and brother-in-law. Together, Mavuso’s narratives draw attention to her lack of social support structures, both from family and government, as integral to her experience as a South African woman.

**Appliqué 3: Having been raped**

In her response to the prompt “a day I will never forget,” Zanele Mkhize narrates the story of how she was raped as a young child by her uncle. Her contribution provides a striking demonstration of the power and significance of the visual narrations that are part of the *Amazwi Abesifazane* project. As a reader, I am saddened by her words as she narrates. As a viewer, I cannot turn away from her story. I find myself frozen in heartache. I wonder how often she sat with her needle poised, unsure of how to continue a line of chain stitches as the image that line formed brought her trauma into relief. Unable or unwilling to believe my own eyes, I ask others to tell me what they see in the figures. I struggle to put words to her detailed depiction, pausing often to negotiate the spaces between her direct telling and academic conventions of propriety. I proceed with caution.

Mkhize is not sharing her personal memory of the rape, but rather her mother’s telling of the story. Mkhize was too young at the time of the rape to remember it. Her youth also prevented her from testifying in the case, leading to her uncle’s acquittal. She ends her verbal narration
expressing sadness for having lost her virginity so young and anger with her uncle for having taken it from her. In her memory cloth, Mkhize embroiders a straightforward depiction of the scene on a brown background, bordered in blue thread (Fig. 4.7). Her name appears in green block letters, underlined in red, in the top, left corner. Two curved blue lines appear under her name, a third appears in the bottom right corner. Small spiked shapes in red, white, and brown sparsely populate the mid-section of the cloth. The top left section is occupied by yellow stitchwork, perhaps in the shape of a tree, embellished with multicolored beads. Two figures, in detailed stitches, dominate the bottom left section. The masculine figure sits atop the feminine figure, pinning her down. The Zulu word “wadlewengulwa,” “was raped,” appears vertically along the left edge in purple thread, underlined in white.

Scene
The scene for this narrative is sparse and unspecific. This may be a reflection of Mkhize’s own sparse remembering of this story. This is likely an imagined scene, based on memories of her childhood home. The stitches in simple lines may represent features of the landscape of her youth. The blue lines in the top, left corner may represent mountains in the distance. The spiked figures in red, white, and brown may be small bushes or tufts of grass. The thin blue line in the bottom, right corner may be a small river or creek near her family’s home. Perhaps the figure in yellow is a tree, the beadwork representing its leaves or fruits. It may be that the yellow stitches form the stout trunk and knobby branches of the baobab tree, common throughout South Africa. It is under this tree, and within the bushes that the rape is being committed. I find myself wondering whether the changing colors of the bushes, from white to brown to red, represent how they, too, were damaged in this act.

The landscape figures in this piece may represent the images from Mkhize’s childhood
Fig. 4.7 Mkhize, Zanele. “Usuku engingasoze ngalukhoshlw (A Day I Will Never Forget)” n.d. Embroidery with text. *Amazwi Abesifazane* – Voices of Women Museum, Durban. Photograph courtesy of Coral Bijoux.
Fig. 4.8 Zanele Mkhize “Usuku engingasozera ngalukhoshlwa (A Day I Will Never Forget),” tree figure detail

Fig. 4.9 Zanele Mkhize “Usuku engingasozera ngalukhoshlwa (A Day I Will Never Forget),” human figures detail
that remain strong with her as she sews. They are also common elements in many of the *Amazwi Abesifazane* memory cloths. Her verbal narrative names this setting as the municipality of Maphmulo. At the same time, her visual narrative could be seen to connect her story with those from other parts of South Africa through shared imagery. Mkhize, herself, does not seem to be as concerned with the setting as she is with the two people in the scene. They are fully embroidered, stitches filling their bodies and clothing, in contrast to the landscape elements that are simple outlines. The exception to this is the tree, which is embellished with brightly-colored beads scattered in the upper branches. Perhaps Mkhize is speaking to the natural beauty of her childhood home as a means to emphasize the unnatural barbarity of her uncle’s act.

*Act*

Mkhize emphasizes rape in both her verbal and visual narrations. In her memory cloth, the detailed stitches of the two people give weight to this act, holding the viewer’s eye even against the shine of the beads that adorn the tree. However, it is not the act of *raping*, though the perpetrated is named and depicted, but rather the act of *being raped* that dominates this narrative. The word “wadlewengulwa,” stitched above the two people, emphasizes this for viewers. The phrasing of “was raped” places the subject in the passive position. Here, Mkhize depicts rape as an act that happens to someone, an act that one has no control over. Her emphasis of this point is particularly poignant given how very young she was at the time of this violation.

Echoes of the act of rape can be seen in the tree figure (Fig. 4.8). As noted above, this may be a baobab tree, which is known to produce nutrient-rich fruit and have a variety of medicinal uses. Perhaps Mkhize is expressing a desire for healing in this tree, its beaded branches heavy with sustenance and curatives. At the same time, the stitches and beading also evoke more disturbing imagery. The top of the stout trunk has a certain yonic quality, while
several of the branches appear somewhat phallic. From this perspective, the trunk, rooted to the ground, is being violated by its own branches in what may be a reflection of how Mkhize herself was violated by her own family member. It is not clear whether Mkhize intended this in her design, whether it was an unconscious manifestation, or whether it simply reflects the difficulty of translating the image of a tree in her memory to fabric with thread and beads. However, given the nature of her narrative, it is difficult for viewers not to see this as a potential interpretation while reading her memory cloth.

Agent

This is Mkhize’s story of being a person that has been raped, not her uncle’s story of being a rapist, although both appear as agents in this narrative. As noted above, the two people are the most detailed of the figures in the memory cloth, their clothing, skin, and hair carefully filled in with discrete stitches (Fig. 4.9). The male figure, presumably Mkhize’s uncle, straddles the female figure, his brow furrowed and mouth open in anger or exertion, or both. He is fully clothed in purple trousers, a white t-shirt, and neat black shoes. Positioned on top and unexposed, his control of the situation is emphasized. In contrast, the female figure, presumably Mkhize herself, is held down under the weight of the man’s body, her arms pinned down by his. She wears a pained expression, her eyes closed and her mouth open as if crying or calling out for help. While her shirt remains on, her lower body is exposed, her bare legs spread and kicking. Her bottom rests on a patch of red, perhaps a torn skirt or perhaps blood from the violation of her young body. In this depiction, Mkhize is an agent with little agency. Interestingly, the female figure in this scene appears as an adult, despite the fact that Mkhize was raped as a very young child. Her body is roughly the same size as the man’s, the contours of her shirt hinting at the developed breasts of a grown woman. Her hair is cut short, not unlike the style that Mkhize
wears in the photograph that accompanies the narratives. It is as if in learning of the rape later in life, something she was too young to remember for herself, Mkhize’s image of the event becomes one of her adult self being raped. This out-of-timeness is all the more poignant as viewers recall that Mkhize is responding to the prompt “a day I will never forget.”

Mkhize does not depict any other agents in her story cloth. However, given that she shares in her verbal narrative that her mother was able to tell the story to her and that her uncle had been arrested for the crime, there must have been others who knew what had happened. But Mkhize does not indicate this in her visual narrative. There are no other people or even animals in the scene. Only the mountains, vegetation, and streams of the landscape are witnesses to the rape. Perhaps this composition reflects Mkhize’s sense of being isolated from and abandoned by the familial, community, and municipal structures that should have protected her from, or at least aided her following, this violation.

The ratios

In these narratives, Mkhize describes rape as an act that constitutes her personal identity. However, she does not enact this herself; rather, rape is enacted upon her. In this manner, her identity becomes that of a woman who was raped. The relationship between act/agent and scene are notably vague in Mkhize’s narratives. Her verbal telling does name the municipality, the local police station, and the chiefs that presided over the town at that time in a way that give geographic and temporal specificity to the circumstances of her violation. At the same time, she only includes brief hints of landscape and small patches of vegetation in her memory cloth. She depicts herself as a full-grown adult rather than a small child. She is alone with her rapist, with no sign of the family members, government officials, or governmental institutions that she names. Mkhize’s visual telling displaces her experience in both space and time and highlights the
isolation of women who have been raped and are not supported by family, community, or government structures.

**Fasteners: Amazwi Abesifazane and Conflict Transformation**

Having described my analysis of the contributions of three *Amazwi Abesifazane – Voices of Women* participants, I now consider their narratives as a collection. I first summarize what type of identity, based on action, these narrators describe. Next, I discuss the relationship between this identity and the one contained within the national narrative developed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Finally, I offer suggestions as to the role these women’s narratives may play in the transformation of conflict in South Africa.

The identity of victim dominates the narratives presented by these three women, constituted through the experience of the target, intended or unintended, of others’ negative acts. The verbal and visual narrations generally utilize the grammatical form of the passive voice, highlighting the narrator’s lack of agency in their own stories. At the same time, there is a sense of resilience in these stories. Each woman is able share her story in her own language (verbal and visual), affirming both her survival and her presence. While each of the rhetors share stories of alienation from the social structures that should provide them with support, in their acts of storytelling they assert their belonging to South African society.

These narrators’ assertion of their belonging to South African society challenges the national identity narrative of the TRC. The TRC process limited the historical archive of South Africa by limiting contributions to those who had been victims of specifically political violence under apartheid. This definition excluded the experiences of many South Africans, particularly those of women who suffered under the general climate of social injustice. The result was a narrative of South African identity that delimited atrocities to a series of individual incidents
from the past and could not accommodate contemporary struggles for inclusion. Bathini, Mavuso, and Mkhize disrupt the distinctions between the past of apartheid and the present of economic development through their narratives that demonstrate the ongoing nature, the out-of-timeness, of structural inequities.

This work contributes to conflict transformation in South Africa by expanding the conceptualizations of citizenship in that country. The transition to a democratic state that is capable of being responsive to the needs of all its citizens is an integral part of the peace process in South Africa. However, the state’s ability to respond to citizen needs is dependent upon its ability to understand the experiences of its citizens. The TRC made great strides in helping South Africans understand their collective history, but the process also left out many voices. The South African government, then, is left with an incomplete national narrative on which to base their decisions in guiding the future of the country. Bathini, Mavuso, Mkhize, and other participants in the Amazwi Abesifazane – Voices of Women project supplement the TRC narrative, prompting an expanded conversation around South African citizenship. In particular, their stories point to the need for government to address ongoing structural inequities in order to meet the needs of South African citizens.

The women who shared their experience orally and through beads and thread have asserted themselves as citizens of South Africa. Together, they express the difficulties in fulfilling familial roles within the context of widespread violence, the struggles connected to a reliance on broken family structures, and the lasting trauma of victimization. Importantly, in sharing their personal experiences they also provide significant contributions to the national narrative of their country. Through the everydayness and out-of-timeness of their narrations, they stimulate a larger conversation about the nature of South African identity. As rhetors, the
participants in the Amazwi Abesifazane – Voices of Women project used their words and their memory cloths to invite others into that conversation.

Next, I consider women’s quilted responses to the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Like South Africa, Northern Ireland is in the process of transitioning out of a lengthy ethnic conflict. However, unlike the Amazwi Abesifazane participants or the arpilleristas in Chile, whose work prompts considerations of the relationship between themselves and their respective governments, quilters in Northern Ireland are prompting dialogues about how citizens related to one another. In the following chapter, I discuss how these women are piecing together a common narrative based on mutual accountability and recognition through bridgework to heal a divided society.
CHAPTER 5

QUILTING IDENTITY:

PIECEWORKING COMMON HERITAGE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Participants in the *Amawzi Abesifazane* – Voices of Women project contribute to the national identity narrative of the new South Africa in ways that expand dominant discourses of citizenship through their memory cloths. In Northern Ireland, women have used quilting to offer possibilities for expressing a common heritage as that region transitions out of its own history of conflict. The Troubles in Northern Ireland lasted nearly thirty years. While a peace agreement did bring a close to formal hostilities in 1998, the struggle to fully realize peace continues more than fifteen years later. One of the key elements of this struggle is the mutual recognition of identity narratives, which are perceived to be incompatible. A variety of community-based projects have worked to respond to this issue, including several quilting projects. In these collectives, women have come together across their divides to develop new identity narratives that they offer to broader society in Northern Ireland through their quilts. In this chapter, I offer my analysis of the narratives presented in three such quilts. Each advocates for a sense of shared identity based on different actions: forging paths through bridgework, demonstrating parity of esteem, and recognizing shared trauma. Together, these quilts represent an identity narrative that emphasizes mutual recognition and accountability through bridgework; that is, these quilters offer foundations for a common narrative for people living in Northern Ireland.

Setting Block: The Troubles and Quilting in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland is an example of what is commonly referred to as a divided society, the setting of an intractable conflict characterized by a division between ethnic groups. Here, the division is primarily comprised of those who identify as Irish Catholics seeking reunification
with the Republic of Ireland and those who identify as British Protestants wishing to remain part of the United Kingdom. A long history of tension and discrimination has marked the relationship between the two communities. The region has been a site of contestation since the 1100s when the English began their colonization of Ireland. The country was formally established as Northern Ireland in 1921 in the Anglo-Irish Treaty that ensured the Republic of Ireland’s independence from Great Britain through partition. Latent tensions between the communities in the North remained. The most recent violent conflict, known commonly as “the Troubles,” began in the late-1960s with a Catholic-initiated civil rights campaign inspired by the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. Unfortunately, civil rights demonstrations became an opportunity for paramilitaries from both communities to recruit new members and the campaign soon devolved into civil war (Mulholland 23-24, 50-54). The Troubles lasted for nearly thirty years, until the Good Friday Agreement was signed in 1998, bringing a formal end to the conflict. Since then, the people of Northern Ireland have been working to come to terms with the legacy of the Troubles and create a peaceful future for themselves. Mutual recognition and acceptance of cultural identity, communal loss, and responsibility are at the core of the ongoing peace process (Stover 439-40).

While the Good Friday Agreement was brokered by high-level officials, various civil society organizations have worked to foster cross-community dialogue on the ground since the outbreak of the Troubles (see Morrow and Wilson; Blood and McAteer). Women were and continue to be at the forefront of this work (Carr “Women in Northern Ireland” n.p.). As noted earlier, these grassroots efforts were often dismissively referred to as “the cucumber sandwiches” of diplomacy, a lesser, effeminate form of the peace work conducted by the men who sat at negotiating tables. However, as full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement continues to
be a challenge more than fifteen years later, the role that these projects play in fostering support for the peace process at the local level has become increasingly apparent. As activist Ann Carr notes in her 2014 commentary on the Good Friday Agreement, “the process of building a sharing [sic] community was never intended to be implemented by politicians alone” (Carr “Women in Northern Ireland” n.p.). Several organizations emerged to create opportunities for women to come together across differences to engage in bridgework and act in opposition to the violence that surrounded them. This work included challenging the divisive identity narratives that dominated the Troubles.

Dominant Identity Narratives: Questions of a Rightful Place in Northern Ireland

Identity in the history of the Northern Ireland conflict is often compressed into a distinction between two communities. As I learned while living there, the terms “community” and “cross-community” are frequently used in relation to the Troubles and the current peace process. However, these terms collapse several identifiers. In the context of the conflict, people may identify themselves and each other in a number of ways: along religious lines of Catholic or Protestant; along national lines of Irish or British; along political aspiration lines of Nationalist or Unionist; or along paramilitary affiliation lines of Republican or Loyalist. These identifiers are intertwined with economic class and personal experience with the Troubles (with those from the middle and upper classes tending to have had less direct experience with the conflict). And while identifiers do not necessarily carry through the various lines – an individual who identifies as “Catholic” is not automatically “Republican” – the terms are often treated as interchangeable by those outside Northern Ireland and, at times, by political leaders within the region. “Community” is most typically used in conjunction with either “Catholic” or “Protestant,” with those terms being used to imply “Irish Catholic” and “Protestant Unionist.” The use of the term
“communities” refers to both at the same time, and “cross-community” refers to projects that involve simultaneous participation from both Catholics and Protestants. While, with other scholars (see, for example, Nic Craith), I acknowledge the historical and contemporary diversity of people living within Northern Ireland, throughout this paper I use the above terms according to these common usages in order to be in conversation with popular discourse of the Troubles.

Popular narrations of identity within the two communities are heavily influenced by contested interpretations of historical events. Two historical periods in particular continue to carry significant weight. The first is the plantation of Ulster in the early 1600s, which secured Ireland’s status as a colony of England and the Irish people’s status as colonial subjects through the plantation of Protestant settlers. The second was comprised by the Williamite wars of the late 1600s, during which Protestant forces in support of King William overcame the Catholic forces of King James, thereby ensuring the domination of Ireland by England and Protestantism (Mulholland 2-5). The mythologies surrounding these historical periods have developed into mutually-exclusive identity narratives. For the Catholic community, these periods represent the cruelty with which they were impoverished as their land was stolen from them. For the Protestant community, these events demonstrate the prosperity they brought to the region and mark them as justly rewarded for their contributions. In both communities, these stories explain who can rightfully claim the region and the land as their own, who are insiders and who are outsiders (Nic Craith Plural Identities 36-41). That is, these stories are used to explain who rightfully belongs in Northern Ireland and who does not.

Some scholars argue against the over-simplification of the two-communities model. In Plural Identities – Singular Narratives: The Case of Northern Ireland, anthropologist Máiréad Nic Craith traces the intermingling of the Catholic and Protestant communities and their political
interests throughout history. In addition, she highlights that Northern Ireland has always been a home to other minority populations, as well as a growing number of immigrants today. For these reasons, she argues for shifting discourse in the region toward one of multiculturalism and the development of a common conceptualization of identity. That is, Nic Craith argues that everyone currently living in Northern Ireland can rightfully claim that they belong in the region. However, as Nic Craith acknowledges and I, myself, experienced, the two-community paradigm continues to dominate politics and daily living in Northern Ireland. The term “community” is rarely applied to other identity groups and the design of peace-process initiatives for cultural recognition often follows the two-community paradigm, with few exceptions (see Nic Craith Culture and Identity Chapter 9). Still, even within the two-community paradigm, groups have worked to come together to develop means to resist the mutual exclusivity of dominant identity narratives in Northern Ireland.

As noted above, initiatives led by women have created spaces to explore possibilities for developing the common identity narratives for which Nic Craith argues. One manifestation of this woman-led, peacebuilding work has been the creation of cross-community sewing projects. The projects formed as a means for participants to share their experiences of the Troubles and use those stories to create quilts depicting key events in the conflict as both commemoration and mourning (“The Irish Quilts” n.p). Through their sewing, these women draw on their lived experiences to offer a new, common narrative of identity in Northern Ireland that highlights the need for bridgework to move beyond trauma within a shared land, expanding the notions of who might claim the region as home.
**Hoops and Needles: A Framework for Analysis**

Cross-community quilting projects serve a dual purpose in the Northern Ireland peace process. First, they provide an opportunity for Catholic and Protestant women to come together to build personal relationships with one another as they exchange stories about their experiences of the conflict and visions for the future while planning their quilts. Second, the quilts serve as a mode of public address for the women to share their stories with a wider audience. While these quilts have been included in international exhibitions, people living within Northern Ireland are, in general, the primary audience. Quilts related to the conflict have been incorporated into demonstrations for peace and commemorative events throughout Northern Ireland. In recent years, they have been included in a number of exhibitions of conflict textiles and accompanying workshops, under the direction of activist and researcher Roberta Bacic.

It is through a 2013 on-line announcement of one such exhibition that I first learned of the quilts. Since then, through Bacic’s on-line archive and the websites of the organizations that have contributed pieces to that collection, I have studied roughly thirty of these quilted responses to the Troubles, each comprised of between sixteen and forty-nine individual panels. While several of the quilts were created by professional artists, the majority of them came together as cross-community projects orchestrated by local organizations. In general, the quilts can be divided into two overarching categories: commemorative and visioning. Commemorative quilts honor the victims of the Troubles, those that were killed, are missing, or were injured through violence. In doing so, they often acknowledge that members of each community were both victims and perpetrators. Iconography typically represents both communities distinctly; that is, symbols from a single community will appear in a given panel, though panels from both communities are stitched together into a single quilt. Often, the goal of these commemorative
quilts, stated in the quilts themselves and/or through accompanying information, is to facilitate cross-community healing through remembrance. Related to this goal, many of the commemoration quilts include brief references to the peace process. For example, the closing sentiment of an individual panel or the final panel in an entire quilt may express the hope its makers find in the Good Friday Agreement. Meanwhile, hope is the central theme in the visioning quilts. These pieces tend to both celebrate existing cross-community work and share their makers’ aspirations for a more integrated future. Iconography typically mixes symbols from both communities throughout the quilt, including within panels. A variety of peace symbols, from doves to specific references to the Northern Ireland peace process, are also incorporated throughout the panels. Interestingly, despite both having been created predominately by women, depictions of gender also distinguish these two quilt styles. The majority of panels in commemoration quilts remember the actions and loss of men while the majority of visioning quilt panels highlight the work of women.

The use of the visual has played a particularly significant role in relation to the Troubles. Folklorist Jack Santino, in his book *Signs of War and Peace: Social Conflict and the Use of Public Symbols in Northern Ireland*, argues that visual depictions in Northern Ireland do not simply reflect the violence of the Troubles but actually are constitutive elements in the conflict. He points to the ways in which symbols – in the form of public rituals (such as parades), ubiquitous murals, and the display of flags – are used in public spaces to assert identity and claim territory. That is, the visual is commonly used rhetorically in Northern Ireland. For example, Protestant neighborhoods are often marked by curbstones painted in the red, white, and blue of the British flag (the Union Jack) while Catholic neighborhoods are indicated by curbstones painted in the green, white, and orange of the Irish flag (the Tricolor). The murals that adorn the
neighborhoods of both communities typically draw on easily-recognized cultural symbols. Protestant iconography may include images such as the massive Lambeg drum used in commemorative parades, the jerseys of popular football (soccer) teams, and the use of the color orange in honor of William of Orange. Meanwhile, Catholic iconography references Celtic heritage such as the three-leafed clover; representations of Irish music, dance and sport; and the use of the color green. These images both draw from and provide narrative elements for individuals within their respective communities. In addition, the cultural icons of the two communities are rarely mixed, maintaining distinction through exclusion.

Overall, the visual is an established and respected form of public address in the context of the Troubles. And while Santino focuses his study on the role of the visual in perpetuating the violence of the conflict, he also acknowledges the potential the visual holds for countering that violence. Through their quilts, women in Northern Ireland have participated in this visual culture to act for peace. Here, I have selected three representative textile pieces to analyze in depth: the Northern Ireland Peace Quilt sewn by members of Women Together, the Shared Visions quilt created by several women’s groups in Belfast, and the Remembering Quilt from WAVE Trauma Centre participants. In providing my analysis here, I focus my discussion on a selection of individual panels that are particularly representative of each quilt and offer a rich opportunity for analysis. (For a brief description of all the panels in each quilt, please see Appendices A – C.) In this discussion, the panels of the Northern Ireland Peace Quilt and the Shared Visions quilt are labeled numerically by row, top to bottom, and alphabetically by column, left to right; for example, panel 1A refers to the top panel in the left column. The structure of the Remembering Quilt resists distinctions among the panels and so scenes are referred to according to their placement in the quilt; for example, top, right quadrant. In addition, each of these quilts is the
result of a cross-community initiative, stitched together through the collaboration of Catholic and Protestant women. As the quilts bring together contributions from many women, the name of the individual who contributed each element is not always discernable. For this reason, here I use the organizational name attributed to each quilt rather than the names of the individual rhetors. Finally, audiences throughout the globe can access images of many quilted responses to the Troubles through the Conflict Textiles website, an associated site of the CAIN Web Service (Conflict Archive on the Internet),\textsuperscript{6} curated by Bacic (Bacic \textit{Conflict Textiles} n.p.). It is from this collection that I have selected the three quilts for analysis. I also draw on the captioning provided by Bacic and the brief descriptions provided by each organization, although my analysis will be focused on the visual narratives presented in each piece.

The three pieces I selected for this study are typical of the representative anecdote embedded within the conflict quilts from Northern Ireland in that they present common themes found within the quilts. The Northern Ireland Peace Quilt and the Shared Visions quilt are examples of the visioning quilts that express hope for a shared future through stronger cross-community relations. The Remembering Quilt is a profound example of an attempt at cross-community healing through the acknowledgement of shared trauma in a commemorative quilt. In addition, the narratives found in each of the following three quilts refashion the recognizable iconography of both communities to advocate for different actions that can be used to establish a shared identity: engaging in bridgework, demonstrating parity of esteem, and acknowledging

\textsuperscript{6} CAIN is an on-line database of documents pertaining to conflict, particularly in Northern Ireland. The website is hosted by the University of Ulster and is associated with INCORE (International Conflict Research Institute) and the ARK (Access Resource Knowledge) public policy database.
common traumas. As a whole, they offer society in Northern Ireland elements of a common

identity narrative.

**Appliqué 1: Forging paths as bridge builders**

Women Together was founded in 1970 by two Belfast women, Monica Patterson, a Catholic, and Ruth Agnew, a Protestant. The two were horrified by the chaos that erupted early in the Troubles and decided to bring together other women to stand against the increasing violence and sectarianism. Members of Women Together groups throughout Belfast used their bodies to separate youth throwing stones at one another, used their time to help children escape the violence of the city with breaks to the country, and used their solidarity to confront both government and paramilitary groups. To mark its twentieth anniversary in 1990, Women Together articulated four aims of the organization:

1. To bring about a cessation of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland.
2. To give support to the victims of sectarianism.
3. To give women a “voice” in society.
4. To create a pluralist society where there is mutual understanding and respect for our diversities. (Carr “Women Together” n.p.)

As part of its continuing efforts to create a more inclusive society, Women Together was moved by the AIDS Memorial Quilt to create three “inspiring, memory filled quilts, which to this day travel the world as a visual representation of peacebuilding and reconciliation” (Carr “Women Together” n.p.). In the Northern Ireland Peace Quilt, Women Together members use this visual representation of peacebuilding to narrate a regional identity based on bridgework to enact peace.
The Northern Ireland Peace Quilt (Fig. 5.1; Appendix A) was created in 1994, with panel contributions from several Women Together groups. The quilt measures roughly five feet high by six feet wide and includes sixteen individual panels. While two panels represent traditional
Fig. 5.2. Top, left quadrant of Northern Ireland Peace Quilt detail

Fig. 5.3. Bottom, right quadrant of Northern Ireland Peace Quilt detail
quilting patterns, the majority feature images accompanied by embroidered text. Several of the panels include traditional symbols of peace, such as a dove, an olive branch, or the word “peace” itself transformed into a motif. Others depict scenes that point toward the people and geography of the region. The panels are sewn onto a dark blue background, which creates uniform borders that separate each piece. The entire quilt is framed with letters cut from fabric, forming one word on each side: equality, solidarity, justice, and peace. These words, framing the quilt as they do, seem to communicate the quilters’ intentions for how viewers should read the panels and emphasize the fourth goal of Women Together (Conflict Textiles n.p.).

Scene

Women Together quilters clearly set their narrative within Northern Ireland, but the strife of the Troubles is nearly absent. Instead, the two communities share the country in harmony. Panels 1D and 2C depict geographical features of the region, such as the Mourne Mountains and the Irish Sea. In addition, names of particular towns and parishes are stitched into the fabric of several panels, a signature from the quilters that connects them to a particular location. The two communities that share this geography are also represented, particularly through the use of the colors green and orange, for Catholics and Protestants, respectively. Panel 1A features feminine figures in alternating green and orange dresses, holding hands to form a circle. In the bottom row, a dove holds an olive branch whose leaves alternate in the two colors in panel 4C. Perhaps most interesting is panel 4D. Here, stitches form the outline of Northern Ireland. Within that outline, a myriad of symbols representing both communities are embroidered, filling the corners but not extending beyond the borders. In addition, the symbols are mixed throughout; there is no “Catholic side” or “Protestant side.” It is as if Women Together is suggesting that the geography of this territory is home to a rich cultural heritage without separating the treasures of that heritage
by group. In addition, that heritage is held within the borders of Northern Ireland rather than bleeding over the Irish Sea into the United Kingdom or to the south toward the Republic of Ireland, emphasizing a regional rather than transnational identity. It is as if Women Together is advocating for a loosening of the strings that connect culture with a particular national citizenship within this conflict.

Notably absent from this quilt are depictions of violence or direct reference to the Troubles themselves. The call for justice, equality, solidarity, and peace that surrounds the quilt points toward a conflict that needs to be addressed using these principles. However, these quilters are not telling a story of conflict; they are offering a new narrative of peace. While this narrative is grounded in the geography of Northern Ireland through the scenic panels and names of specific places stitched into the quilt, there is also something of the aspirational that remains. Several of the panels, particular those that strongly feature doves, are images floating in a blank space. The doves seem to represent the quilters’ aspirations, serving as symbols of peace (rather than anthropomorphic agents) alongside the symbols of culture from each community. However, geography becomes murky in this wish for peace. This hovering between reality and hope may be a reflection of the times. In 1994, when this quilt was made, Republican and Loyalist paramilitary groups called a ceasefire that is now recognized as the beginning of the peace process (Mulholland 132). I imagine the quilters, at the time, felt a great sense of hope for peaceful coexistence based on this reality along with uncertainty of what the future might hold.

Agent

Through the Northern Ireland Peace quilt, Women Together share a story of a future created and sustained by women. The figures are feminine, clothed in dresses. The names of the women’s groups and women’s social roles (nuns, mothers), as well as the words “Women
Together,” are stitched throughout the panels. The feminine is also represented symbolically. For example, panel 3D depicts a rose growing out of barbed wire. It is as if the feminine, in the rose blossom, is rising above and overshadowing the sharp painfulness of war, which is often associated with the masculine. Aside from the brief and indirect reference of the barbed wire, men and the masculine are notably absent from this quilt. The task of creating a new, regional identity, it would seem, falls to women.

Interestingly, while representations of cultural identity remain within the borders of Northern Ireland, there is also an indication that individuals outside of the region may have a role in supporting local women’s efforts. Panel 1B depicts a bridge with the names of countries stitched into the brickwork like graffiti. These countries are home to the Irish and British diasporas. It is as if these quilters were calling on those living abroad who are connected to the conflict to support the peace efforts. But even here, women are still central actors; across the top of the panel are the addressees for this call: “mothers for peace.” The call to “mothers” perhaps points toward the role of women as shapers of national identity (Sinha). That is, perhaps in inviting mothers into the narrative, the quilters are sharing their belief that it is women, at home and abroad, who must collaborate to piece together a new regional identity for those living within Northern Ireland.

Act

Women Together advocates for coming together across differences as the primary act to establish a regional identity in this quilt. Traditional quilt patterns invite a sense of togetherness. The feminine figures, in their green and orange dresses, are touching, holding hands. Bridgework is given special emphasis. In panel 1B, discussed above, a sturdy bridge provides safe passage over the river below. The words “Make a Bridge of Your Sharing” below the image make the
The task, it would seem, is to work across differences to create a strong and safe passage for the future. In this way, the violence of the past could be seen as the water that flows under the bridge, a past that will always be remembered but that no longer poses a threat on account of the new passage that rises above it.

Creating new paths forward seems connected to bridge-building in the Northern Ireland Peace Quilt. While several of the panels point toward the outcome of such efforts through pastoral scenes and flying doves, the quilters also seem to recognize the difficult labor of this work. Two footprints appear in panel 3A, their trajectory preparing them to cross much of the quilt. The appliquéd fabric pieces, which bear the words “footprints” and “women’s centre,” could carry a dual meaning for viewers. On the one hand, footprints can mark where one has been. These footprints may be commemorating the actions taken by Women Together participants, marking the places where they stood to separate rival youth or marched to protest government or paramilitary actions. On the other hand, footprints can also serve as a path for others to follow. These footprints may be calling on women to create paths toward the future, and inviting others to follow in that path. All the while, the footprints and their stitches deviate from the green and orange seen in much of the rest of the quilt. Instead, they are in red and blue (though not in shades typically associated with the Union Jack), as if to indicate that a new sort of cultural pattern could lead Northern Ireland forward.

*The ratios*

One of the fundamental questions of the dominant identity narratives of the conflict is who rightfully belongs in Northern Ireland. That is, identity is interwoven with a connection to the land in the region. The Women Together quilters respond to that question most clearly in panel 4D, where symbols of the Catholic and Protestant communities are held together within the
borders of the territory. Throughout the Northern Ireland Peace Quilt, the quilters seem to be arguing that those who engage in bridgework demonstrate their belonging to the region. They make the case that accepting differences and working together across them is the act that rightfully constitutes that identity. Furthermore, when individuals act according to that identity, the scene, the conflict itself, will be altered. This can be seen in panel 3D as the rose grows out of barbed wire, its stem transected by the words “Violence ends / Where love begins.” The implication seems to be that coming together in care and respect can change the conflict and eradicate violence. For these quilters, it appears that women, operating outside the confines of the conflict to form a regional identity based on bridgework, most effectively accomplish this work and provide a path toward future peace.

**Appliqué 2: Demonstrating parity of esteem**

Quaker House Belfast worked toward peace in Northern Ireland for nearly thirty years. In 2008, the organization coordinated and funded a cross-community quilt project. Under the direction of quilter and Unionist politician Sonia Copeland, four community groups comprised of women who identify as Nationalist, Loyalist, Republican, and Unionist came together to exchange meals and conversation as they explored their hopes of peace. Together, the women determined the content of a quilt to share their ideas of a more inclusive Northern Ireland. After completing panels in their respective community centers, the women once again gathered to stitch these aspirations together into the Shared Visions Quilt. Quaker House Belfast invites viewers to take on the message of the quilt with the epigraph: “It has been said; Listen till ye hear. As you stand before this quilt today let me suggest to you that You look till ye see” (*Conflict Textiles* n.p.). The organization calls on viewers to hear these women’s narrative of a
tenuous, but necessary, regional identity built through expressing mutual respect and recognition of each community’s cultural heritage.

The Shared Visions Quilt (Fig. 5.4, Appendix B) is roughly six-and-a-half feet squared and is comprised of thirty-six panels set against a tan background, separated by a uniform light-green border. Each panel brings together corresponding images from the Catholic and Protestant communities, some through human figures, some through plants or animals, and some through cultural symbols. The colors green and orange dominate many panels, as well as the Irish Tricolor and the British Union Jack. The four sides of the quilt hold letters spelling the names of each of the four community groups that came together for the project. White hands reach out from each of these names, meeting the hand of another group in the corners of the quilt (Conflict Textiles n.p.)

**Scene**

The women’s centers quilters lay their contested views of territory side-by-side as they situate their narrative within Northern Ireland. Panel 1A is dominated by a united Ireland, the entire island in angled strips of fabric in several shades of green that erase the borders separating the North from the Republic. Adjacent to this, panel 1B features the landmass that is comprised only of the six counties of Northern Ireland. Territoriality can also be seen through the quilter’s use of flags. As noted above, representations of the Tricolor and Union Jack are most commonly used in Republican and Loyalist neighborhoods to mark control over particular spaces, as well as to indicate the identity of the people who belong in those spaces. Here, however, it would seem that the quilters are using flags as a means to declare their identity, to express the figurative spaces from which they are speaking rather than lay claim to physical geographic spaces. Indeed, the quilters seem to emphasize the shared nature of geographic space. The flags are sometimes
Fig. 5.4. “Shared Visions” by Belfast women’s groups facilitated by Sonia Copeland from Conflict Textiles. November 2015. Roberta Bacic – CAIN Associated Site. Web. 16 December 2015.
Fig. 5.5 Roundabout and sport panels detail

Fig. 5.6. Homes, woman, and music panels detail

Fig. 5.7. Health and butterfly panels detail

Fig. 5.8 Umbrella and sport panels detail
displayed side-by-side, but, more often their colors are actually integrated into one image. Panels 2A and 3D depict homes marked by the colors of the flags side-by-side; one pair emits heart-shaped smoke from their chimneys, between which the words “a shared space” are nestled. In panel 4E two women, apparently Catholic (green dress) and Protestant (orange shirt), take shelter under an umbrella made of both flags from a dark grey sky with the words “when it rains we all get wet” stitched beside them. It is as if the quilter is commenting on the shared negative outcomes of conflict, and perhaps also injecting a humorous nod to the shared experience of Northern Ireland’s notoriously poor weather along with her comments on coexistence. Other panels forego the use of flags, instead drawing on the common image “we’re all in one boat,” depicting several people in a single craft.

The quilters seem to confirm their commitment to working toward peace with the roundabout in panel 1C. The green and orange roads are marked with “no U-turn,” as if to say that the only option for both the Catholic and Protestant communities is to move ahead with the peace process, toward a common future. A “back road” cut from dark grey fabric is labeled “no entry” and stands in contrast to the bright and open “avenue to peace,” as if to say the only acceptable way for those communities to move ahead is through openness. Interestingly, two smaller paths, perhaps footpaths, also enter the roundabout. Their bright, floral pattern evokes the feminine and their access to and from the roundabout is unimpeded. Perhaps here the quilters are celebrating the alternative paths to peace that work like theirs represents. Many of the panels also point toward the hope found in this new path. Panel 3E features a baby in a lush tree with the words “a new beginning.” Panel 4C depicts two chicks, one bearing the Tricolor and one the Union Jack, emerging from the same egg under the words “a new life.” A dinosaur and a rabbit
in panel 6D seem to suggest turning away from outdated behaviors in favor of a new ways of being. Several other panels echo these sentiments.

At the same time, there is hesitancy in this vision of a shared Northern Ireland. While the narrative of this quilt is clearly tied to the region, many of the panels lack geographic specificity. Some of the images are incredibly focused, such as the hands that hold each other in panel 3A, as if hinting at the extreme micro-level of everyday peacebuilding. However, the majority of the images, most notably the doves, float within their panels. Many include what appears to be a bright, blue sky, suggesting a vast expanse of future possibility. As with the Women Together quilt, the Troubles are only indirectly referenced here. However, unlike the Women Together quilt, lingering tensions between the two communities can still be seen. The more detailed figures, such as those depicting sport and the women under the umbrella, do not touch. Even some of the hands in the corners that represent the connections of the women who made this quilt sometimes barely brush fingertips. It is as if the women desire a more inclusive society and are willing to take steps toward forming a more integrated regional identity, yet they remain wary of fully embracing one another. This is unsurprising, given that, coming from Republican and Loyalist neighborhoods, these women were likely among those most affected by the violence of the Troubles.

Agent

A majority of the panels have no particular actor, but rather feature plants and insects. (While doves also appear in this quilt; as with the Northern Ireland Peace quilt they seem to be used more as symbols of peace than as representations of agents.) Others include anonymous, disembodied hands. This may point to the aspirational quality of the quilt – who, indeed, will create this reality? In other panels, women, children, and men are all depicted as actors. There is
a mutuality in their representation. Each time a Catholic is represented, a Protestant counterpart is also present. In panel 1D two soccer players stand abreast, their uniforms reflecting the colors of the Tricolor and the Union Jack to represent their respective communities. Four rows below them, another sport-themed panel plays with the use of color in representation. Here, a hurly player wears a blue jersey and a football (soccer) player wears green. Sport carries cultural connotations that are strongly connected to the conflict in Northern Ireland, with hurly being exclusively Irish and football mostly associated with British culture (Nic Craith “Cultural and Identity” Chapter 7). In this context, this panel makes perhaps the boldest statement of the entire quilt on the identity of the actors in Northern Ireland, opening up possibilities for expressing cross-community identity in and through sport. At the same time, like several of the other images that include representations of both communities, this bold statement is also complicated. The players have their backs to one another and bear the numbers nineteen and sixteen on their jerseys. While these numbers can be seen as related, a nine and a six being inversions of one another, this may also be a reference to the Easter Rising of 1916, an event that is often credited as a key turning point in Ireland’s struggle for independence from Great Britain. Once again, the quilters seem to be expressing a hesitancy to fully embrace one another’s traditions.

Notable exceptions to the mutual recognition that dominates this quilt are two panels in the bottom row that reference health. In panel 6B, the figures of two women appear to be standing in front of mirrors, conducting self-exams for breast cancer. A pink ribbon is sewn between them and below them are the silhouettes of eight feminine forms. Seven of the silhouettes are black and one is pink, under embroidered lettering referencing the statistic of one in eight women being diagnosed with breast cancer. This and the panel directly to its left, which features the caduceus and the words “your health is your wealth,” are the only panels that do not
reference the conflict or community identity. It is as if the quilters are highlighting a common experience in their gender identity as women. Breast cancer, they seem to say, does not care which church you attend or which passport you hold. As a viewer, I am struck by the familiarity of this panel, the commonplace experience of a woman in the routine of conducting her monthly self-exam. I am left to wonder whether perhaps this is a brief, yet powerful, testimony of the challenges these women have faced that are overlooked in the dominant discourses of the conflict. Perhaps these women seek to turn attention in the region from the divisions of the Troubles and toward solving the issues that face both communities.

Act

Overall, the quilters seem to be advocating for people to reach toward one another through mutual recognition and respect. The many hands reaching out throughout the quilt point to this. They are reminiscent of the well-known “Hands Across the Divide” statue in Derry/Londonderry, in which two men stand opposite each other on separate walls that share a foundation and reach for one another across the gulf between them. Like that statue, many of the hands in this quilt reach for each other, but do not always touch. In contrast to Women Together, these quilters do not yet advocate for a full embracing of one other. As noted above, many of the figures stand next to each other without touching. The quilters seem to emphasize sharing space and respecting each other’s presence. At the same time, in the case of the white hands reaching out from the names of each of the women’s centers, the hands do touch. Perhaps, similar to panel 1C, the quilters are commenting on the connections that women make through their work in cross-community projects. Another notable exception to this hesitancy is panel 2B. Here, a woman raises her hands to hold up what could be interpreted as a silver lining. Her hair flows and her skirt billows, as if she is spinning or dancing. Her dress is a patchwork of the Irish and
British flags. It is as if the woman is joyously celebrating the representations of identity that she wears as one garment, an embodiment of coming together.

Perhaps, overall, the women’s centers participants are recognizing the incremental steps that must take place before the vision of the dancing woman, the hope of a fully-integrated society, can be achieved. Panel 5C features two caterpillars, one green and one orange, between two butterflies whose coloring does not evoke either community’s flag. Transecting this patch is the stitched text “undertaking the great mutation / to live in harmony.” It is as if the quilters are recognizing that notions of identity and its expression must change in order to achieve a more peaceful future; the two butterflies in different colors point toward a new, perhaps multicultural, identity. At the same time, a new identity is not fully formed in this narrative; “undertaking the great mutation” is present-tense, a change in the making. In the meantime, perhaps as an initial step, the idea of demonstrating mutual respect and understanding of cultural heritage dominates the narrative of this quilt.

*The ratios*

The notion of “parity of esteem,” which calls for mutual recognition and respect of cultural traditions, is a core element of the peace process in Northern Ireland, although questions remain about what this would actually look like (Nic Craith *Culture and Identity* Chapter 1). Potential avenues for enacting parity of esteem seem to run strong in the narrative of the Shared Visions Quilt. The women who sewed this quilt seem to call upon viewers to, at the very least, welcome, if not yet fully embrace, the cultural traditions of each other’s communities. That is, the Shared Visions quilters make the case that accepting the other’s cultural traditions is the act that constitutes a “good” or “proper” expression of one’s own identity. Furthermore, they argue that such acts can alter the setting to create a more peaceful Northern Ireland. And while on the
whole they do not push audiences to fully integrate cultural expressions, they do offer a glimpse of the possibilities of doing so. In panel 3B, a man plays the Lambeg, a massive drum used as a celebration of Protestant heritage in parades and political rallies, often to the ire and concern of Catholics. Here, his body is turned toward two young girls who perform a traditional Irish dance, bringing these cultural expressions together to create music that floats in the air. Like the woman dancing in the flag dress, this panel seems to hint at the possibility of a more integrated society in the future of Northern Ireland. In the meantime, the women’s centers quilters point toward a tenuous regional identity based on mutual respect and recognition.

**Appliqué 3: Acknowledging shared trauma**

WAVE Trauma Centre, an agency that supports those who have been affected by The Troubles, developed their Quilt of Remembrance as a therapeutic intervention. Under the leadership of a professional artist and a social worker, a quilt depicting significant events of the Troubles was designed and sewn by women participating in cross-community trauma support groups over a period of four years. Participants engaged in dialogue through storytelling and used the personal experiences of individual women in the quilt’s design. Pieced together, the quilt becomes a means to share a broader narrative of the Troubles. As WAVE describes their project, “the quilt tells the story of individuals who suffered because of the conflict on this island, but who also gained strength by sharing their experiences with each other, and through the medium of the quilt with all of us” (“Quilt of Remembrance” n.p.). The collective story of these women is one of an identity shaped by recognizing the shared experience of trauma in relation to the violence of the Troubles.

The Quilt of Remembrance (Fig. 5.9, Appendix C), completed in 2013, is approximately five feet wide by seven-and-a-half feet high. Each of the roughly twenty individual panels
depicts a specific incident from the Troubles that is presumably significant for the quilt’s makers. The quilt’s layout is reminiscent of the murals of the Troubles that appear in some neighborhoods and may add a particularly evocative element for audiences within Northern Ireland. The panels are placed in a roughly chronological order moving from left to right, top to bottom like text on a page, beginning just before the Troubles broke out and ending with the Good Friday Agreement. Scenes include public demonstrations in the form of parades, marches, and funerals. Many depict, through fabric and stitching, the fire, smoke, and debris of explosions. Unlike the neatly framed panels of the Women Together and women’s centers quilts that connote calm orderliness, there are no borders around the individual panels of the WAVE quilt. These panels overlap and bleed into one another, with some edges strong and linear while others are soft and curved. In some cases, it can be difficult for viewers to distinguish where one panel ends and another begins. The entire scene is framed in a solid, black border.

Scene

WAVE participants set their narrative within the violence of the Troubles. The individual acts of violence are not causally connected in their Quilt of Remembrance. The quilters do not seem to be asking viewers to blame a particular community or political orientation for the atrocities, but rather point toward a general climate of disorder. The visual depictions of violent acts interject into other panels, disrupting the page-like pattern of the quilt. This is perhaps a reflection of the ways in which the unpredictable violence of the Troubles disrupted the lives of people and communities. This violence permeates the entire region, with scenes from Northern Ireland’s cities, towns, and countryside, each in incredible detail as if the fabric had been cut and sewn to match images from a photograph. The details lend specificity to the scenes. Typical shop
Fig. 5.9. “Quilt of Remembrance” by WAVE Trauma Centre participants from Conflict Textiles. November 2015. Roberta Bacic – CAIN Associated Site. Web. 16 December 2015.
Fig. 5.10 Children playing before the outbreak of the Troubles

Fig. 5.11 Good Friday Agreement on the steps of Stormont

Fig. 5.12 Overlapping borders make distinguishing panels difficult

Fig. 5.13 Different threads, fabrics, and stitch patterns lend texture to the quilt
signs hang in the doorway of “White’s General Store;” a woman is taken from an ambulance to “Royal Victoria Hospital;” the cars bear license plates, sometimes referencing a particular date. Each of these scenes blur into one another in a crush of people, bombs, walls, and debris. Overall, there is an immense amount of imagery presented in a single space, leaving viewers overwhelmed by a claustrophobic and cacophonous chaos. At the same time, the entire quilt is framed in a thick, solid, black border, evoking the black borders of traditional mourning stationary. It is as if this border serves to contain this onslaught of memories, relegating these events to history.

The only calm comes in the final panel, placed in the bottom, right corner. Here, viewers see the greenery and roadway leading to Stormont, the seat of governance in Northern Ireland. Sewn to the roadway is a paper copy of the Good Friday Agreement. The Agreement appears to be in the form of a pamphlet that presumably was distributed to citizens throughout the region, as it emphasizes “It’s Your Decision.” Perhaps the quilters are echoing this sentiment, proposing a promise of calm through legitimate local governance that the people living in Northern Ireland must choose to create. But to create this calm, to take the road toward peace, the quilters seem to imply, viewers must first decide to traverse the painful memories of the past to recognize a common identity formed through trauma.

Agent

In marked contrast to the earlier quilts in the Northern Ireland collection, as well as the arpilleras from Chile and the Voices of Women project from South Africa, the majority of the figures visible in the Quilt of Remembrance are apparently masculine, pointing toward a view of men as the primary actors in the Troubles. Men march in Catholic civil rights demonstrations and Protestant Orange Order parades. A man stands in a cell in the infamous H-blocks of Long Kesh
Detention Centre, shrouded in a green prison blanket, refusing to wear his prison uniform as he protests for political prisoner status. Other men dress in the uniforms of the British Army, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (the police force comprised mostly of Protestant Unionist sympathizers), and the various Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries. They wield guns, taking aim at invisible foes and other men. Men are the targets of what appear to be security checks, laying on the ground and standing against walls. They bury each other, turning funerals into political rallies as they drape coffins in the Union Jack or Tricolor. Men are also first responders, serving as firefighters who douse the flames of a recent explosion and doctors who treat bomb victims.

In contrast, with the exception of the nurses who stand outside the hospital and a group participating in what appears to be a road blockage in the center of the quilt, women and children are rarely featured in this narrative. A notable exception to this is the panel in the top, left corner that features children playing in tiny patches of calm. Two boys play hurly and golf in a small green field. Two girls share a tricycle to ride along a short paved path. Groups of girls stand together on a bit of grass under a lamppost. These common scenes of childhood are set atop a light-blue background covered in zig-zagging stitches that lead to patches of black peeping through fissures and jagged-edged holes, evoking a sense of cracked concrete or glass. It is as if the quilters are commenting on the ways in which many people moved through mundane acts of living amid general disrepair and disarray just before and during the Troubles. Taken together with the rest of the quilt, they seem to suggest that these people were placed in this situation by others, primarily the men on both sides of the divide who chose violence, even as they themselves were victimized by that violence. Importantly, no single community is depicted as
the sole perpetrators or sole victims in this situation. Both Catholics and Protestants enact violence; both Catholics and Protestants are victimized by that violence.

*Act*

The content of the WAVE Trauma Centre quilt is comprised of various acts of violence. However, the violent episodes do not seem to thread together into a cohesive narrative; the scenes are piled on top of one another, and yet remain disconnected. There is no indication that one act of violence led to the next, perhaps pointing to a sense that the narrative of the conflict had lost its own thread. In this way, the violent acts shift from an expected relationship to action toward setting in this story. In doing so, the quilt-makers seem to be asking viewers for different actions. By carefully stitching together fabric representations of their memories, the quilters bear witness to the past. In doing so, they demand that viewers engage with their testimony. The fine details invite me, as a viewer, to lean into the quilt to consider the soft, rolling stitches of sea and sky in contrast to the jagged stitches that mark explosions and broken glass. The overlapping panels ask me to join the quilt-makers on the impossible task of parsing out the contours of these painful memories, dominated more by a sense of pain and loss than a sense of ethnic pride and religious righteousness.

While WAVE participants call on viewers to remember the Troubles as the site of shared trauma, they also seem to ask that those memories be bracketed. The bold border enclosing the quilt seems to foreclose the possibility of adding yet more overlapping panels, of creating new memories of trauma. Instead, with the final panel of the quilt, the women ask viewers to consider the possibilities for a more peaceful future, and to take the decision to embark on the path toward that future. Here, the Good Friday Agreement is sewn to the path leading toward Stormont, reminding audiences that the decision for a more peaceful society, the decision to express
identity in ways that do not lead to violence, lay in the hands of the citizens of Northern Ireland. Rather than a fabric representation of the Agreement, the quilters attached a small paper copy of the document. The paper literally stands out in relief, a different medium from the quilt, just as diplomacy and political participation are a different media, distinct from political violence. The paper addresses the viewer, “YOU,” inviting her or him to reach out and turn the pages of the pamphlet. Perhaps the quilters, in attaching paper rather than fabric, are calling on the audience to see, read, and consider the Agreement as a material document in their own lives.

The Ratios

The idea of victimhood is contentious in the ongoing peace process in Northern Ireland, with both communities laying claim to the exclusive rights to the identity of victim (Stover 440). In the Quilt of Remembrance, WAVE Trauma Centre participants call on viewers to recognize the mutual victimhood of both communities, formed in the common experiences of pain and loss caused by violence perpetrated from both sides of the conflict. Each of the panels addresses a particular event or depicts a single community. However, the quilt, pieced together as overlapping sections that bleed in and out of one another, resists attempts to isolate trauma within a particular incident or a single community. In enacting a recognition of shared trauma, viewers can enter into a shared identity of victim, shifting the focus away from the divisions between Protestant and Catholic communities toward a broader community marked by trauma. This leaves the actors of this narrative open to make different decisions than those made in the past, to decide to journey away from violence. Like the paper used to include the Good Friday Agreement, formal political processes are suggested as different material to use to build a path for that journey. While the WAVE quilters do not share their visions of where that journey may
lead in this piece, the implication is that, for the sake of the people of Northern Ireland, it must lead to a more peaceful future.

**Fasteners: Conclusion**

After analyzing each of these quilts separately, I now consider them as a collection as I return to my original research questions. I first summarize what type of identity, based on action, these women in Northern Ireland advocate through their quilts. Next, I consider the relationship between this new identity narrative and the ones that dominate the Troubles and ongoing impediments to the peace process. Finally, I reflect on how these women’s new narratives might contribute to the transformation of the conflict in Northern Ireland.

To begin, these rhetors seem to advocate for, at minimum, mutual acceptance based on the recognition of a shared experience of living in Northern Ireland. These shared experiences include the trauma of the Troubles as well as the pedestrian acts of daily living, emphasizing a common humanity that transcends community boundaries. In addition, these quilters seem to indicate an ideal of recognizing while also working across differences in the interests of forging new paths for future generations. This ideal may be in the future for some, but its value in creating peace in the region is established. Together, these quilters offer elements that can be gathered for the formation of a common identity narrative, one that allows for the inclusion of both communities within Northern Ireland.

The Troubles are one episode in a long history of the Protestant and Catholic communities attempting to establish their right to be in Northern Ireland, to claim insider status to this territory. These narratives are mutually exclusive – “we” are insiders and therefore “they” must be outsiders. The quilters’ narratives disrupt this distinction by advocating for a broadening of the definition of insider. Rather than building their narrative from the long history of the
region, they focus on their lived experiences of the Troubles. In their story, insiders are those who are able to recognize and respect one another’s cultural heritage and victimization as well as their own. That is, insiders engage with one another across and through their differences. In addition, while sometimes serving as commemoration, rather than a cataloguing and continuation of past atrocities, the quilter’s narratives are forward-looking, as they envision the ways in which pluralistic identity expressions and a common identity narrative, can contribute to a more peaceful future.

This forward-looking insistence on common heritage has important implications for the transformation of this conflict. In a divided society, simply telling one’s story and listening to another’s from across the divide becomes a means of resistance to dominant forms of identity performance. In these quilts, women not only listen to each other’s stories, but they incorporate those stories into a single narrative. In so doing, they initiate an identity that encourages a renegotiation of social relationships. Perceptions of opposing communities initially shift from threatening to non-threatening. As women engage in cross-community bridgework, they establish foundations for overcoming the conflicts of the past and addressing those that will arise in the future.

Having described my analysis of the narratives presented by women in Chile, South Africa, and Northern Ireland through textile work, I next draw these analyses together. In the following chapter I bring these analyses into conversation with one another to describe the contributions that these women have made to peacebuilding work through their narrations. I offer my observations of the variations and common themes among the settings as I contextualize these observations within narrative theory. In addition, I discuss the implications of this study for
feminist rhetoric, conceptualizations of identity negotiation, conflict transformation theory, and socially engaged art practice, including considerations for future research.
CHAPTER 6
GATHERING THREADS

Having conducted a rhetorical analysis of a selection of conflict textiles from Chile, South Africa, and Northern Ireland, I now return to my original research question: how might the ways in which women narrate their experiences of conflict through sewing inform conflict transformation work? To address this question, I have brought communication theories into conversation with peace and conflict scholarship. I situated my work within literature pertaining to feminist approaches to rhetoric, discussions of bridgework in identity negotiation within intercultural communication, concerns related to conflict transformation, and socially engaged art practice. I drew on narrative theory as the framework for this study. Using Burke’s dramatistic pentad, I conducted a rhetorical analysis of conflict textiles created by women in Chile, South Africa, and Northern Ireland.

Here, I gather these threads together. I first contextualize my findings from each conflict location within narrative theory. Within this, I consider the variations in the narratives I explored from each setting, as well as the common themes that appear across the artifacts. I then discuss the implications of my study of these women’s work for feminist rhetoric, conceptualizations of identity negotiation, conflict transformation theory, and socially engaged art practice. In addition, I consider the questions that remain unanswered in this study as I offer avenues for future research.

Weaving stories of identity

Charland investigates the ways in which audiences are interpellated into a collective identity in his theorization of constitutive rhetoric. That is, he describes the role of narratives in inviting individuals to participate in a collective identity. Ideologically, these narratives assert the
historical existence of a people as a people, provide a transhistorical connection to peoples from the past, and invite individuals to contribute to the continuation of the narrative through their own actions (137-42). This final element, action, is essential in constitutive rhetorics. It is through taking action to continue the collective narrative that individuals become part of the narrative themselves, and thus become interpellated within a particular collective identity. To use the terminology of Burke’s dramatistic pentad, it is the act that defines the agent within constitutive rhetoric (Grammar 15-16). Individuals enter into the narratives, participate in the collective identities that speak to their own experiences and help them survive in and make meaning of their worlds.

In conflict and post-conflict settings, where the need for survival is heightened, the nature of the act advocated for within a given constitutive rhetoric is a significant concern. Salomon’s work in peace and conflict education emphasizes the role of narrative in addressing conflict. She emphasizes that identity narratives within conflicts are often mutually exclusive, establishing and fortifying a dichotomy of “us versus them.” That is, conflict narratives often promote actions and interpretations of actions that draw attention to and create a belief in irreconcilable differences. To disrupt this belief in irreconcilable differences, Salomon advocates for the development of mutual understanding and recognition of identity narratives (274-77). Others have highlighted the ways in which this call for mutual recognition has, in some cases, simply become another element in the mutually-exclusive narratives – “they do not recognize us” (Hancock 463-64). In addition, Salomon does not address the impact this recognition would have on the constitutive rhetorics within a given identity group. Nic Craith troubles the notion of mutual recognition, or parity of esteem, in her study of identity in Northern Ireland. She asks how an individual can maintain a sound sense of self, live with integrity to his/her own identity narrative, while at the
same time accepting the narrative of another that negates the value of one’s own self (Nic Craith *Culture and Identity* Chapter 1). Nic Craith advocates instead for fostering new, shared senses of identity. This would entail the development of new identity narratives that call for new actions to participate in that collective identity.

As advocates for peace attempt to develop these new identity narratives, they must do so in a way that is legible to the audiences they address. As both Kerby and Polkinghorne discuss, people use narratives to provide order to isolated events in ways that give meaning to their individual selves, their relationships with others, and the realities for the worlds they occupy. The interpretations of these events are always open for reinterpretation, the meanings within narratives always being renegotiated. At the same time, those reinterpretations occur within systems of meaning within particular social, cultural, and historical contexts and must be recognizable within those contexts. New constitutive rhetorics are built with the elements of previous constitutive rhetorics. As the old narratives no longer serve to explain the world and guide a people in daily living, individuals begin to look for alternative stories that do (Charland 142). In conflict and post-conflict societies, the identity narratives that fueled the conflict cannot be simply abandoned. Rather, those narratives must be reworked in ways that offer alternative actions for identity expression to their audiences. The rhetors in this study offer examples of how that reworking might be accomplished.

In Chile, *arpilleristas* were sewing for survival in response to the Pinochet regime’s violent oppression. Initially the women sewed their narratives for audiences within Chile, but their *arpilleras* were soon sold abroad, addressing audiences outside the country. Many *arpilleristas* interpreted international interest in their work, demonstrated through the act of purchasing *arpilleras*, as support for their interpretations of events occurring within Chile. These
interpretations, presented in the narratives of the *arpilleras*, challenged several aspects of the Pinochet regime’s dominant narrative of Chilean life. In particular, Doris Meniconi, Irma Muller, and an unknown *arpillerista*, through the three *arpilleras* considered in this study, presented narratives of a renegotiated identity for Chilean women.

Pinochet advocated for a Chilean womanhood defined by concern for the domestic sphere of home and family, away from the public sphere of politics, in an attempt to foster a depoliticized population. Women, as mothers, were to become mothers of a nation that would recognize Pinochet as the national patriarch. The rhetors whose work I investigated here, rather than submitting to the authority of Pinochet the patriarch, offer narratives of resistance through the redefinition of women’s social role as mother. Meniconi, in her letter sent on the wind, demonstrates mothers’ inability to perform this role in the context of the military regime’s disappearances of citizens. Muller presents mothering as political activism in the public sphere. And the unknown *arpillerista* highlights the dual responsibility of mothers to preserve both the past and the future. Together, these women draw on the notion of *marianismo*, connecting to a Chilean cultural belief in the historical existence of mothers as a people. Like Pinochet himself, the rhetors point toward a transhistorical connection with these historical mothers and themselves. However, they advocate for actions that are quite different than those proposed by Pinochet. Rather than nurturing docility, Meniconi, Muller, and the unknown *arpillerista* offer a redefined identity of mother, of Chilean woman, constituted by the act of engaging in public activism.

In South Africa, women contribute to that country’s transition to democracy by stitching their experiences with structural inequities during and after apartheid. Unlike the Chilean *arpilleras*, South Africans themselves comprise the primary audience of the *Amazwi Abesifazane*
memory cloths, although individuals from other countries are also invited to view these works. In the aftermath of apartheid, South Africa entered into a nation-building project to develop a national identity through a narrative that, ultimately, fell short of addressing the structural violence embedded in its past policy of segregation. Participants in the Amazwi Abesifazane – Voices of Women project open up a conversation about acknowledging continuing structural inequality within the narrative of the new South Africa. In particular, Bathini Xulu, Zandile Mavuso, and Zanele Mkhize offer their narratives of daily living to invite a broader conversation about South African citizenship.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has established a national narrative for the new South Africa that rests on inclusion regardless of race, in contrast with the past exclusions of apartheid. In this narrative, to be South African is to be a citizen in a democratic society. However, by relegating the structural inequality that was codified in apartheid to the past, the TRC narrative is unable to account for experiences of inequality that continue today. The stories of marginalized women who continue to suffer under systemic injustice do not seem to fit into the TRC narrative of national identity, calling into question the extent to which those women are truly citizens of South Africa. However, by sharing their daily struggles as South Africans, marginalized women instigate a reconsideration of national identity in their country. The rhetors I investigated open up possibilities for a broader understanding of South African citizenship. Xulu highlights the challenges of fulfilling her responsibilities as a mother in the context of widespread violence. Mavuso draws attention to the lack of familial and social support structures as she describes her experience of being run off by her relatives. Mkhize exposes failures in family, community, and governmental institutions in her experience with rape. Contrary to Charland’s theory, these women’s narratives resist the simplified notion of a historical South
African identity shaped by apartheid. Instead, they emphasize a transhistorical connection between the social inequities inscribed in apartheid and continuing structural injustice in South Africa. Through their narrative work Xulu, Mavuso, and Mkhize offer a more nuanced understanding of South African citizenship, demonstrated through including a wider diversity of voices in the nation-building process.

In Northern Ireland, women quilt their alternative visions for coexistence within a divided society. As with the Amazwi Abesifazane memory cloths, local communities form the primary audiences for these conflict quilts, though international audiences are invited to engage with the pieces, as well. A narrative of two distinct communities in conflict with one another has dominated both the Troubles and the peace process in Northern Ireland. Through various quilting projects, women have considered alternative narrations of identity in Northern Ireland. In particular, quilters from Women Together, Belfast women’s centers, and WAVE Trauma Centre offer foundations for developing a new narrative of common identity in Northern Ireland.

The dominant narratives of the Northern Ireland conflict draw on competing interpretations of historical events to position the Catholic and Protestant communities in opposition to one another. For Catholics, history demonstrates their rightful claim to the land in Northern Ireland, of which they were brutally robbed at the hands of Protestant settlers. For Protestants, history vindicates their sacrifices, proving their ascendancy as a reward for the prosperity and order they brought to the territory. As members of both communities work toward peace in Northern Ireland, it has become apparent that these narratives had contributed to the violence of the Troubles and continue to plague the peace process. While identity narratives are widely recognized as matters that need to be addressed, just how to do so remains a contentious issue. However, women in various quilting projects throughout the region have offered what
could be seen as the foundations of a common identity narrative. Women Together advocate for bridgework in their Northern Ireland Peace Quilt. In their Shared Visions Quilt, members of several Belfast women’s centers provide examples of coexistence through demonstrations of mutual recognition. WAVE Trauma Centre participants, through their Quilt of Remembrance, emphasize acknowledging common traumas. In each of these projects, women draw on visual symbols that evoke the histories of each community as narrative elements, building on their audience’s acceptance of the historical existence of Catholic and Protestant communities. As the quilters use these symbols to narrate their own experiences with the Troubles and the peace process, they establish a transhistorical connection between themselves and those who lived in the region in the past. At the same time, they place those symbols in new relationships with one another, integrating the symbols into a shared narrative of life in Northern Ireland. Together, the rhetors I have studied here offer a new narrative of common identity, demonstrated through bridgework to connect across differences and past trauma.

*Matters of materials*

In sewing, the types of stitches one may utilize are determined by more than skill and purpose. It is also a matter of materials. The type of fabric, the nature of the thread, the number of layers, the size of the needle, the time and space with which one has to work…these all shape the context that determines the features of the finished product. In the same way, context has impacted the messages of the rhetors I have studied here. The nature of the conflict, the cultural setting, and the origins of the sewing project are materials that these women have drawn from as they stitch their differing responses to conflict.

The nature of the conflict impacts the ways in which these women narrate their identities. The violence enacted by the Pinochet regime in Chile was never strongly connected to particular
identity labels. While members of particular identity groups may have found themselves particularly affected, this was most commonly understood as a conflict of political ideology. That is, poor people suffered greatly under Pinochet, but this was due to the military junta’s assumptions about political affiliation rather than targeting “the poor” as a social class. Identity in this context became a question of how one relates to the government in particular and to larger society in general. This may be why many arpilleras, including the ones in this study, illuminate the relationship between women as mothers and the Chilean government in their work. In South Africa, women are also negotiating their relationship to broader society through their memory cloths. However, the impetus for their negotiation is actually rooted in identity as a core element of the conflict. There, the logic of apartheid was predicated upon the belief that racial differences were fundamental and that, therefore, different races should be treated differently. A rejection of this logic in the move toward democracy means that political involvement and citizenship based on common identity labels have become taboo in the new South Africa. In their memory cloths, Amazwi Abesifazane participants contribute to the national narrative of South African citizenship by bringing to light lingering structural inequalities without referencing racial identity directly. In Northern Ireland, however, identity is at the forefront of discourses of the Troubles and the peace process. The notion of two ethnic communities in conflict with one another is deeply rooted in the history of the conflict. The need to address the narratives of these two communities is widely acknowledged as a core component of the peace process. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that bridging and integrating Catholic and Protestant identities is the primary focus of many peace quilts from Northern Ireland, including those in this study.

The cultural setting also influences these women’s sewn responses to conflict. In all three countries, sewing has been a traditional outlet of expression for women and the rhetors in this
study are participating in that tradition through their work. At the same time, the particular form used in each setting was different. The *arpillera* is a well-recognized artisan form throughout Latin America. The use of beadwork in conjunction with embroidery connects the *Amazwi Abesifazane* memory cloths with traditional indigenous craftwork in South Africa. Quilting is a common activity for groups of women in Northern Ireland, particularly among older generations. In each of these instances, the form of the textile pieces can be seen not only as an expression of each rhetor’s own cultural identity, but also as a means to make pieces that are legible to the audience in each setting. In addition, culturally relevant concepts and symbols can be seen in the narrative elements of these works. For example, the three *arpilleras* considered in this study exemplify the Chilean reverence of motherhood embedded in *marianismo*. While women’s familial roles are also addressed in the pieces from South Africa and Northern Ireland, the political protection for women and the imperative to care for family before all other concerns implied in *marianismo* does not carry through to these other settings. In South Africa, many of the women incorporated beadwork into their memory cloths. While beading does serve to embellish borders and backgrounds, it is also often used to embellish or even form specific elements of their visual narratives. The incorporation of beadwork, which takes additional skill and time in the sewing process, may serve as a connection to traditional art forms among the women. That is, the use of beading, because of its relationship to cultural expression among indigenous women in South Africa, can serve as a rhetorical tool for the women to highlight the value or importance of a particular element of their work. Without that cultural history, the use of beadwork in pieces from Chile or Northern Ireland does not carry the same significance and, in fact, is quite rare. Meanwhile, in Northern Ireland, women draw upon the symbols used within the visual rhetorics of both communities throughout the Troubles. While recognizable symbols
also appear in the pieces from Chile and South Africa, the symbols of Catholic and Protestant communities in Northern Ireland carry a citationality that makes their juxtaposition particularly powerful. Again, through the use of concepts and symbols specific to their cultural settings, the rhetors in this study both express their own identities and connect with their particular audiences.

Finally, the nature of the sewing project, how women came to be involved in each collective, impacts both the content of the pieces and the ways in which those pieces are read. The *arpillera* workshops developed as a pragmatic response to economic hardship. Meeting in the familiar and protective space of churches, the process of using the workshops to exchange stories of hardship and stitching those stories into their work developed organically for the *arpilleristas*. This process of development may have influenced the themes in these works, which often connect personal hardship with political activism. It may also have contributed to the ways in which *arpilleristas* are often positioned as examples of resilience and resistance within the context of political oppression. In contrast, *Amazwi Abesifazane – Voices of Women* was designed as an intentional and formal process to engage marginalized women. The process included direct references to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the specific prompt “a day I will never forget.” This framing invites narratives of hardships from the women who participated. In addition, the framing invites audiences of the women’s memory cloths to see the personal narratives as directly connected to the structural inequities associated with apartheid, much as I have done here. The formality of the process that involved women in Northern Ireland in quilting responses to the Troubles varied in the examples I have discussed here. At the same time, the women became involved through established organizations with the express intent of fostering cross-community relations. They were invited to participate based on their membership to the Catholic or Protestant community to join a project centered on discussing that
membership. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the women explicitly referenced their Catholic and Protestant identities in their quilts. In addition, with an awareness that cross-community dialogue was a goal of these projects, viewers are prepared to read theme of cultural identity within the narratives of the quilts.

Common threads

While the materials of the natures of the various conflicts, the cultural setting, and the sewing project have contributed to differences among the conflict textiles in this study, some common themes across contexts can also be seen. Perhaps the most obvious of these commonalities is the use of sewing as a rhetorical form. The women’s choices to sew their responses to the conflicts they were experiencing, whether by invitation or necessity, suggests that the rhetors in this study found the medium to be a useful entry into public dialogue. In addition, these textile pieces have spurred audience engagement with the rhetorical claims the pieces contain. Individuals abroad bought arpíleras and hosted exhibitions in solidarity with the women in Chile. Officials within the South African government were so moved by the exhibitions of Amazwi Abesifazane – Voices of Women memory cloths that they incorporated the project into their own efforts to support the country’s democratic development. In Northern Ireland, quilted responses to the Troubles have sparked interest among local residents and international audiences through a variety of exhibitions. This interest supports the women’s use of sewing as an effective means to foster understanding.

In addition, each of these rhetors participates in public dialogue in a particularly gendered way. That is, they each speak as women about women’s roles in their particular social context. For example, mothering is notably addressed in the majority of these pieces. Moreover, the attention these rhetors give to women’s social roles highlights the gendered dimensions of the
conflict to which they are responding. These gendered dimensions include the unique ways in which women are involved and impacted by the conflict as well as the unique contributions women can make toward transforming the conflict. The *arpilleristas* in this study bring attention to renegotiating the role of mothers in Chile. Operating within the cultural expectations of *marianismo* the narratives of these women reveal the economic and emotional hardships women faced as the men in their lives were disappeared by Pinochet’s agents. At the same time, they also demonstrate the ways in which women can, and indeed must, leverage their roles as mothers to publicly work for social justice. Men are notably absent in these narratives or, when present, unable to act. The work of finding the disappeared and enacting social change in Chile falls to women as they fulfill their duties as mothers. The *Amazwi Abesifazane* memory cloths also address mothering. Like the *arpilleristas*, the South African rhetors in this study raise awareness about the difficulties in performing the role of mother within the context of violence and social injustice. In addition, they also address the challenges faced by female children whose mothers are unable to perform that role fully, from finding the security of housing to surviving rape.

While men do appear as both victims and perpetrators in many *Amazwi Abesifazane* narratives, the memory cloths in this study only depict men as either inactive or as perpetrators of violence. Instead, these rhetors emphasize the ways in which the burdens of social inequity and failed infrastructures fall heavily upon the shoulders of women. Their narratives reinforce the need for the implementation of structural changes in order to address the needs of all South African citizens. In Northern Ireland, quilters call on all women, and mothers in particular, to work against the sectarianism of the Troubles. The rhetors in this study highlight the ways in which women act as bridge builders. This is in contrast to their representations of men, who are shown as both perpetrators and victims but are rarely portrayed as peacemakers.
These rhetors’ gendered experiences of conflict make the rallying cry of the second wave feminists strikingly clear: the personal is indeed the political. Significantly, each of the rhetors in this study has drawn on her personal lived experiences as the foundation for her rhetorical claims. Their reliance on lived experience is a stark contrast to the emphasis on historical events and precedent involved in the dominant narratives of the conflict in each context. This suggests that conflict narratives that are developed through the exchange of stories of lived experiences, rather than through contested interpretations of historical events, may reveal avenues toward peace. In particular, the narrators whose work I explored in this study offer stories of lived experience that create opportunities to engage in the important work of identity renegotiation, addressing how groups relate to one another within their given society. In addition to inviting dialogue through their own narrations, each of these women also offers specific ways to contribute to peacebuilding. This is, I believe, how the ways in which women narrate their experiences of conflict contribute to peacebuilding. That is, in narrating her own experiences, each of these rhetors has provided broader society with the narrative elements that can be used to reconstitute collective identities in her own setting.

This conclusion also raises several new questions, particularly in relation to constitutive rhetoric. The women’s use of personal narrative in their work speaks to both the need and the struggle to incorporate individual experiences into larger narratives, particularly in conflict and post-conflict settings. However, Charland’s theory of constitutive rhetoric roots collective identity in the historical existence of a people as a people, rather than through common contemporary experiences. What adjustments to Charland’s original theory are needed to accommodate an emphasis on lived experience over historical events? How might rhetorical scholars theorize the processes through which individuals’ personal narratives come together to
form a larger collective narrative? Perhaps most significant in understanding the dynamics of conflict transformation, how might communication scholars track the integration of the narrative offerings such as those presented by the rhetors in this study into broader social discourses?

**Chain stitches: Connections to existing bodies of research**

With this study I have aimed to highlight and honor women’s contributions to peacebuilding efforts. I also have sought to offer insights that may further understandings of women’s uses of narratives in conflict and post-conflict settings. In addition, I believe my work contributes to academic research in four areas. First, this study provides an example of how women might be woven into the rhetorical canon while at the same time challenging the criteria that limit entry into that canon. Second, this research offers a materiality to the theoretical discussions of identity negotiation within intercultural communication. Third, this work represents concrete examples of how individuals from civil society have engaged in and opened further dialogue for conflict transformation. Finally, this project has illuminated socially engaged art as a practice and as a framework for analysis. At the same time, my research raises a variety of questions in each of these areas, which I also outline here.

*Feminist rhetoric*

Rhetoricians working within a feminist framework seek to both write women into the rhetorical canon and challenge existing rhetorical standards (Meyer 2). Here, I have considered the narratives presented by women through their sewing as public address. This approach challenges the notion of rhetoric as “the great man speaking,” recognizes these women as significant communicators in their own right, and demonstrates how sewing can be used as a mode of public address. The women who sewed the conflict textiles in this study make powerful statements about their experiences with conflict and present thought-provoking suggestions for
moving toward peace. It is my hope that this study can serve as an example of rhetorical
criticism that works to weave women into the rhetorical canon.

In addition, I believe this study sheds light on the ways in which sewing can be a
communicative form that challenges traditional rhetorical criteria. These women’s choices to sew
their narratives provided them with a platform from which to speak that may otherwise have
been unavailable to them. That is, sewing as a medium created a space for the rhetors in this
study to add their stories to public dialogues where their voices often go unheard. This is perhaps
most evident in the *Amazwi Abesifazane* project, which intentionally uses sewing as a means to
record narratives that have been excluded from formal institutions. But sewing also provides
more than access to an audience; it provides a new way to connect with that audience. In their
 theorization of invitational rhetoric, Foss and Griffin explain that creating inviting external
conditions is an important element in encouraging audiences to engage with rhetors (5-7).
Sewing, with its soft edges, textured fabric, and traditional associations with the feminine, serves
to invite viewers into the story. In the language of invitational rhetoric, the narratives presented
by the rhetors in this study can be seen as offering new ways to narrate identity, the beginnings
of an ongoing dialogue.

This project also invites further study to advance feminist rhetorical theory. One direction
of future research is to develop the understanding of sewing as a rhetorical form. What trends
might be seen in the study of a wider selection of conflict textiles, either within one setting or
across a greater number of settings? Could these trends assist in the development of a certain
grammar for use in rhetorical criticism of textile pieces? Other studies may contribute to the two
core goals of feminist rhetorical theory. How might the further study of sewing as
communicative practice influence or change traditional approaches to rhetorical theory? For
example, as noted above, what new approaches to constitutive rhetoric are called for by the use of personal narrative in sewing work? How might such study impact the diversity of rhetors who are considered significant communicators? That is, given that sewing is a rhetorical form often employed by marginalized members of society, how does the inclusion of sewing as a rhetorical genre open the rhetorical canon to include marginalized rhetors?

Identity negotiation

In the field of intercultural communication, recent discussions of identity have sought to shift the notion of difference away from negative connotation and toward considerations for bridge building. Grossberg advocates for an identity based on actions rather than embodiment (102-05). Connected to his approach is Hall’s idea that identity can be fluid, allowing for strategic alliances based on individuals’ and groups’ needs and interests at any given time (“Cultural Identity” 229-30; “Old and New” 57-58). In this study, I have discussed the narratives put forth by several women. These women, like Grossberg, suggest the participation in particular actions as a means to constitute a particular identity. However, these identity narratives also tend to implicate others, highlighting the relationship among identity groups within society. The arpilleristas suggest that women may constitute their mother identity by demanding accountability from the government. Amazwi Abesifazane participants assert their place among the South African citizenry, in part, by highlighting the lack of accountability from families, communities, and the government. In Northern Ireland, members of the Catholic and Protestant communities contend that being accountable to one another constitutes the identity of someone who can rightfully claim the region as her/his own. This is reminiscent of Carrillo-Rowe’s notion of an identity of belonging based on mutual accountability (15, 36). In this sense, this study
highlights these rhetors’ concrete examples of ways in which people can enact an identity of belonging, providing texture to the largely theoretical discussions on the topic.

This study also raises several questions about the ways in which women might utilize sewing to support identity negotiation. I am particularly drawn to questions of the communicative practices that women engage in as they prepare their textile pieces within their sewing collectives. How do the arpilleria workshops, the Amazwi Abesifazane sessions, and the women’s organizations in Northern Ireland invite women to discuss their identities? What formal and informal processes do they employ to facilitate these conversations? In addition, I am curious about the ways in which their work within the collectives impacts their other relationships. How might participants carry their renegotiated identities into their daily lives beyond the sewing collective? What successes and challenges do they face as they do so? How does this further our understanding of the complicated process of identity negotiation, especially in conflict and post-conflict settings?

Conflict Transformation

Conflict transformation centers relationships among individuals and groups within peace work (Lederach Little Book 20). Within this frame, dialogue is an integral component of developing and nurturing systemic justice (Kriesberg 54). In this study, I have discussed the ways in which women contribute to peacebuilding through the narratives they present in their sewn work. This contribution is twofold. First, by sharing their personal experiences with injustice and violence, the women inspire their audiences to open dialogues with others. Second, to support such dialogue the women offer society the narrative elements to constitute collective identities based on mutual accountability, belonging, and actions that support peace rather than division.
In addition, conflict theory emphasizes the importance of civil society in peace work. Often, civil society actors are able to initiate and participate in innovative projects that are unavailable to those with higher profiles (Barnes 15-16; van Togeren, Verhoeven, and Wake 84). In addition, research has shown that women, based on their social positions and networks, may have a particularly strong role to play in such projects (Schirch and Sewak). This was certainly the case with the sewing collectives whose work I investigated here. In Chile, churches were able to invite women to begin the first *arpillera* workshops in a political climate where most social activism conducted by men was held suspect. In South Africa, *Amazi Abesifazane* developed a more inclusive process for gathering testimonies than the state institution of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was able to accomplish. In Northern Ireland, women’s and trauma support centers were able to initiate cross-community dialogue among ordinary citizens while political figures continued to wrangle over which community’s narrative of victimhood was most accurate. In each of these settings, women, working through civil society organizations, contributed their perspectives as a means to foster peace and justice. This would suggest that individuals and institutions interested in peacebuilding would do well to support similar projects in these and other conflict settings, as well as further research in this area.

While the direction of such research may take many paths, I am particularly interested in those that center the experiences of the women who participate in these projects themselves. How might these women see themselves in relation to local peace efforts? What kinds of impacts, tangible and intangible, do they and external observers feel this work accomplishes? In particular, I believe centering the women’s understandings of their work would be important in order to develop support structures that are responsive to their needs. What sort of institutional
support would the women identify as most appropriate and helpful? What advice would they offer to women in other conflict and post-conflict settings?

*Socially engaged art*

As a body of literature, socially engaged art creates an opportunity to bring together the aspirations of conflict transformation, the theoretical foundations of identity negotiation, and the validation for women’s communicative practices of feminist rhetoric. Despite tensions between an emphasis on artistic expression and overt political action, SEA offers opportunities to enact social change. Grant Kester’s dialogic aesthetic highlights the potential of intentional conversation to contribute to more just social relationships, not unlike the dialogue upon which conflict transformation relies. Socially engaged art projects that utilize a dialogic aesthetic can foster new modes of being in community, of forming and maintaining relationships. For example, the types of SEA projects considered in this study can create a space for people to theorize and begin to enact an identity of belonging. The dialogic aesthetic involves honoring co-constructed communicative norms; in SEA projects that engage women, this can be a form of recognizing gendered communicative practices such as invitational rhetoric.

As a framework, SEA presents a means to understand the practices that operationalize those bodies of literature together. This is a particularly helpful framework in considering the tapestries and quilts discussed in this study. First, it provides a reminder of the social aspects of these projects, not just of the women who exchanged stories within their respective sewing collectives but also of the relationships between each rhetor and her audience. That is, it is a reminder that in each of these settings, women’s participation in these projects included the intention to connect with their audiences in ways that would instigate conversations about, the women’s and viewers’ relationships to one another in society. Within this frame, each *arpillera*,
memory cloth, and quilt is a means to open such dialogue. Through the narratives presented in each piece, the women also offer communicative norms, the narrative elements, to guide that dialogue. As the model of SEA helps in understanding the dynamics of how *arpilleristas*, *Amazwi Abesifazane* participants, and quilters in Northern Ireland contribute to peacebuilding efforts, these women’s creative works also provide a helpful example of the potential for SEA to foster social justice.

It should be noted that founders of the projects discussed in this study never self-identified as socially engaged artists. Although the rhetors operate without that self-referential title, their practices fit the definition of what it means to work for social justice through aesthetic rhetoric. Their work thus helps to develop understandings of socially engaged art practice. At the same time, the work raises questions about the practice. Some of these considerations are related to the socially engaged artists themselves, others to the participants, and others to the interactions between the two. What statements do these sewing projects make about the role of artists within society? How does the structure of the project impact women’s choices to participate? How do the intentions that the artist (or other community leader) brings to the project affect the dynamic of the dialogue within the sewing collective and the textile products that are produced by members of that collective? How might those engaged in peacemaking utilize the philosophy of socially engaged art practice in their work without compromising SEA’s artistic integrity?

**Unstitching the borders**

Among quilters, the term “birthing a quilt” refers to the process of sewing the patterned, batting, and backing layers together, inside out, and then turning the whole piece right-side out, like a pillow case, before stitching the final side closed. While this process gives form to the final product, it is only through securing the three layers together that the quilt is completed. Quilts
can be secured in a variety of ways, from simply placing knotted strings at intervals to stitching elaborate patterns throughout. These variations say something about both the experience of the quilter and the meaning of the quilt itself. In the same way, women in Chile, South Africa, and Northern Ireland have used quilting to stitch new worlds into being.

Women like the *arpilleristas*, the *Amazwi Abesifazane* participants, and quilters in Northern Ireland have birthed new options for the social fabric of their societies. They have challenged divisive, conflict-driven narratives of identity. They have offered a new identity narrative based on their personal experiences with conflict. They have envisioned the potential outcomes for peace that expressions of such an identity may create. Whether or not these narrative offerings will be adopted by others, as well as how these layers will be secured, remains to be seen.

The edges of the tapestries and quilts I have studied here are tidy; they are what needle workers would call “finished.” The borders prevent the fabric from fraying, but they also serve to punctuate the piece as if to denote that the story within those borders has been told and is now, like the edges, finished. In reality, of course, the borders can always be added to, unstitched and re-stitched to accommodate what needs to be accommodated. Those stories permeate their borders, evoking memories and inspiring visions for the future. In a similar fashion, this document is in some ways falsely punctuated. This concluding chapter, following the form of all concluding chapters, is intended to finish the edges of this quilt of theory and analysis. In actuality it is, of course, only a beginning, an invitation to continue making and remaking this story.
It is a quiet day at sewing circle. More of a sewing dot, really. I am the only one here. But I am appreciative of the opportunity for reflection. I sew hair on the tiny doll that will become my husband’s figure in the “first Christmas with the (future) in-laws” panel. Having spent the past many months immersed in rhetorical analysis of women's sewing, I begin to wonder what others will see in my own work. Will my in-laws understand that I just felt new to this scene, that I was trying to find my way into it? Or will they interpret the distance I have placed between the figures of them and myself as a statement of feeling unwelcome? Will they think I was unhappy spending that day with them? I wonder if I should change my plans for this panel in order to avoid unintended insult, although I ultimately decide against it. I realize that my sewing has changed in other, more tangible ways throughout the course of this project. Frustrated with the fraying edges of figures, I turned to the arpilleras and began copying their careful cross-stitches to outline each piece of fabric. I wonder if Irma Muller also giggled in a bit of delight at the tiny figures as her protesting mothers took shape. Thinking of Amazwi Abesifazane cloths, I used seed beads to embellish another project. I wonder if Bathini Xulu also entertained fantasies of a simpler design as she struggled with running thread through the fine eye of the beading needle. Considering the blocks that formed the quilts from Northern Ireland, I began layering the various panels of my memory cloth, letting them overlap one another rather than stay distinct and apart. I wonder if the women at the WAVE Trauma Centre also felt a mix of mourning, joy, relief, and pride when they first saw their stories blended into one image. Most of all, I wonder what it would be like to join in these women’s sewing collectives. If we sat together as we sewed, what would we talk about? Who would I become as we began to belong to one another in that circle?
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

PANEL DESCRIPTIONS FOR THE NORTHERN IRELAND PEACE QUILT BY WOMEN TOGETHER

1A: The figures of ten women join hands to form a circle around a three-leafed clover with a dove in the center. The figures wear dresses alternating in green and orange. Stitched text reads “Lisburn Women Together for peace.” Lisburn is a city outside of Belfast. Overall, as discussed in Chapter 5, the panel gives a sense of the joy and beauty of Protestant and Catholic women coming together.

1B: A river or creek flows through the grass. A bridge crosses over the water and blue sky is above. The scene is sewn onto a red background that includes the words “Mothers for peace make a bridge of your sharing.” Additional text is sewn on to the bricks of the bridge that names some local communities and some of the countries that are home to Irish and British diasporas. The graffiti also includes a small rainbow. As discussed in Chapter 5, this panel highlights the emphasis on bridge building that runs throughout the quilt.
1C: A heart-shaped floral motif is embroidered onto a white background. Text, illegible in the image, runs along all four edges of the square panel. It is difficult to discern possible meanings of this panel without the ability to read the text.

1D: A landscape scene is comprised of different shapes cut from a variety of fabrics. The shapes evoke mountains in the background, green fields and a river in the center, and the waves of the sea on the foreground. A dove flies above the scene. Text in the upper, left corner is illegible in this image; however, given the content of similar text in other panels, this is likely the name of the community from which the Women Together group that contributed this panel comes. Overall, the panel gives a sense of peace reigning over the landscape of Northern Ireland.

2A: A traditional quilt square pattern features sections in two shades of pink, with a floral patterned fabric used in the upper right and lower left corners. The panel is crossed by two interlocking L-shaped segments in black. The panel evokes a feeling of traditions coming together.

2B: A blue circle on a yellow background holds a white dove. A symbol, possibly Christian in origin, is embroidered in gold-colored thread above the dove. The top of the circle features text, illegible in this image, and text at the bottom names the town of Banbridge, likely the home of the Women Together group that contributed this panel. Perhaps, if the gold symbol is indeed Christian, it is intended to hint at common religious roots among people in Northern Ireland.
2C: Four figures walk along a path in town; three of the figures appear to be women and one appears to be a small child. The scene also includes a building perched high on a hill overlooking the sea and several houses. Text in the upper right-hand corner reads, “Whitehead WEA Women’s Craft Group.” The scene perhaps is intended to demonstrate the enjoyment of a day without warfare.

2D: A dove in flight appears in the center of a blue background. A star-like figure is embroidered over the dove. This panel, with its traditional symbols of peace in a nondescript background, highlights the aspirational quality of the quilt.

3A: A pair of footprints appear on a background in various pastels. The left print is in blue fabric with red text that reads “footprints.” The right print is in red fabric with blue lettering that reads “women’s Centre.” Footprints Women’s Centre is a community center in Belfast. However, as discussed in Chapter 5, the footprints also could be seen to represent the labor of making new paths and an invitation to others to follow in that path.

3B: The word “peace” is transformed into a motif, repeated three times in primary colors, placed on a green background. The panel, with the idea of peace transformed into a mantra or motif, highlights the aspirational quality that runs throughout the quilt.

3C: A stylized blue cross is centered on a black background. The word “Peace” appears on the cross, along with a dove holding an olive branch in its beak and the letters “CSJP.” The words “Sisters of St. Joseph Parish” are stitched in the bottom, right-hand corner. The panel can be seen
to represent the intentions of the particular women who made it, as well as perhaps an indication of the shared religious roots of both communities in Northern Ireland.

3D: A rose appears in the center of a white square. While the top of the rose is in bloom, the stitching in the lower half of the stem appears to represent barbed wire. In the center, where the thread color changes from the dark grey of the barbed wire to the green of the stem, are the words “violence ends where love begins.” Small, illegible text appears in the lower, left-hand corner, perhaps a signature from the panel’s maker(s). As discussed in Chapter 5, this panel could be seen to represent feminine forms of peacemaking overcoming masculine forms of war making.

4A: A light pink diamond appears on a plaid background. Around the diamond are four light pink figures, perhaps a simple motif or perhaps they are meant to evoke hands reaching toward one another. On the diamond patch there is a motif in green and small figure in the blue at the bottom. The green may be stylized lettering, but is illegible in this image. Overall, the patterns in the panel are reminiscent of traditional quilting patterns, lending a sense of coming together.

4B: A traditional quilt pattern in blues and pinks. Like the other traditional quilt pattern panels, this one contributes to the theme of coming together that runs through the quilt.

4C: A small white dove, outlined in blue, appears on a white background and holds an olive branch in its beak. The olive branch includes two leaves in green and two in orange. The panel
also includes lettering that is illegible in this image. The panel can be seen to represent the hopes for peace between Catholic and Protestant communities.

4D: The outline of Northern Ireland appears in green on a blue background. Several images are embroidered within the green borders. In the center is a white dove and the letters “WT.” Around these symbols of Catholic and Protestant heritage are interspersed. Catholic symbols include: a three-leafed clover, an Irish harp, and a Celtic broach. Protestant symbols include: orange poppies, the red hand of Ulster, a drum, and a horn. Two shapes appear outside the green border, in the bottom, right-hand corner; it is unclear what these shapes are meant to represent. As discussed in Chapter 5, the panel could be understood to depict a shared history and tradition within Northern Ireland.
APPENDIX B

PANEL DESCRIPTIONS FOR THE SHARED VISIONS QUILT BY PARTICIPANTS FROM VARIOUS WOMEN’S CENTERS

1A: A borderless Ireland appears in the center of a blue square, the borders between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland further erased by diagonal strips of fabric in various shades of green. Arching over the island are letters that spell out the word “peace.” Given the representation of a united Ireland, it is likely that this panel was contributed by women from a Nationalist or Republican neighborhood. As discussed in Chapter 5, its position next to panel 1B can be seen to demonstrate the women’s interest in parity of esteem, as they have laid their worldviews side-by-side.

1B: The outline of Northern Ireland, cut from dark green fabric, is sewn directly onto the base layer of the quilt. Two hands holding a torch are centered on the outline. Given the emphasis on the six counties of Ulster, it is likely that this panel was contributed by women from a Unionist or Loyalist neighborhood. As noted above, the panel’s placement adjacent to panel 1A give it special meaning.
1C: A traffic roundabout is sewn onto a light blue-green background. The roundabout itself is in white. Lettering the top reads “avenue to peace.” Lettering on the bottom reads “no entry,” and is placed in front of a small black panel labeled “back road.” A green road on the left and an orange road on the right are both labeled “no U turn.” Two paths cut from floral fabric enter the roundabout at the corners, placed between the back road and the green and orange roads. As noted in Chapter 5, this panel likely demonstrates the women’s desire to move forward with the peace process, while also perhaps honoring the alternative paths toward peace created by women in cross-community initiatives.

1D: Two figures appear side-by-side, a football (soccer ball) in between them. The figure on the left wears a uniform comprised of a red jersey, white shorts, and blue socks, evoking the Union Jack. The figure on the right wears a green jersey, white shorts, and orange socks, evoking the Tricolor. The background fabric layers dark green on the bottom, light blue on the top, and strips of colored fabric in the top right corner, evoking a sunny day after a rain. As noted in Chapter 5, images depicting parity of esteem in sport are particularly powerful in the visual rhetorics of Northern Ireland.

1E: Two yellow daffodils with green stems are sewn directly onto the base fabric of the quilt, surrounded by small stitches that evoke tufts of grass. Each stem holds a flower in full bloom, a budding flower, and a leaf. At the top of the square, just right of center, the word “hope” is embroidered in red or dark orange thread. Lacking specificity in the setting, the panel highlights the aspirations of new life that appear throughout the quilt.
1F: A Union Jack and Tricolor flag are sewn together as the background. A dove in flight appears in the center. Faint lettering across the top spells “love & peace.” The panel can be seen to demonstrate the tensions within notions of parity of esteem, as it places the flags of Ireland and Great Britain side-by-side but does not integrate the colors into a single cloth.

2A: Two row houses appear together in the grass. The house on the left has a green door, an orange yard plant, a red roof, and its chimney spouts three hearts in red, white, and blue. The house on the right has a red door, a green yard plant, a green roof, and its chimney spouts three hearts in green, white, and orange. Separate paths lead to each door and small hearts appear in each of the houses’ two windows. The words “a shared space” are stitched between the two chimneys. As noted in Chapter 5, the panel expresses an interest in living together in the shared territory of Northern Ireland.

2B: A feminine figure holds a silver hoop above her head in the center of a pastoral scene. Her hands are painted orange and green. Her hair appears to blow in the wind and is adorned with beads or glitter. Her dress is constructed of layered stripes of green, white, orange, red, and blue, evoking the Union Jack and Tricolor. Over her abdomen is a silver design that appears to be a circle with a “Y” in the center. As discussed in Chapter 5, the woman seems to represent the joy that may be found in embodying a common identity that incorporates the traditions of both communities.

2C: A teddy bear figure, striped in the colors for the Union Jack and the Tricolor, is sewn directly to the base fabric of the quilt. In each paw the bear holds a string attached to a balloon.
The balloon on the left is orange with the word “equality” written on it. The balloon on the right is green and features the word “peace.” The teddy bear, a child’s toy, may represent the joy and new life found in young children. It may also be an indirect reference to a united Ireland; Irish school children are taught that the island resembles a bear in their geography classes. Given these two potential interpretations, this panel can be seen as an example of the hesitancy toward full integration that can be found throughout the quilt.

2D: Two brick walls, their edges angled toward one another but not touching, appear in the lower half of the panel. A green field is visible in the space between the wall, and rolling green mountains beyond. A yellow sun appears in the sky, its silver rays extending into the space between the walls. Perhaps the sun’s rays represent hope for a light that might be found in between Northern Ireland’s two communities.

2E: The figures of two mice stand facing each other on a light blue background. They each appear to have one paw on a thick string that is sewn across them. The phrase “pulling together for the future” is stitched across the top of the panel in dark thread. Perhaps this panel’s maker(s) are expressing their belief that both communities must make efforts to create peace in Northern Ireland. At the same time, given their positioning, these two mice would be pulling in opposite directions. Perhaps the quilters may also be offering a commentary on the challenges they encounter in working together.

2F: Four windmills appear in a green field next to the sea, with a road running through the center of them. The sun shines in the sky above. A large green patch of fabric is placed in the center of
the panel; perhaps this patch represents a solar panel. It may be that the quilters are highlighting Northern Ireland’s natural resources that both communities share. At the same time, the symbols of renewable energy – wind, water, solar – raise the notion of sustainability, an important consideration in energy policy and peace processes.

3A: Two hands clasp in the center of this panel, one wearing a blue bracelet and one wearing a green bracelet. The background is comprised of strips of fabric in the colors of the Union Jack and the Tricolor, the fabric pieces angled inward, drawing attention to the hands in the center. As discussed in Chapter 5, this panel provides a sense of the interpersonal labor required in peace processes while also lacking specificity in relation to who will conduct this labor and where.

3B: Three figures stand in the grass under a blue sky. The two girls on the left, one wearing a green dress and one wearing a red dress, appear to be performing a traditional Irish dance. Musical notes float in the air above their heads. The third figure is a man playing the Lambeg drum. As discussed in Chapter 5, this panel perhaps speaks to the potential of integrating the traditions of the Protestant and Catholic communities.

3C: Six figures, resembling paper dolls, form a circle. The figures alternate in orange and green, and smiling faces are stitched onto the ones facing viewers. The words stitched in light green thread are illegible in this image. Like many of the panels in this quilt, this section speaks to the desire for members of both communities to come together.
3D: Two houses face one another in front of green mountains and the sea, under a blue sky. The house on the left has a blue door with a red, white, and blue roof. The house on the right has a green door with a green, white, and orange roof. The two houses share a front path to their doors. Like panel 2.A, this piece demonstrates an interest in living together.

3E: A baby in a cradle, set in the upper branches of a tree, is sewn directly onto the base fabric of the quilt. The words “new beginning” are sewn in light green thread toward the base of the tree. Like many other panels in the quilt, this one evokes a sense of the possibilities that might be found in creating a new society in Northern Ireland through the peace process.

3F: Two figures hold hands along a road through the grass. The left figure appears masculine in a blue shirt, red pants, and white shoes. The figure on the right appears feminine in a green shirt, white skirt, and orange shoes. Across the road from them, in the upper left corner of the panel, is a post with five signs pointing in each direction. The embroidered text on each sign is illegible in this image. The panel is perhaps intended to convey a sense of the two communities journeying along the road toward peace together.

4A: A white dove appears to be flying in the center of a blue panel. Darker blue fabric in the lower portion of the panel evokes the sea, while lighter blue fabric in the top portion evokes the sky. The dove carries an olive branch with alternating orange and green leaves in its beak. The words “peace for all” are stitched at the top of the panel in blue thread. Like several other panels, the traditional symbol of peace in a nondescript background points toward the aspirational quality of the quilt.
4B: Two overlapping hands appear in the center of the panel, one green and one orange. The hands open upward, as if releasing the two doves that fly above, one holding a branch with green leaves and one holding a branch with orange leaves. The figures are sewn directly onto the base fabric of the quilt. Perhaps the hands are meant to indicate that both communities must unclench their fists in order to release peace.

4C: Two doors, one orange and one green, are sewn onto a tan background outlined in glitter. Between them is a window with shutters open to a blue sky under a clock; the whole figure is outlined in glitter. Above the orange door is a green crayon; above the green door is an orange crayon. A mortarboard appears in the bottom left corner; a stack of books is in the bottom left corner. Between them the words “everyone welcome” is underlined in glitter. This panel appears to speak toward efforts for integrated education institutions where both Protestant and Catholic children can feel welcomed.

4D: Two chicks hatch out of the same egg. One has the colors of the Irish flag on its stomach while the other has the colors of the Union Jack on its stomach. The figures are sewn directly onto the base fabric of the quilt. Above them the words “a new life” are stitched in dark blue thread. As with other panels, this one shares a sense of the possibilities that can be found in peace.

4E: Two women stand in the grass under a gray sky; glitter evokes rain. The figure on the left wears a green suit with an orange shirt; the figure on the right wears an orange shirt with blue
trousers. Both stand under an umbrella make of the colors of the Irish and British flags, though neither holds the umbrella. The words “when it rains we all get wet” are stitched in the upper left corner or the panel. As discussed in Chapter 5, the panel shares both a sense of common experiences and a reluctance to fully embrace one another’s traditions.

4F: A larger, rounded, grey figure appears in the center of a light blue panel, with brickwork underneath it. Two angels in white dresses appear above it, one holding a green heart and one holding an orange heart. This panel may depict a headstone, perhaps speaking to the lives lost on both sides of the conflict.

5A: A green bell, white bell, and orange bell are tied together with a read string in red thread. Small beads are sewn to represent the clappers. The figure is sewn directly onto the base fabric of the quilt. The words “peace,” “hope,” and “joy” appear below the bells in read thread, one under each bell. Again, this panel emphasizes the aspirational quality of the quilt.

5B: Three feminine figures appear in a boat under a night sky. Each of the figures holds an item in her hand, indistinguishable in this image. Below them are an orange, a green, and a yellow fish. Below the scene are the words “we’re all in one boat.” The women may be holding cooking implements; perhaps this panel is representing the shared responsibility to provide sustenance and the common need for that sustenance in both communities.

5C: Green and orange caterpillars appear in the center of the panel, with multi-colored butterflies on either end. The caterpillars and butterflies appear on a white background that crosses
diagonally across the panel. Stitched directly onto the base fabric of the quilt in light blue thread are the words “undertaking the great mutation to live in harmony.” As discussed in Chapter 5, this panel highlights the ongoing labor of creating a new identity for people in Northern Ireland.

5D: Two figures play sports in a field under a blue sky, their backs to one another. The one on the left plays hurly, wearing a blue jersey with the number nineteen stitched onto it. The figure on the right plays football (soccer) in a green jersey with the number sixteen stitched onto it. As discussed in Chapter 5, this panel is both radical in its mixing of cultural iconography and perhaps resistant through the inclusion of the Catholic symbol of the year 1916.

5E: Two open hands are sewn together on a blue background, cupped as if just releasing the dove that flies above them. Text stitched on the palms of the hands reads “we are the generation 4 change.” As with panel 4B, perhaps this panel expresses a belief in the importance of letting go of the past in order to achieve peace in the future.

5F: A white circle is stitched onto the base fabric of the quilt. In the center is a stylized image of four people in a boat with a cross above them in black, both images surrounded by an incomplete red circle. The design is reminiscent of Christian imagery, perhaps speaking to shared religious roots or to calls for peace within Christian traditions.

6A: The outline of a flying dove carrying an olive branch is embroidered onto a white square. A green and an orange flag appear below the dove. The words “we CAN make peace together” are stitched at the top of the panel. At the bottom of the panel are the words “we CAN make peace
forever.” The symbol of peace in a nondescript background again conveys a sense of aspiration; the emphasis on the word can – in capital letters – reinforces this sense, as if the quilt makers were hoping to speak a reality into being that did not yet exist.

6B: Two women perform their self-exams for breast cancer screening in the mirror. Between them is a pink ribbon and the words “one in eight women.” Below them the silhouettes of eight women stand in a row, the second one in pink. As discussed in Chapter 5, the panel perhaps indicates the women’s common desire to direct resources toward community health and away from violence.

6C: A caduceus appears in the center of a yellow panel, between the phrase “your health is your wealth.” Similar to panel 6B, this piece may point toward shared health concerns.

6D: A sun sits in the top right corner. A green dinosaur appears in the top left corner. In the bottom center is a white-tailed rabbit in a red coat with a blue bowtie. Between them the phrase “out of the past and into a brighter future” is stitched in black thread. Again, the women seem to be indicating that new possibilities can be found by turning away from outdated modes of relating to one another.

6E: An olive branch, made from various fabric pieces, is sewn onto a white background. As with other panels of peace symbols set in a simple background, this one seems to highlight the aspirational quality of the quilt.
6F: Two orange flowers grow from the same stem in the bottom left portion of the panel. Two green shamrocks appear in the top right portion. The flowers seem to point to the growth that can occur when members of the two communities come together.
APPENDIX C

PANEL DESCRIPTIONS FOR THE REMEMBERING QUILT BY PARTICIPANTS FROM WAVE TRAUMA CENTRE

1: Children play in pairs or small groups on small patches placed among a cracked blue background. Three girls stand below a lamppost. Two children ride a tricycle. One child holds an infant. Two boys play sports, one hurlly and the other golf. Three girls stand together on the grass. As noted in Chapter 5, this panel depicts scenes of childhood just before the start of the Troubles.

2: British troops, the “B specials,” practice on a firing range. The scene takes place before the Troubles began and points toward the militarization of the territory even before violence broke out.

3: Catholic demonstrators march under a banner that reads “civil rights now” while police and British military personnel look on. The Catholic civil rights marches, though modeled on the nonviolent actions of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, quickly devolved into recruitment opportunities for paramilitaries from both communities and ultimately erupted into violence.
4: Several men walk through what appears to be debris and a barricade. This may represent the barricaded communities, such as Free Derry (discussed in the description of panel 6 below), that sprang up in response to police and military attempts to control territory in Northern Ireland.

5: A number of men are lined up facing the wall while two figures in military attire look on. The scene appears to be a security check; whether the check is being carried out by the British military or by a paramilitary group is unclear.

6: The well-known “Free Derry” mural painted onto the end of row houses in the Bogside neighborhood of Derry/Londonderry during Bloody Sunday, a civil rights march that erupted into riots after British military personnel fired upon the crowd. The mural is freshly painted each year to coincide with the Bloody Sunday commemoration march.

7: Two military personnel stand guard at what appears to be a car bomb explosion in front of a brick building.

8: The infamous Long Kesh Detention Centre, also known as “The Maze” or “the H-blocks,” where paramilitary prisoners, primarily Republican, were housed during the Troubles. The Maze became a symbol of the mistreatment of political prisoners, as well as the site of battles for the recognition of the political nature of the conflict (see, for example, the description of panel 9).
9: A political prisoner is wrapped in a prison blanket. The individual may be participating in the dirty protest / blanket protest of the 1970s or the hunger strike of 1981. Both were attempts by Republican paramilitary members to gain the status of “political prisoner” or “prisoner of war,” with the attendant rights. The efforts were designed to earn certain privileges for these prisoners, such as the right to wear their own clothing, as well as to force the British government to recognize the concerns of the republican groups as legitimate.

10: A crowd gathers as a freight truck is overturned and set ablaze outside a high-rise building flying the Irish Tricolor.

11: Firefighters extinguish a blaze. The tall buildings on the right juxtaposed with the end of a row house behind the smoke on the left indicate that this is likely a residential area of Belfast.

12: A funeral procession for a Catholic Republican. While civilians carry the coffin draped in the Irish Tricolor, members of the Irish Republican Army (the dominant Republican paramilitary organization) flank the pallbearers, wearing their well-recognized balaclavas.

13: Farmers and a group of women form a roadblock while motorists are turned away from a gas station that has run out of petrol. It is not clear whether this is an action taken by Catholic or Protestant community members. Given the contrast between the farmers along the right bend in the road and the women sitting in the center, it is possible that this panel represents a consolidation of several actions of this sort.
14: A small group of two women and one or two men meet on a sidewalk. They stand over a canister and hold a white cloth between them. The nature of the event depicted in this panel is unclear to me, but would likely hold meaning for viewers within Northern Ireland.

15: Two nurses and a doctor stand outside the Royal Victoria Hospital as a team of paramedics bring in a young girl who had been the victim of a bombing. Belfast’s Royal Victoria Hospital was where many victims of the Troubles were brought for treatment. One nurse stands in front of a brick wall stitched with graffiti that reads “where are they?” The graffiti is likely a reference to those who were either disappeared by paramilitary groups or to those detained for lengthy periods without warrant under the Temporary Provisions Act. In front of the nurses, a figure in military attire appears to be attempting to detect or detonate a bomb, perhaps with the help of a dog.

16: Mourners gather at a Protestant funeral. The casket, draped in the Union Jack, is flanked by paramilitary members. The paramilitary men, wearing black clothing, berets, and sunglasses, salute their fallen comrade.

17: A wall of corrugated iron runs along a road. On one side is the patch of an Irish flag, under which the letters “IRA” (Irish Republican Army) appear. On the other side is a British flag near graffiti on the wall that reads “UDA” (Ulster Defense Association, one of the primary Loyalist paramilitary organizations). This is like an example of the euphemistically named “peace walls” built to separate residents of Catholic and Protestant neighborhoods.
18: A well-known mural from one of the Protestant neighborhoods through which Shankill Road runs in Belfast. The mural features paramilitary figures and unionist iconography, such as the Red Hand of Ulster. The letters “UFF” stand for the Ulster Freedom Fighters, one of the main Loyalist paramilitary organizations.

19: A car bomb explodes, sending debris into the road. The license plate reads “May 1976,” likely the date of the bombing that affected the woman who contributed this story.

20: A military guard or police officer patrols outside a government building encased in chain-link fencing and flying the Union Jack. Two figures stand against the corner of a wall in the bottom left portion of the panel. The heads of the two figures are not discernable and drop-like stitches in black fall from the bodies; it is possible these figures represent individuals who have been shot in the head.

21: Mourners gather for a Protestant funeral procession. The casket is draped in the Union Jack, although no members of a paramilitary organization are discernable. The deceased may be a political figure who either did not have or sought to avoid public associations with paramilitary organizations.

22: Two individuals are apprehended by police officers outside White’s General Store as an Army helicopter hovers overhead. The political affiliation of the two individuals being apprehended is not discernable. This panel is perhaps an example of how innocent individuals...
without clear paramilitary involvement were often accused and detained throughout the Troubles.

23: Protestant men march in the Port Down Orange Order parade. The annual July 12 Orange Order Parades, commemorating Protestant King William of Orange’s victory over the Catholic King James, are contentious events. Protestants celebrate the parades as expressions of their cultural heritage. However, given that parade routes typically run through Catholic neighborhoods, Catholics tend to experience the parades as expressions of domination and violence.

24: Stormont, the seat of governance of Northern Ireland, appears at the end of the path that runs through a green park. A paper copy of the Good Friday Agreement hangs along the path. The cover of the document reads: “The Agreement: This document is about your future, please read it carefully. It’s your decision.” As discussed in Chapter 5, this panel attempts to bring closure to the history of the Troubles and emphasizes the need for a new approach toward community relations in Northern Ireland.
Re: Request for arpillera images

Marjorie Agosin <magosin@wellesley.edu>

To: Arielle Ann Semmel<br/>

1/20/2016

You replied on 1/20/2016 11:55 AM.

Dear Arielle

Thank you for your kind an very noble letter. I appreciate it so much.
Of course, you can use the images of the Arpilleras and also there is a special webiste made by curator Roberta Bacic and you can find some.
it would be wonderful if your Univ is interested in an arpillera exhibit. I have a very special collection and if organized with time and with the proper space

it could be wonderful for the students.
I appreciate so much your email and wish you luck

Marjorie Agosin

On Tue, Jan 19, 2016 at 2:27 PM, Arielle Ann Semmel <arielle.semmel@siu.edu> wrote:

Dr. Agosin,

Hello! My name is Arielle Semmel and I am a doctoral candidate at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, currently working on my dissertation. For my research project, I am exploring the ways in which women contribute to conflict transformation through their sewing. As part of my research, I am conducting rhetorical analyses of textile pieces from sewing projects in different conflict and post-conflict settings. I am interested in the work of the arpilleras in Chile and have found your many writings and published collections of arpilleras to be very helpful in my research.

Unfortunately, I do not have the resources to travel to view pieces in person, so I am relying on photographs for my analysis. I have selected three arpilleras from your book, Tapestries of Hope, Threads of Love (1st edition) to study. I was wondering if you might be able and willing to share some high resolution images of the following three pieces for the purposes of my research.
• Doris Meniconi, "A Woman Throws a Letter to the Wind" (p. 66)
• Irma Muller, "A Woman Dreaming and Wondering about Her Missing Son" (p. 67)
• Unknown, "Mother and Young Daughter" (p. 50)

The images would be for my personal study, I certainly plan to include proper citation and credit for the images, and I would only include the actual images in the copy of my dissertation that I submit to my graduate school with your permission. In addition, I would be happy to share this chapter or my entire dissertation with you as it is completed, if you are interested.

If it would help for you to hear more about my project, I would be happy to talk with you further. Thank you for your consideration of my request and I look forward to hearing from you.

Cheers!

Arielle Semmel
Doctoral Candidate
Southern Illinois University, Carbondale
Department of Communication Studies (formerly Speech Communication)

President, Student Communication Organization
Dear Arielle

It's good to hear from you. Yes the project had been exhibited in Chicago in 2004. It was then the artwork of Andries Botha. It has become the Voices of Women core collection and continues to grow.

We have a substantial digital database and had enlisted the help of Michigan State University to assist us with linking it to the website. Unfortunately, that did not go very well as there were many glitches so we have had to begin the process again.

We have a basic research protocol which I will send you tomorrow to sign, but its line with your suggestions as per your email. Let me send you that tomorrow. In terms of access, let's see how else we can do it. There are some samples on our website currently (www.amazwi-voicesofwomen.com) which I believe you have seen. I can perhaps arrange to send you a selection of pieces based on your topic thought it will take some time and I can't guarantee that I can do it right away.

Shall we look as what's possible?

We can also do a Skype call at an appropriate time...

Let me know.

Coral

Coral Bijoux

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coralbijoux.65@gmail.com

On Tue, Feb 16, 2016 at 12:55 AM, Arielle Ann Semmel <arielle.semmel@siu.edu> wrote:

Ms. Bijoux,
Thank you so much for initiating the email. My apologies - despite the many double-checks we did, I still had your last name as "Dijoux" - I am very glad to have the corrections.

Hello! Thank you for taking the time to speak with me on Friday (and this morning).

My name is Arielle Semmel and I am a doctoral candidate at Southern Illinois University in the United States, currently working on my dissertation. For my research project, I am exploring the ways in which women contribute to conflict transformation through sewing collectives. As part of my research, I am conducting rhetorical analyses of textile pieces from sewing projects in different conflict and post-conflict settings. I first learned about the Amazwi Abesifazane project from the 2004 exhibition at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and am including a discussion of that work in my dissertation.

Unfortunately, I do not have the resources to travel to South Africa to view the pieces in person, so I am planning on relying on photographs (along with the narrative and biographical information that accompanies each memory cloth) for my analysis. I would be extremely grateful for access to the archive for my research.

The access would be for my personal study, I certainly plan to include proper citation, and I would only include the actual images in the copy of my dissertation that I submit to my graduate school with permission. In addition, I would be happy to share this chapter or my entire dissertation with you as it is completed, if you are interested.

I thank you for your consideration. Also, you had mentioned that a woman in the UK is working on a similar project. If you were able to share my contact information with her, that would be great. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

All the best!

Arielle Semmel

Doctoral Candidate
Southern Illinois University, Carbondale
Department of Communication Studies (formerly Speech Communication)

President, Student Communication Organization

From: Coral Bijoux <coralbijoux.65@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, February 15, 2016 10:37 AM
To: Arielle Ann Semmel
Re: Your request for information

To: Arielle Ann Semmel

3/24/2016

Inbox

You replied on 3/24/2016 9:53 AM.

Dear Arielle

I'm glad that you are doing well. Yes I have not yet sent you our research protocol - which you will receive for the process (retrospectively unfortunately) - my computer and back up was stolen so its taken a while to get everything back in one piece as we run a very small entity without all the usual back up support systems.

1. With regards to the triangle, its really about interpretation. The artists/crafters seldom explain their work as its almost an extension or an interpretation of their narrative. Triangles can represent so many things and it could also just be used as an aesthetic. Her work is very stylized as opposed to the usual narrative form and could echo the roof, or be of personal significance to her - we can only guess. Its similar to the San-Bushman cloths we have in the Collection.

2. Again, we are guessing and it could be anything. The assumption that it is a Xhosa word meaning to chase/run off is probably closer to being correct as that is what her narrative is about - being chased away. For all we know, it could be letters representing something else.

Without actually making contact with the person directly, we can guess. Even so, its a bit like asking an artist to explain each symbol they might have added to their work- much could also be subliminal.

I trust that’s helpful. I am trying to source a higher resolution but its probably not possible. We have only a select few in high resolution, if I recall, these 3 pieces are not amongst them. 2 of them are framed (not on the website- I think I sent those to you) so its a matter of photographing behind glass. The other is probably not a framed piece. I have asked our archival assistants to look for me as i away.

Do you need quality photographs?

All the best,
Coral

Coral Bijoux

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oralbijoux@telkomza.net
coralbijoux.65@gmail.com
Re: Art of Survival exhibition images

Robert Bacic <robertabenone@hotmail.co.uk>
To: Arielle Semmel; Cc: monitos@companres.fsnet.co.uk

12/13/2015

Arielle:
I am just back from travelling.
Please look into the upgraded web that gives much more info for each piece and you can look through the serach engine regarding textiles or events. It was launched 19th November.
http://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflicttextiles/
After you have gone through that I am happy to provide high resolution images, though would value a bit more information about your research and can only give photos for the ones I hold copyright. Presently there are plenty more textiles from Northern Ireland documented.
The easiest way for clarification would be to plan a brief phone conversation and consider time difference.
I can ring free of cost to a landline.
Regards and look forward to hearing from you,

Robert
note: please reply to both e-mails

From: Arielle Ann Semmel <arielle.semmel@siu.edu>
Sent: 10 December 2015 18:01
To: robertabenone@hotmail.co.uk
Subject: Art of Survival exhibition images

Dear Ms. Bacic,

Hello! My name is Arielle Semmel and I am a doctoral candidate at Southern Illinois University in the United States, currently working on my dissertation. For my research project, I am exploring the ways in which women contribute to conflict transformation through sewing collectives. As part of my research, I am conducting rhetorical analyses of textile pieces from sewing projects in different conflict and post-conflict settings. I am interested in the quilting work from women in Northern Ireland and have found your curation of the Art of Survival, as posted on the CAIN website, to be very helpful in my research. I
heard (through INCORE’s Facebook page) that a new exhibit was also recently launched in Derry/Londonderry, which is very exciting.

Unfortunately, I do not have the resources to travel to Northern Ireland to view the pieces in person, so I am planning on relying on photographs for my analysis. However, it is difficult to see all the fine detail work on the quilts with web-quality images. I was wondering if you might be able and willing to share some high resolution images of the following three quilts for the purposes of my research.

- #9 Patchwork Quilt, Women Together Belfast  
  (http://www.cain.ulst.ac.uk/quilts/photos/DER08QLT_iri9_1380r.jpg)
- #3 Pathways of Life / Shared City Project, Derry/Londonderry  
  (http://www.cain.ulst.ac.uk/quilts/photos/DER08QLT_iri3_1581r.jpg)
- #20 Remembering Quilt Panel 8, Relatives for Justice  
  (http://www.cain.ulst.ac.uk/quilts/photos/DER08QLT_iri201476r.jpg)

The images would be for my personal study, I certainly plan to include proper citation and credit for the images, and I would only include the actual images in the copy of my dissertation that I submit to my graduate school with your permission. In addition, I would be happy to share this chapter or my entire dissertation with you as it is completed, if you are interested.

I wish you all the best on the current exhibition and look forward to hearing from you soon.

Cheers!

Arielle Semmel  
Doctoral Candidate  
Southern Illinois University, Carbondale  
Department of Communication Studies (formerly Speech Communication)

President, Student Communication Organization
full size images and how to credit

Robert Bacic &lt;monitos@compadres.fsnet.co.uk&gt;  
To: Arielle Ann Semmel;  
12/24/2015

Arielle:
I will send the images today and in this message attach the regulations as how to credit copyright. This was just finished with Ulster University's archivist at CAIN yesterday, and wanted to send all together.

At 01:24 18/12/2015, Arielle Ann Semmel wrote:

Roberta,

Thank you again for taking the time to speak with me and for your willingness to share the images. I have looked through the pieces from Northern Ireland that are posted on the website. I think the ones created by women in cross-community groups and incorporate the stories of several women into one piece will be most helpful for my current project. With that in mind, I would like to request images of the following quilts:

- Quilt of Remembrance, WAVE Trauma Centre:
  http://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflictextiles/search-quilts/fulltextiles/?id=315
- Northern Ireland Peace Quilt, Women Together:
  http://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflictextiles/search-quilts/fulltextiles/?id=4
- Shared Visions, Belfast Women's Groups facilitated by Sonia Copeland:
  http://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflictextiles/search-quilts/fulltextiles/?id=115

Thank you!
PS. On an unrelated note, did your assistant curator Breege Doherty happen to spend time at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and/or the Peace Museum in Chicago a little over ten years ago? Her name is familiar from work I've done with both, though we never met (it seemed I was always a year or two behind her). I am just curious if she is the same person I'd heard so much about.

Cheers!

Arielle Semmel  
Doctoral Candidate  
Southern Illinois University, Carbondale  
Department of Communication Studies (formerly Speech Communication)

President, Student Communication Organization
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VITA

Graduate School
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Arielle Ann Semmel
arielle.semmel@gmail.com

Gustavus Adolphus College
Bachelor of Arts, Peace Studies, May 2001

University of Ulster
Master of Arts, Peace and Conflict Studies, July 2006

Special Honors and Awards:
Research Award, Graduate & Professional Student Council, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 2015.


Dean’s Prize, University of Ulster, 2006.

Dissertation Title:
Women’s Work: Stitching New Identity Narratives in Conflict and Post-Conflict Settings

Major Professor: Suzanne Daughton

Publications: