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Craftivism
our yarns are the tellers of us
Unthreading the Stories Beneath Stitched Stories

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Humanities,
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg,
in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Applied Drama

by **Stacey Rozen**

Person number: 2016036

Supervisor: Tamara Schulz

Declaration

I, the undersigned, Stacey Rozen, hereby declare that this dissertation is my own original work. It is being submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Applied Drama at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree at any other university.

I declare that:

I am aware that plagiarism (the use of another's work without prior permission and without due acknowledgement by citation of their source) is wrong. I have followed the required conventions in referencing the thoughts and ideas of others according to the Faculty of Humanities.



Stacey Rozen

September 2019

Johannesburg, South Africa

Acknowledgements

It has taken a village to transmute this dissertation into wholehearted existence, the culmination of a life-changing story that began a decade ago. Gratitude abounds for the support I have received from colleagues, family and friends.

To all my sisters and daughters, kin by choice and heart, thank you for bravely sharing your stitched stories. I have gained clarity on the many encounters craftivism has gifted us and the role I play in creating experiences for others as a craftivism facilitator.

Thank you to all the interlocutors whose words of wisdom have resonated with me, moved me, infused my thoughts, inspired me and prompted me to action, especially:

My supervisor, Tamara Schulz, for encouraging me to make the invisible visible.

Dr Corrine Oosthuizen, for our reflective conversations.

My lecturer, Cherae Halley, for holding me through the PaR.

Prof. Christo Doherty, for persuading me to reveal my side of the story.

This dissertation is dedicated to my dad, Simon.

Dad, you left a legacy I am truly grateful for. I wasn't aware you were saving towards my education for so many years… until the executor of your will informed me. I finally was ready to do it. I thank you and mom for believing in me.

Abstract

This narrative enquiry, entitled *Craftivism: Our Yarns are the Tellers of Us*, is an auto-ethnographic unthreading of a craftivism facilitator's story submerged beneath the stitched stories of the collective. The fusing of craft and activism surfaces the invisible into visibility. It is a response to *Story Scarves*, a craftivism project in which teenage girls fuelled resistance to the inclement ethos of gender-based violence in Soweto, South Africa. Its analysis and critique are from the perspective of the craftivism facilitator receiving traumatically embodied stitched stories that were difficult to hold. This gives context to the Practice as Research which considers the role of the craftivism facilitator while piloting processes and techniques for mindfulness and compassion. The findings, reflections and recommendations emerge from the creative work.

Creative Layout of this Dissertation

Postgraduate students are advised to adhere to the university's style guide in order to submit an academic document for examination. As this is a creative research enquiry coupled with a focus on the medium as the message, I am wanting the form of the dissertation to congruously stitch with the content. I am using Harvard citation style for referencing but I have chosen not to indent quotations preferring to embed them in-text with italics for seamless threading into the yarn. As an experienced graphic designer, I have an affinity for the lingo of typefaces, pica sizes, line spacing and letter kerning. Hence, I have chosen to conservatively implement my own typographic styling that threads the text of this stitched story. I am, as Sibongile Khumalo proffers, a creator - not a rule-breaker in my non-conformity of the academically preferred practice. (Khumalo, 2018)

Trigger Warning

Prior to reading this dissertation, please be aware that some of the stories relating to gender-based violence could be triggering. You may consider having a supportive person on hand for conversational reflections.

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chapter 1
Introduction
Craftivism: Our yarns are the tellers of us

“Our yarns are the tellers of us” consciously reconstructed from *“Our stories are the tellers of us"* (Cleave, 2012) is an investigation into yarns in the transmutation of self and community.

Key Terms

Relevant key terms needed to pursue this research: yarn, personal narrative, stitched story, thread, tapestry, handicrafts, crochet, knit, embroidery, appliqué, craftivism, craftivist, yarn bomb/graffiti, gender-based violence, auto-ethnography, mindfulness

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Craft + Activism = Craftivism

The basis of this narrative enquiry, entitled *Craftivism: Our Yarns are the Tellers of Us*, is framed by craftivism (craft + activism) and its contribution to advantageous personal and collective social change. The core focus is yarn, both of fibre thread and narrative story.

Yarn is defined as a *"spun thread used for knitting, weaving or sewing"* and *"a long or rambling story."* (Oxford Dictionary, 2018)

The phrase craftivism is "*the symbiotic relationship between craft and activism."* (Greer, 2014) and *"relates to creative, traditional handcraft (often, assisted by high-tech means of community-building, skill-sharing, and action)."* (Buszek & Robertson, 2011) The high-technology component of craftivism focuses on social media interaction for communicating the craftivism cause. It is a gentle form of protest for quiet introverts (Corbett, 2016). Yarn bombs are graffiti-style fibre installations in a public space. (Sayeg, 2015)

This enquiry investigates the disciplines of handicrafts, such as embroidery, crochet, knit and appliqué, and the stitched stories they embody, both visibly and invisibly beneath their façades. Specifically, it is an investigation into ways of facilitating the craftivism process within groups, to ensure a *"do no harm"* approach and outcome. The research question is:

How does the work of craftivism, specifically through the methodology of stitched stories, make the invisible visible?

It is an auto-ethnographic response to stitched stories fuelling resistance to the inclement ethos of gender-based violence (GBV) in South Africa. It is written from my self-reflecting perspective as teaching-artist/craftivist and facilitator/researcher. My personal anecdotes connect to my wider socio-cultural understandings of my home country and my past experience of a craftivism project.

1.2 Gender-based Violence in South Africa

In the context of post-apartheid South Africa, protest culture is charged with activism as multitudes of invisible stories are hidden within our socio-political fabric. The context of our society therefore demands a deeper enquiry in order to surface the submerged invisible yarn and convey the depth of complexity we are grappling with. Hence, my angle is a mindfully connected approach in order to fully investigate the fusion of craftivism, gender-based violence, vulnerable youth and the artistry of agitation in an African context.

The seminal texts I have engaged with from other practitioners in the field of craftivism are vitally important and have greatly influenced my knowledge and practice. However, my enquiry into the facilitator of craftivism fills a gap not fully investigated previously by other theorists.

In 2018, *#TheTotalShutdown* protest shut down South Africa with the cry, *"My body is NOT your crime scene!"* (The Total Shutdown, 2018) Women and gender non-conforming people (GNC) marched in solidarity against gender-based violence handing a memorandum of demands to the government. This protest confirms that pervasive rape culture has been normalised due to societal attitudes surrounding misogyny and patriarchy. There is a need for methodologies that can fuse activism with mindfulness and explore alternative ways to break patriarchal structures in society. Traditional handicrafts associated with gentle craftivism might offer such an alternative.

Citizen activism is a disruptive influence rebirthing consciousness by piloting awareness campaigns. Achieving gender parity by changing individual and collective psyche is imperative to healing both the victims and the perpetrators. Therefore, there is a need for this research because South Africans require more creative interventions to galvanise the momentum for real change in our society.

However, facilitators and activists need to be able to handle these interventions safely, without prodding painful wounds. My personal experience offers an enquiry seeking recommendations for other facilitators working in similar contexts.

1.3 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The theory is framed by craftivism-based community interventions within the gender justice movement (Oxfam, 2018). It includes storytelling via fourth-wave feminism which is defined by technology and online social media (Cochrane, 2013).

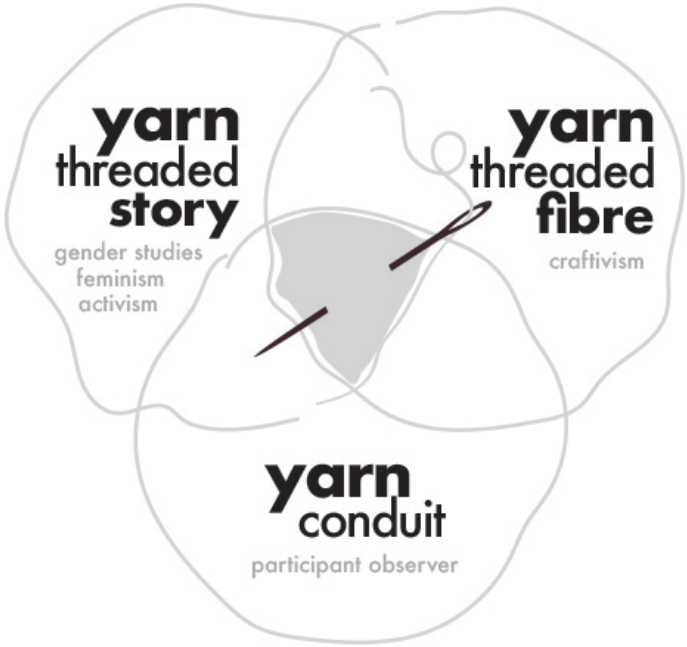


Figure 1 - Infographic of interlinking yarns indicating where the research sits

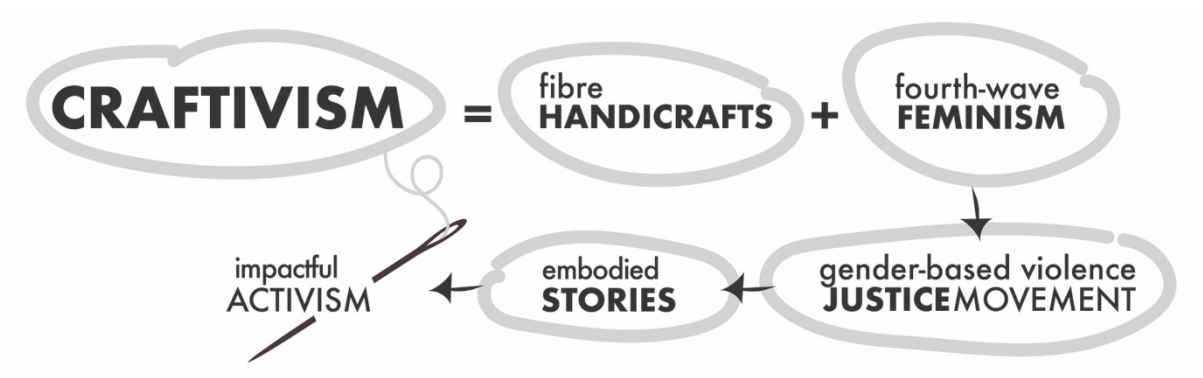


Figure 2 - Infographic of Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

A broad critique of craftivism considers, surveys and theorises on submerged stories embodied within yarns for the purposes of activism, communication and healing including relationships to digitality and mindful practice. The parallelism of the submerged stitched story beneath the surfaced stitched story animates my inquiry through this main question:

How does the work of craftivism, specifically through the methodology of stitched stories, make the invisible visible?

The practice methodology includes craftivism and embodied handcrafting, design ideation, mindfulness practice and storytelling. The research methodology includes auto-ethnography, critically reflexive praxis and practice as research (PaR). They are elaborated upon in Chapter 2: Towards a Methodology for Practice as Research.

1.4 Mapping the Journey

The genesis of this research is a project that I was involved in from 2009 to 2015 called *Story Scarves*. I describe it in-depth as it underpins the enquiry that I undertook in the PaR intervention. The project is anchored within a grassroots craftivism project for teenage girls in Soweto, South Africa, associated with the *#1BillionRising* Revolution, a global movement *"calling for an end to violence against all women and girls, led by grassroots activists."* (One Billion Rising, 2019) It unthreads the tangled yarn beneath *Story Scarves*, where I was the community teaching-artist/craftivist. My reflective critique surfaces the submerged story beneath the façade by revealing its censored complexity.

As the teaching-artist/craftivist, specific focus is on my inability to sufficiently hold the space embodied with traumatic stitched stories in a gender-based violence (GBV) context. Through my own participatory observations, anecdotes and personal journal excerpts written while tracking events, it integrates descriptive, narrative and analytic text and imagery. The story of the project is not the main focus of this research, merely a springboard into informing the main enquiry.

The project's story provides a series of problems to critique and endeavour to correct. These problems include the tendency for craftivism interventions to be superficial, particularly in the context of a fraught, post-conflict situation that exists in South Africa. There is a need for craftivist facilitators undertaking projects such as *Story Scarves*, to be better equipped to deal with what arises, as my personal journey illustrates.

In response to the traumatic experiences of the situation described, I then embarked on a PaR enquiry, aimed at forging a different way to approach craftivism in South Africa. This part of the dissertation draws upon ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2019. It considers the role of the facilitator in craftivism interventions envisioning a sensitive paradigm in compassionate facilitation by intentionally piloting a methodology of self-preservation involving mindfulness, embodied reflection and artistic expression in a safe space.

Conducted as a methodological study, it employs community-based techniques in the form of a progressive series of experiential craftivism workshops.

Cognitive processes are not adequate tools to speak of material that has a practical element entwined with emotional complexity. Therefore, the theory around creative research and the relevance of lived experience is foremost. (Green, 2007) The main focus of my enquiry is on developing a set of boundaries, methods and processes for craftivism facilitators working in the intersection between community-based projects, issue-led activism and mindful creative expression through handicrafts. As facilitator/researcher and creative arts practitioner, I contrast my findings with my previous practice as a teaching-artist/craftivist. From my findings, I make recommendations for other facilitators of craftivism interventions working in similar contexts.

At various points in this dissertation, I may refer to myself as: teaching-artist/craftivist (*Story Scarves*), story-weaver/craftivist (journal), facilitator/researcher/craftivist (enquiry), receiver/conduit (throughout), creative arts practitioner (academic). I use the term *receiver* in various ways: as facilitator receiving messages in stories emotionally as in the applied arts framework and as the sender-receiver in communication theory.

1.5 Tracking and Journaling

As the story-weaver/craftivist of *Story Scarves*, I tracked my fieldwork experiences over the years by journaling. Mostly, my personal journal was a digital archive of stream-of-consciousness writings typed into my notepad on my smartphone at random moments when I felt I needed to express myself. These on-the-fly narrations held my inner most thoughts and feelings and were automatically backed-up on my laptop. I hardly ever re-read or edited them until recently when I decided to do this enquiry. I pondered deleting them during an anxious moment concerned for my own exposure through prying hackers that could make them visibly public, but I didn't. They sat there. They still sit there. The invisible patiently waiting to transmute into the visible – until the right time arrives. I use excerpts from pertinent journal entries as a way of weaving my own anecdotal experiences and reflections into this dissertation.

Self-regulated learning through my journaling process has moved me from reflective analysis to critically reflexive questioning. Its ability to incite critical reflexive praxis of past actions and future possibilities has led me to profound insight while investigating evocations incited within me when encountering stitched stories, and how that impacts others. Self-reflexivity has been crucial in me figuring out effective methodologies for my practice going forward. (Cunliffe, 2004)

1.6 On Being an Auto-ethnographer

As the auto-ethnographer in this self-imposed enquiry, my personal and visceral response to my experience at a craftivism project is threaded with my life's encounters. My personal experience is a lens through which to explore the collective, so that others may learn from my story. I use my auto-ethnographic voice in two ways: my descriptive voice is in the journal excerpts and my analytical voice considers the impact of my anecdotes on the overall story. **In my view, my personal voice is my own self-activism.**

Louise Bourgeois said: *"Tell your own story and you will be interesting."* (Tate, 2018) My interestingness is revealed through self-reflection connecting my autobiographical anecdotes to socio-cultural understandings: *"a personal narrative of the self, revealing the wider narrative of the other. By studying my own work, I'm revealing the joys and the failures typical of life itself - for all of us. I'm doing it in a way that others can learn from me."* (Van Tonder, 2018) Fundamental is this: *"Life is your syllabus: Gather from everywhere." "But also remember that just because it's your story, that doesn't mean you're entitled to an audience. You have to earn that."* (Saltz, 2018) I know that in order to earn my right to tell my story: *"The only rule is work."* (Kent, 2018)

Story as an Auto-ethnographer

Ultimately, at the root of auto-ethnography is the yarn of storytelling and story listening/receiving. A story is a portrayal of a journey, either personally or communally. A story is an anecdotal shapeshifter transforming its form as it gathers multitudes of threads over time. No matter its medium, a story aims to communicate a message. As storytellers, we are all threaders of yarns whether we choose to thread them verbally through conversation, nonverbally through gesture, written through books or as craftivists through stitched stories.

Stories embedded within our lives teach us about ourselves, our relationships and our place in our communities and "*Me Story, My Story, Our Story, Their Story and No Story"* relates strongly to craftivism. (Lambert, 2013) *Me Story* is a first-person self-disclosure not for public consumption, for example a psychotherapy session. I have experienced *Me Story* during debriefing at clinical supervision. *My Story* is important for an auto-ethnographer as it is a first-person account in relation to others or a subject. In this dissertation, I use this method of storytelling. As the teller, I am a participatory witness with significant knowledge of the other and share the story publicly. *Our Story* is us according to one person's connected perception told ethnographically. As a blogger, I was the teller sharing our story publicly online via

social media. *Their Story* is an objective narrative about others as in journalism. *No Story* consists of pure facts such as a scientific report. So, pertinent to this inquiry is *My Story* as auto-ethnographer in contrast to my past as a blogger sharing our narrative as *Our Story*.

> *"We are perpetual storytellers, reviewing events in the form of relived scenes, nuggets of context and character, actions that lead to realizations."* (Lambert, 2013).

Stories matter as a *"fundamental way in which we understand who we are in the world."* (Ganz, 2015) The *"story of self"* provides insight into my own values; the *"story of us"* speaks of our threaded values as a community; the *"story of now"* speaks of the values we wish for our world contrasted with the values that actually exist and how our aspirations can incite action to change those values. (Berman, 2017)

Transmedia storytelling is *"a multimedia product which communicates its narrative through a multitude of integrated media channels."* (Kalinov, 2017) The story is transmitted across multiple platforms including traditional cross-platform analogue media, such as a stitched story, and digital media, such as online social media. The prefix *'trance'* means *'across,'* so the tellers interweave the message criss-crossing the different media. As an auto-ethnographer, I have gathered data for this story across all its interdisciplinary media that have collaborated with each other to share different chapters of the collective story.

The story's message was communicated to a wider reach and specific target audiences that may resonate with differing aspects of the story. For example, a stitched story used as a protest banner on-the-ground may appeal to an audience that are geographically close to the location. A digitised photograph showing the craftivist making that stitched story, may be shared online in a Facebook group that reaches other craftivists and spurs conversation about the meaning-making process. A tweet using hashtag activism for the cause that this stitched story speaks of, may reach activists worldwide. So, on three differing platforms criss-crossing from analogue to digital, the stitched story's chapters convey its artistry, its making and its activism. On-demand culture allows the receiver of the anecdotal chapter of the stitched story to decide when to receive its message at a convenient time. This leads to a more comprehensive perspective of the stitched story while giving it a wider reach. The evolution of a handcrafted stitched story is thus adapting to human evolution and simultaneously the evolution of communication. Therefore, stories permeate all facets of our lives as a vehicle for social and personal engagement. As the auto-ethnographer, I have chosen to tell this story in a written format here, but I have researched and taken into account all the transmedia forms of this story that have touched me and those around me.

A typically Southern African approach to auto-ethnography is embodied in the Nguni word for humanness, *ubuntu*. *"I am, because we are"* relates the self (my story) to the broader community (our story) and how they are threaded together.

I am aware of exposing myself to scrutiny through intimate self-disclosure, yet I do not agree that auto-ethnography can be lassoed into confessional culture. My own vulnerabilities have had to be exposed in order to make visible the invisible story that lies beneath the known story. I have cautiously risked my private self without over-exposure. Vulnerability's value in storytelling, *"the willingness to be "all in" even when you know it can mean failing and hurting – is brave."* (Brown, 2018) and is echoed in the Japanese ceramic art of Kintsukuroi which considers *"breakage and repair as part of the history of an object, rather than something to disguise."* (My Modern Met, 2018) Cracks make the imperfect object more valuable as it's repaired with gold, which is symbolic of the insight gained from imperfect stories. *"Forget your perfect offering, there is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in."* (Cohen, 1992).

Auto-ethnography is the correct research method for this inquiry as it allows my personal story to touch the reader more deeply than a purely academic paper would and thereby may have a greater impact on the other. It has allowed access to an abundant source of my own private data that would not otherwise have been made public. Readers of my personal narrative may become aware of similar realities that they have experienced themselves yet not considered prior to reading this dissertation. By reflecting upon and empathising with my experiences, they may then benefit from my introspective meaning-making and learnings. I thereby can contribute to their practice as craftivist facilitators.

The Tree in the Forest

This is a conundrum that has been debated for decades: *"When a tree falls in a lonely forest, and no animal is nearby to hear it, does it make a sound?"* (Mann & Twiss , 1910, p. 235) Scientifically, it can be argued that there will be a sound no matter whether it is perceived through the cochlea or not. Philosophically though, it ponders the question: does recognition through hearing/observation affect the outcome of the happening? Mark Travis asks a similar question relating it to storytelling: *"If a story is told and there is no one there to receive it, does it make a sound?"* (Travis, 2011) Travis continues to explain that every story must have a teller, sharing its narrative, and a listener, receiving its narrative in order for the message of the story to be conveyed. Yet, the teller and the receiver do not have to be two different beings because the initial teller of a story is our self and the first listener is our self. So, the tree heard itself when it fell and the story is heard within us, regardless of the

audience. We initially tell our story for ourselves. Just like our basic needs, *"storytelling is such an essential tool to keep the human psyche in balance."* Stories nourish us. Yet, a story kept to our self is hidden, invisible to others. It also does not fully emerge that story into the collective. No personal story is solitary as, even if it is in some tiny aspect, it is a part of the whole. Therefore, as an auto-ethnographer, in setting a story free from our invisible inner self, and gifting it to other receivers, we make space for new stories to germinate. Therein lies the healing. The *"telling of our life stories is perhaps one of the most powerful therapeutic tools available to man."* (Sachs , 1998)

The phenomenon of quintessence includes *"things that offer more to us than we specifically ask them and to which we respond more strongly than is easily explained."* (Cornfeld & Edwards, 1983) The essence and presence of the process of this dissertation, writing the story auto-ethnographically while engaging with the interlocutors and the PaR, has incited critical reflexive practice within me.

Ethnographic Refusal as an Auto-ethnographer

As an auto-ethnographer, I consent to be the research focus of this self-imposed enquiry. I have, however, had to consider the risk I'm taking in revealing extremely sensitive information. Even though my intimate disclosures may be portrayed as the 'full story,' I have consciously chosen to reveal only parts of my personal narrative for public consumption. It has been essential for me to protect myself from over-exposure. I have followed ethics of care *"that includes nurturance, care, compassion, and networks of communication."* (Loue, 2000, p. 48) Hence, my use of self-censorship for self-care.

Theorists consider *ethnographic refusal* a decolonising research method. *"Activist researchers have the potential to uncover particularly sensitive information that, when revealed, may have very real social and material consequences for research participants and their communities." "Refusal is a method whereby researchers and research participants together decide not to make particular information available for use within the academy."* (Zahara, 2016)

My private journal entries are pertinent to the research, especially in the story beneath *Story Scarves*. As stream-of-consciousness writings while tracking craftivism events, they hold delicate data. I have therefore used abstraction, generalisation and ethnographic refusal while editing my journal entries for inclusion in this dissertation. Despite my self-censorship, my ethical practice has ensured the integrity of my research. Ethics clearance was granted. Ethical good practices including consent forms, confidentiality and the rights of all

participants have been considered. I have conducted this research with integrity respecting the autonomy of all individuals involved. Anonymity of participants has been kept unless granted permission to reveal names. Photographs have been cropped to protect identities. During the PaR, I did not deliberately excavate traumatic stories. If any had arisen, participants/co-researchers could be referred to a clinical psychologist. I was supported by my own clinical supervisor off-site for debriefing throughout my research.

1.7 The Medium is the Message

There is a need to interrogate the relationship between craftivism and clicktivism. When the craftivist intervention is reliant on a widespread social media viewership (it must go viral in order to succeed), there is a potential compromise of the quality of the work-in-process. The deep mindfulness and group cohesion that stitching can bring, comes into conflict with the rapid, screen-based means of disseminating the message. I therefore situate the discussion in a communications theory frame, drawing on the ideas of McLuhan's philosophy of the medium is the message. (McLuhan, 1967)

In 1964, McLuhan conceived the phrase, *"The medium is the message"* proposing that the *"content of any medium is always another medium."* (McLuhan, 1995) The premise that the medium is the message elicits debate in cross-platform transmedia storytelling. McLuhan asserts that the medium is not neutral and embodies the message it transmits in a collaborative alliance, thereby influencing how the message is perceived and received. (McLuhan, 1967) Messages, which are the content of the medium, exist in relation to their carrier which is both the fibre of thread and the fibre of the Internet. The media are extensions of our own selves, attracting targeted audiences. A message threaded into a textile fabric may carry more gravitas because of its digitality. The message is key and frames the discourse.

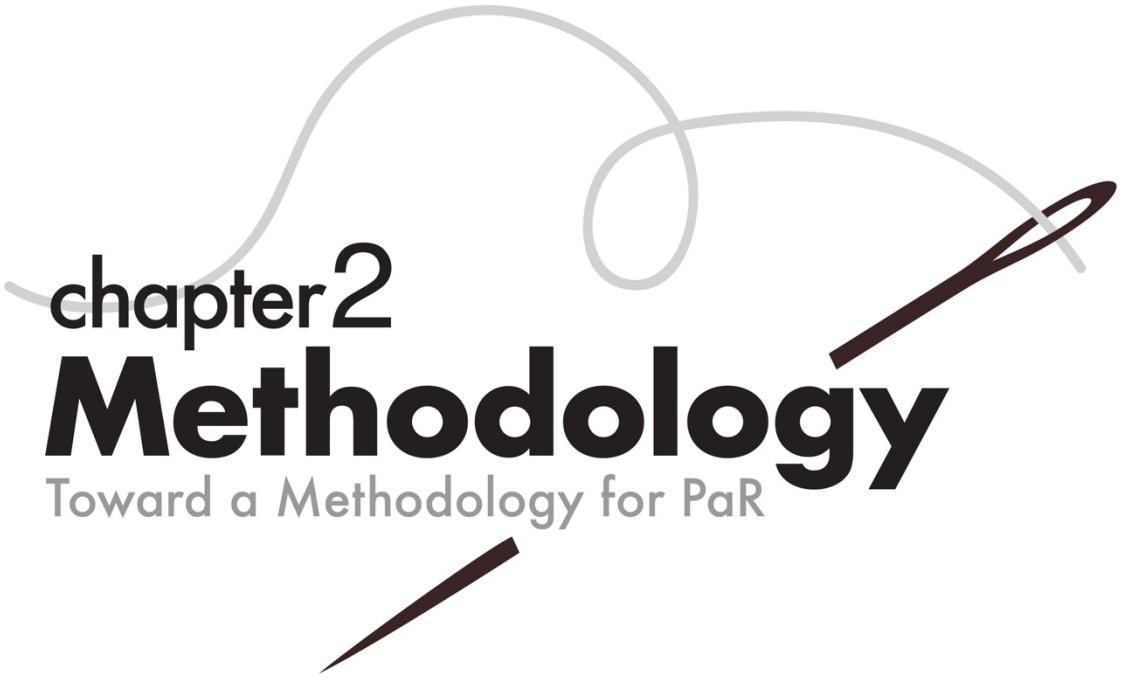
McLuhan affirms that the artist shapes and understands the life of the medium. An artist *"sets out to MAKE an effect"* by setting *"a trap to catch your attention. That is the nature of art."* Contestation on whether craftivism textiles should be considered artworks is currently being debated. (Stitched Voices, 2017) *"Craft has traditionally been placed well below "art" in an art-craft hierarchy"* and craft-based projects are marginalised into the *"interstitial spaces in the cracks of the art world."* (Buszek & Robertson, 2011)

In my opinion, the artistry of craft and the craftistry of art have a to-and-fro exchange. Historically, the textile's main significance, whether as a protest banner or a personal narrative, is in its ability for meaning-making and communication: it holds and conveys meaning ambiguously or clearly, encourages others to access that meaning through materiality, and incites interpretation through layers of visibly surfaced and invisibly submerged clues.

Wyndham Lewis said, *"The artist is always engaged in writing a detailed history of the future because he is the only person aware of the nature of the present."* (McLuhan, 1995) The artist's awareness is needed for the survival of humanity. Art communicates beyond its visible aesthetic. Craftivism is artivism and its artefacts are artworks.

Fifty-five years ago, McLuhan believed that *"the electric age is the greatest of all human ages."* Today we are midst the digital age he predicted, and communication platforms have widened into the *"global village"* McLuhan spoke of. Online digitality has created a *"small world"* and simultaneously made our networks much bigger. In the *Story Scarves* craftivism project, there was reciprocity between the maker, the receiver and their conduit through stitched stories. All three aspects converse with each other cross-platform between analogue and digital. Humanity has invented both our handcrafted world and our mechanised world. Yet, as McLuhan said, *"We shape our tools and thereafter our tools shape us."* Contemporary craftivism is indelibly shaped by these tools in communicating significant messages through these interconnected media.

Niemann, an illustrator, says the magic does not happen in the crafting, *"it happens in the mind of the viewer."* (TED, 2018) Humans have an intuitive ability to decipher symbols stitched into messages through unconscious decoding, without even knowing they have this ability. This fluency in a dialect that needs no translation, transforms a craftivism statement into a relevant dialogue which is a craftivists ultimate intention. As a craftivist, it's imperative to have an empathic understanding of the targeted audience and frame the message from their vernacular perspective so that they are capable of decoding messages for themselves. As an experienced designer, I know that strategic thought in conceptualising an idea gives clarity to how it is perceived by the other. The audience's ability to interpret and be inspired by the metaphoric stitched story is as important as the craftivist's contribution to stitching it.



chapter 2
Methodology
Toward a Methodology for PaR

Chapter 2: Toward a Methodology for Practice as Research

2.1 Overview

The PaR draws upon a methodological study conducted in 2019 at the University of Witwatersrand. I facilitated craftivism workshops elaborated upon in Chapter 5: Stitched Stories - Practice as Research. Auto-ethnographically, my participatory approach considers the role of the craftivist-facilitator. It envisions a sensitive paradigm for compassionate facilitation by piloting a methodology of self-preservation including mindfulness, conscious boundaries and action-reflection cycles in a safe space. The main focus is on developing a set of methods and processes for craftivism facilitators working in community-based projects, issue-led activism and creative expression. The recommendations can be adapted for vulnerable groups that embody traumatic stitched stories. As the craftivism facilitator and creative arts practitioner, I contrast my findings with my previous practice as a teaching-artist, reframing my course of action in my own practice. I believe that *"if you are firmly grounded in the present moment, the past can be an object of inquiry"* (Lambert, 2013)

The questions I asked myself were:

- How can a craftivism facilitator be a more informed, prepared and supported creative arts practitioner?
- How can a craftivism facilitator de-role, cleanse and re-enrol as a committed craftivist for issues pertinent to our communities?

The workshops were an opportunity for me to be in the work again, after a reflective respite and recovery from burnout. Bearing witness to the intense magnitude of suffering in the world had eroded my being and taken a cumulative toll on me. I had been vicariously exposed to traumatic stories that gradually devastated my worldview. My resources had diminished, and I burnt out… a purpose-driven burnout typical of mission-focused activists in care-giving contexts. At that time, I was affected emotionally because I did not have boundaries in place or knowledge of distancing techniques. I was not a researcher or learned creative arts practitioner then. I was not aware of the techniques available for my own sustenance and caretaking as a teaching-artist/craftivist. My willingness to confront my own unconscious material has resulted in me being able to better hold a craftivism container in my current work.

Through this PaR, I now know that re-resourcing is key to my own sustainability. *"From a place of cultivated presence one can be truly transformative."* (van Dernoot Lipsky, 2015) I have learnt that caring for myself is as important as caring for others. Coping mechanisms,

which I experientially evaluated during the workshops, have taught me how to facilitate compassionately as an informed practitioner. I can now share and recommend them for other craftivism facilitators.

The following re-resourcing recommendations of self-care, cleansing rituals and *ukuphahla*, expressive arts and handicrafts, psychotherapy, meditation, breathwork and somatic experiencing will be expanded upon in Chapter 5: Stitched Stories - Practice as Research.

The following guiding principles of practice for a more informed practitioner such as osmosis, distancing techniques and psychic shields, mindfulness, being good enough, making mistakes and feeling the discomfort will be expanded upon in Chapter 6: Findings and Recommendations.

2.2 Methodological Approaches

All the methodological approaches I engaged with have commonalities including reciprocity, consciousness raising, dialogue creation, storytelling and relationship building. I undertook the Practice as Research with collaborators as co-researchers and encouraged community stakeholder engagement. The craftivism workshops were specifically created by me for this enquiry. The social change method and qualitative research tool is a *stitched story*, a handcrafted artefact designed and created by the participants using symbolism to reference their own chosen story. This handcrafted personal story incites change in the Teller/maker as well as in the audience/receiver. My intention was to facilitate a mindfully conscious process, not the output of an aesthetically pleasing artwork/craftwork.

Practice Methodology

The practice methodologies within a creative framework include craftivism, design ideation, mindfulness and storytelling.

- **Craftivism (craft + activism)**: I engaged with embodied artisanal handicraft skills (such as embroidery, crochet, knit and appliqué) to facilitate the creation of handmade stitched stories that hold meaningful artistic expression for self-activism and communal activism. Craftivism is embedded within Transformative Arts Practices (TAP) to provoke constructive individual and social change that is both cognitive and emotional.
- **Purpose-driven design ideation**: I encouraged the generating of ideas to create a stitched story with a deeper purpose than simple aesthetic value. The process of creation itself must matter, incite change and be beneficial to the maker and the receiver of its message.

- **Mindfulness**: I lead integrated mindfulness practices through conscious breathwork and contemplative 'slow' stitching. For my detailed unpacking of mindfulness and 'slow' stitching, please refer to section 6.2 *Mindfulness Practice* and *Take it Slow*.
- **Storytelling**: I encouraged co-researchers to share their own personal stories through meaningful anecdotes by using the language of symbolism for expression.

Research Methodology

The research methodologies include auto-ethnography, storytelling and Practice as Research (PaR).

- **Auto-ethnography and Storytelling**: I reflect upon my personal experience as a craftivism facilitator within the emergent field of auto-ethnographic storytelling. My auto-ethnographic story considers my past practice which leads to new learnings in the present that inform my future practice. For my detailed unpacking of auto-ethnography and storytelling, please refer to section 1.6 *On Being an Auto-ethnographer*.
- **Practice as Research (PaR)**: As a practitioner-researcher, my PaR is a creative enquiry birthed from the problematisation of my past practice as a craftivism facilitator in search of understanding. My intention is to address the issues, make discoveries during the process through exploration of possible solutions and establish new insights and knowledge for my future practice through piloting new methods.
- **Person-Centred Approach**: I chose a person-centred approach with critical analysis reflecting upon each stitched story individually. (Rogers, 1993) Similar to a person-centred humanistic approach (Rogers, 1980), I encouraged self-direction. Each participant chose her own story and directed herself while I held the space for them.



This broad overview of craftivism proves that there is *"a history of the world through the eye of a needle."* (Hunter , 2019)

Chapter 3: Broad Context of Craftivism

3.1 Visiting the Past

During the First World War, a spy, perceived to be an innocently knitting granny, was *"watching between the click of two needles"* as she knitted encoded messages into garments. (Zarelli, 2017) These espionage secrets were embodied into woollen artefacts, hidden to the uninformed eye yet decipherable to those privy to steganography. Needlework was a mode of analogue communication and the textile fabrics were the conduit carriers of information from one hand to another.

Historically, fibre handicrafts were devalued as hobbyist's pastimes for the domesticated feminine. Embroidery, knit, crochet and appliqué were, and still are within ignorant cliques, identified with chaste femininity. This visible artisanry of women's hands in abeyance of society's expectations was underpinned by the invisible actuality that *"there was no way of controlling what women were actually thinking about while they were stitching."* (The Establishment, 2017) Handicrafts are not the stereotypically conservative avocation they are perceived to be. For centuries, their active/passive duality has made them weapons for radical global activism while communicating beyond the suppressive ethos of domestic constraint. The visible/invisible binary holds delicate femininity, oppressive patriarchy and the courageous will for egalitarianism. Handicrafts cede potent agency to women as initiators of their own stories through the yarn of marginality, memorialising their narratives through stitched stories.

> *"To know the history of embroidery is to know the history of women."* (Parker, 2010)

The Handkerchief

In 1912, a suffragette advocating for women's rights recorded her experience in prison on an embroidered handkerchief. (Wheeler, 2012) By consciously expressing herself, her subversive stitches mirrored her inner world of thoughts and emotions while reflecting them to her outer world. The embodied materiality of the handkerchief's fabric was a nurturing substrate holding her stitched message. Her tool was not a weapon of destruction, but of communication. Her hands were honed instruments and her implement was her needle. A needle for mindful reparation of her inner turmoil, a needle stitching understanding, a needle voicing her personal narrative, a needle that, as Louise Bourgeois says, was *"never aggressive, it's not a pin."* (Parker, 2010)

Gender Crossings

During the Second World War, a poster reminded readers to, "*Remember Pearl Harbour and purl harder*." The intent of the wordplay reinforced that, *"Knitting was more than a hobby in wartime - it was an act of patriotism."* (Florence, 2014) Handmade knitted items such as warm socks and balaclavas joined with gruesome *"amputation covers"* to be sent to the allied forces.

A photo of a wounded serviceman in hospital being taught to knit by a nurse asked, *"Why shouldn't men knit*?" Intersectional diversity was gaining momentum out of pure necessity. No matter who made them, handmade woollen items were appreciated in a time before mass production of synthetic products. The Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry had offered traumatised ex-servicemen the mindful practice of embroidery for healing and rebuilding self-esteem while earning income. *"It was an unlikely marriage of men of war and fine needlework."* (Hunter, 2019) Gentle handcrafting, as opposed to violent war, was dismantling conservative perceptions. Through the action of making, there was a sense of belonging to the collective, whether on the warfront or not, and whether male or female.

Tribal Connections

Craftivism attracts like-minded people who have a yearning to connect in order to spread an idea or causal message they all resonate with. Craft circles have always forged relationships between space, women, storytelling and handcrafting skills whether in loosely knit groups or formal organisations. Neo-tribes of craftivists become movements to challenge the status-quo by inciting change. (Godin, 2009) McLuhan spoke of humanity re-tribalising in the form of *"human family"* within a global village. (McLuhan, 1968) Contemporary craftivist groups are the evolved tribes of historic handcrafting circles *"participating in historic traditions tens of thousands of years old" and "embodying the work of our ancestors"* to pass on to future generations. (Colden, 2019)

In formalising the word craftivism, the Craftivist Manifesto is a declaration of the intentions, motives and collective views of our global craftivism community. (Greer, 2019) As a craftivist reviewing my fellow craftivist's installations and stitched stories, the manifesto offers me a sense of belonging and connection to like-minded people who are passionate about handicrafts and their capacity for innovation.

Conflict textiles hold messages of activism and survival. (Bacic, 2019) In the 1980s, Chilean women used embroidery and appliqué to create *arpilleras*, narrative quilt squares, in protest of the Pinochet regime. Arpilleras are the tellers of personal resistance as well as material

witnesses to the collective. (Onion, 2014) Disobedient objects, such as these, play a powerful role in social change movements. They reveal how activism fuels innovative design and cumulative creativity defying the predictable. (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2015) Hebron was named the World Craft City by the World Crafts Council in 2016. Its embroidery co-operative emulates traditional handicraft groups by providing Palestinian women with a supportive sense of belonging, ability to preserve traditional skills and gain income while living in a conflict zone. (Women in Hebron, 2019)

Picasso's 1936 anti-war painting, Guernica, is still a relevant humanitarian pacifist symbol calling *"for solidarity and compassion across borders."* (Ashmore, 2017) The Guernica Remakings are appliqué tapestries inspired by Picasso's artwork. They thread stitched stories of the women of Keiskamma Art Project in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. (Guernica Remakings, 2019) They have both aesthetic value as artworks and communicative value as craftworks, commenting on the socio-cultural issue of HIV/Aids that the makers face.

3.2 Renaissance, not Decolonisation

The discussion arises about whether craftivism can be considered part of a decolonising process especially in a post-apartheid context. Decolonisation's intent is to eliminate the idea that knowledge disseminated by colonisers is superior to that of the colonised. It implies that colonial legacies must be abandoned.

In reality, there cannot be a recovery of pre-colonial South African identities because of the evolution of our society. Rather, there are new identities emerging in reply to our current time and era. Similarly, new forms of handicrafts in response to this epoch have emerged from traditional handicrafts *"developing a new form of art, one that in part draws upon their unique heritage."* (Pissarra, 2011)

Professor Jonathan Jansen says that a social scientist should be controversial and ask the difficult questions. In considering the term decolonisation, Prof. Jansen says, *"Suddenly somebody pops the term into the public discourse, and we all run with it, without somebody saying wait, wait, wait, who is saying this, why now, what does it mean?"* Knowledge and understanding of the complexity of the topic cannot be reduced to a singular word. (Leadership, 2018)

Instead of decolonisation, it is preferably an emergence of a new dialect derived from the original language that is allowing the re-storying of our yarns. Drawing upon the lexicon of hand stitched vocabulary, a new lingo has rebirthed the mother tongue of handicrafts by including the words craftivism, craftivist, yarn bombing, graffiti storming and guerrilla knitting.

This new communicative dialect re-envisions handicraft's core language and its multiple modes of contemporary practice.

Themba Mkhoma prefers to call this evolution a renaissance, a rejuvenation of traditionalism, instead of decolonisation. (Mkhoma, 2018) Traditional handicrafts cannot be discarded as colonial, unworthy of being passed on to future generations because they hold the stories of white privilege. They are the backbone of knowledge without which contemporary handcrafters could not be the forward-thinking craftivists they are today. Stitched stories depict personal and cultural identities because they are stitched for and in reaction to their time. *"Every story's evolution needs connection to history. The present and the future are meaningless without a direct correlation to the past."* (Margolis, 2009)

3.3 Visiting the Present

In the 21st century, the preservation of traditional handicraft skills continues to intertwine with female experience. Previously, handicrafts were valued for subsistence living before mechanisation and mass production. Modernity and contemporary feminists have forged the way for women to now return to traditional handicrafts as a choice rather than a requirement.

Fibrous fabrics remain an effective tool for communication even though digital technology is the mainstream conveyancer of messages in our social media world. In modern craftivism, the offline analogue is still present indivisible from the online digital in the act of spreading messages. The added dimension is the digitality of the artefact - digitised via photography and posted online to gain global traction. *"For guerrilla knitting communities and activist groups, blogging, vlogging, and representing material practices in online spaces to a global audience is a vital part of the acts of citizenship and resistance that they are engaged in."* (Orton-Johnson, 2014) Fabriculture, or DIY craft culture, merges with cyberculture to produce a new form of materiality. The tactile elements of analogue crafting and *"craft culture shows that digital media are not only a disembodied affair – they are tactile."* The fabric and the fabrication are both tactual *"embedded with codes and communication."* (Bratich & Brush, 2011)

Yarn bombers *"take knitted or crocheted material out into the urban environment, graffiti-style or, more specifically, without permission and unsanctioned."* (Sayeg, 2015) Traditional street art and graffiti artists are no longer male dominated. Women are taking up space in public, changing the face of cities and landscapes, rather than being shut away at home as the suffragettes were. London Kaye's yarn bombs, which range *"from whimsical to subversive,"* bring friendliness into urban turfs. She practices *"a feminine craft"* on the street. Her installation for Miller Beer was the first low-tech yarn bomb billboard in Times Square,

NYC. *“These are exciting times for yarn heads”* in the redefining of handicrafts. (CBS This Morning, 2017)

Graffiti artist/craftivist @foodbabysoul focuses on rebirthing fabric scraps using the hashtag *#scrapimpact*. (foodbabysoul, 2019) She receives rejected pieces from the studio of a textile artist and upcycles them as appliqué tapestries. Capturing her street graffiti through photographs, she shares her stitched stories online, transforming waste into beauty.

The Urchins was a crochet-bomb installation using handicrafts to create large-scale sea urchins over Singapore’s Marina Bay. (Mok, 2017) The designers added wonderment through lighting artistry transforming the woven polyester chords into a three dimensional *“lacy room”* that visitors could enter. The designer’s intention was to create a *“momentary pause of the mundane routine of our life would hopefully give us an opportunity to find the poetry around us.”*

Ruth Bader Ginsburg, known as RBG, is a justice of the USA Supreme Court. Judge Ginsburg has a collection of jabots, decorative collars of lace, which she wears with her judicial robes. RBG’s jabots each have a specific meaning. RBGs collars have a much more significant activist intent than simply dignified styling. Her jabots are gentle craftivism messages through attire worn by a gender justice advocate. *"The standard robe is made for a man because it has a place for the shirt to show, and the tie,"* explained RBG. So, she wears an accessory typically worn by women as a symbol of her strong feminist stance. (George, 2018) South African conceptual artist Kim Lieberman made a lace collar as a gift for RBG with the message that *“Lace is not utilitarian, it’s about presence, about who you are as a human being.”* (Klawansky, 2018) Judge Albie Sachs, who is a friend of both Judge Ginsburg and Kim, delivered the gift to RBG on Kim’s behalf. The message held symbolically in lace intricately weaves people together across continents and platforms as Judge Sachs says, *“capturing the way that ideas emerge like strands of silk from the bodies and minds and personalities of each one of us.”* (Sachs & September, 2004)

The idea virus shifts the paradigm of how ideas are contagiously transmitted and virally spread. Social media stimulates online conversation and influencers disperse information through dialogue with their followers. As Seth Godin says, craftivists should *“ignite consumer networks and then get out of the way and let them talk.”* (Godin, 2009) Then, a crafted statement transforms into an interactive creative dialogue intent on social change, no matter the media. London Kaye and Craftivist Collective, to name just a couple, have huge online followings where they document their work and create their own neo-tribes that feed into the

collective craftivism tribe. They create their own hashtags and sub-profiles to celebrate their project ideas.

The Social Justice Sewing Academy teaches teenagers about craftivism by *"piecing together youth voices, textile art, and community in a 21st century sewing circle."* (Social Justice Sewing Academy, 2019) Participatory community engagement projects promote active citizenship and mediated expression through craftivism.

Another Handkerchief

Now in 2019, I refer back to 1912 and the story of the handkerchief a suffragette advocating for women's rights embroidered while in prison. To set the stage in this current era, I introduce Amanda Palmer, a singer-songwriter and ukulele player. Her new album entitled, *There will be No Intermission*, has an artfully tasteful nude photo of her on the cover. (Palmer, 2019) But the album cannot be promoted on Instagram because the platform does not allow photos of female nipples. So, craftivism solved the problem. @wookiee_wookiee embroidered the nude woman with French knot nipples on a handkerchief and posted a photo on Instagram, which was allowed. (Noon, 2019) The power of craftivism is evident in overcoming boundaries. Significant though, is that 107 years later, women are still using an embroidered handkerchief to communicate as activists for women's rights. This time though, its tactility is not only analogue but digital too.

This is how the yarn of fibre (both textile and Internet), the yarn of stories (both personal and collective) and the yarn of their conduits (story-weavers) are threading lives, spaces, contexts and times together by offering platforms for belonging, creativity, expression and most importantly, communicative dialogue in a craftivism dialect that is current and paramount for our humanist discourse.



chapter 4
Story Scarves
Unthreading the story beneath the story

Chapter 4: Story Scarves Project

4.1 Introducing Story Scarves

To better understand the actual work of craftivism and the roots of my practice as research undertaking, it's beneficial to examine an example of a craftivism project in-depth within its real-life context, from a personal and political angle. The story I present here, is anchored within a grassroots handicrafts project for vulnerable teenage girls in Soweto, South Africa, called *Story Scarves*. I was the founder, teaching-artist, craftivist and story weaver and then the director, project manager and craftivist of its Non-Profit Company. On the ground, the core sisterhood was approximately 30 teenage girls; the migratory group was 60; the reach at protest risings was 500. The overall reach through digitality is unknown.



Teenage girls knit and crochet at *Story Scarves* in Soweto

Story Scarves was associated with the One Billion Rising global movement fuelling resistance *"to end violence against women (cisgender, transgender, and those who hold fluid identities that are subject to gender-based violence)."* (One Billion Rising, 2019) Using hashtag activism, #1BillionRising headlines the shocking statistics that *"1 in 3 women on the planet will be beaten or raped during her lifetime. With the world population at 7 billion, this adds up to more than ONE BILLION WOMEN AND GIRLS."* Since 2012, each year on the 14th of February, Valentine's Day, grassroots community groups have risen for justice, revolution and solidarity in protest of gender-based violence, worldwide. Survivors, activists and supporters of the cause unite through celebratory dance to the lyrics of *"Break the Chain"* as a call to action to stop violence. (One Billion Rising, 2013) Eve Ensler is a performer, playwright, artivist and artistic director of One Billion Rising. Eve is known for her play, *The Vagina Monologues* and her work with *City of Joy* in Congo.

Introducing Myself as Craftivist and Story Scarves Founder

Heartistry

When a heartist is born, a lifetime of creation beckons. The artistry of craftistry is solidly embodied within my ancestral genes. At eight-years-old, I sat next to my mom echoing her pearl 'n plain while knitting my first scarf. I learnt to crochet a zillion granny squares without knowing how to read a pattern. I visited my paternal grandfather, the tailor, and watched as he sewed custom made suits. He showed me how to upcycle leftovers into yarmulkes and prepare thread over a wax ball. I stitched my own tapestry inspired by my maternal grandmother's petit-point canvases. I cherish her original Singer sewing machine. My dad taught me how to Cut Make and Trim textiles for garments. I carry a bag with my latest handcrafting project while in planes, cars, trains, buses and restaurants. Handicrafts are inseparable from the fabric of my being. I'm grateful for inheriting my love of yarn and ability to pass on my skills, knowledge and passion to others.

~ My journal, 2019

Tying-up Loose Ends

This story, from an auto-ethnographic perspective, is an endeavour to unravel my own role within *Story Scarves* in search of understanding. Over the timeframe of this craftivism project, one view of the story was divulged - that of the participants through my perspective via online blog posts on *One Billion Rising* (One Billion Rising, 2019)*, World Pulse* (World Pulse, 2019) and *Sheroes* (Story Scarves, 2019). The intention of that façade was to extend the reach required by funders and gain traction for the cause. This version of the story existed in the public domain. The painful reality remained hidden in the private domain and needs unthreading in order to critique behind-the-scenes. Stories that exist publicly are often not reflected upon and consciously critiqued to learn from the experience because the nature of social media is about real-time pace, hits, stats, numbers and reach. Multiple parallel narratives interlocked, as threaded fibres do. The story unthreaded here is mine, that of the receiver/conduit of other's stories, many of which were painful and previously untold. During my current mindful pause for reflection, I realise we can change the ending. Why bother unravelling this yarn in search of threading a new ending? *"Because right now, there is someone out there with a wound in the exact shape of your words."* (Dougherty, 2018) This dissertation is the new ending.

Broad Context in South Africa

This craftivism story is set against a backdrop of gender-based violence (GBV) in South Africa. According to *Africa Check*, statistics reveal that in 2015/16, a total of 15,790 child rapes (referring to children younger than 18 years) were recorded by the police. (Wilkinson, 2016) International counterpower campaigns in resistance to sexual violence, including *#1BillionRising*, *#SlutWalk* (Sibanda, 2017) and *#MeToo* (Me Too Movement, 2019) have extended dialogue through hashtag activism, globally. Artivists on home turf have artfully focussed on raising awareness. *Her Shadow was Here* projected animations in Braamfontein protesting unsafe streets for women to walk at night (Zondi, 2017). *SA's Dirty Laundry* strung underwear in Maboneng representing people who had been raped (SA's Dirty Laundry, 2016) coinciding with *16 Days of Activism for No Violence against Women and Children* (UN Women, 2018).

Context in Soweto



Soweto is a township geographically located southwest of Johannesburg in the province of Gauteng, South Africa. It is approximately a forty-minute drive from central Johannesburg. Soweto was formed when the white government separated blacks from whites due to the Urban Areas Act. Apartheid was a policy for racial segregation instituted in 1948. It ended in the early 1990s with the birth of a democratic South Africa. Nelson Mandela became president in 1994. (Wikipedia, 2019)

Vulnerable teenage girls face consequences of poverty, abuse and sexual assault, HIV/Aids and TB, teen motherhood, illegal abortions, school dropout, blessers (sugar daddies), loss of family and homelessness. Some live in a safe-house, others in child-headed households at informal settlements. Social workers select children to join community feeding programs. The National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) is implemented by the South African government. Approximately 9 million children receive meals daily at schools. The aim of NSNP is to alleviate hunger which increases children's capacity for learning. (Devereux, 2018) NSNP is also implemented at community centres, such as churches. The feeding

scheme referred to in this case study is managed by community members at a church in Soweto. Children receive one meal a day there, lunch, five days a week.

Naïve Beginnings

In 2009, while visiting with a community elder in Soweto, I volunteered to visit a feeding scheme at a church on Saturdays, initiating a handcrafting circle for teenage girls. I taught them to knit, crochet, embroider and appliqué while exploring design-with-purpose. We named our group *Mekgabiso ya Pelo* (art with heart in Sesotho). I initiated the idea to stitch stories as gifts for other girls across the African continent with the aim to discourage xenophobic attitudes through peer-to-peer knowledge because intolerance towards African foreigners is rife in South Africa. Xenophobia opposes the spirit of *Ubuntu*, a South African belief in the essence of human interconnectedness.



Story Scarves travelled from makers in Soweto, South Africa, to receivers in Kibera, Kenya

A craftivism initiative coupled with storytelling would teach tolerance for diversity because *"girls have the power to transform themselves, their communities and the world around them."* (Girl Up, 2019) Handmade Story Scarves voyaged on friendship journeys connecting African girls from Soweto, the craftivist makers, with other African girls, the receivers. Random volunteers became integral players in the narratives as connectors. Hand delivered to Burundi by a television crew; delayed on route to Rwanda by courier; Zimbabwe by a flight attendant; Zambia by an ex-pat; Uganda by a solar company; Ghana by a friend of a friend. The girls in Soweto created with their own hands, shared stories and learnt about others. They also realised that, even though distanced geographically, of differing nationalities and never meeting face-to-face, they were similar. Perspectives expanded through exposure to a wider world - from a shack in an informal settlement to countries beyond a taxi ride. We were piecing our continent together, peacefully.

~ My journal, 2012

4.2 Stitching Communities

Collaborative Innovators

Craftivism stitches communities together and builds movements for social change that offer a sense of identity, commonality and belonging. The communal heartistry of the craftivism collective is foremost, whether for activism, education or healing. By stitching actual threads collectively, there are interrelated bonds that stitch us together into our tribe. This is the process *bell hooks* speaks of, that brings us into meaningful community. (hooks, 2003)

The teen girls from Story Scarves were offered a safe space in a supportive sisterhood of peers which developed into a community of belonging and care. Craftivists can thrive when finding their tribe coupled with a creative outlet inciting learning, growth and communication. (Greer, 2019) According to the project aims, it was important for these Sowetan teens to know that similar tribes to theirs existed, such as the teen girls in Harlem Children's Zone, USA - even if they may never actually meet, they were connected and could communicate through stitched stories.



Story scarf as a protest banner tells of the teenage craftivists who are sheroes

From Harlem to Soweto

The Sowetan girls have inspired girls in Harlem to make story scarves. Harlem Children's Zone is a community organisation assisting children in Central Harlem, USA. They welcomed me as the teaching-artist at a workshop for American teen girls to make story scarves as friendship gifts for the Sowetan girls. I returned home traveling with precious cargo - craftivism artefacts that would connect two groups of similar yet geographically distanced teen craftivists. Each Sowetan received a story scarf as we chatted about and looked at photos of the makers in Harlem. They wished they could meet in reality.

~ My journal, 2011

Craftivists are envoys connecting hearts and beings while crossing borders. Our innovative collaborations weave a fabric of connection to share personal and communal narratives in our common humanity as egalitarian allies. Through mutual following on social media, the Story Scarves network grew, globally. There were many collaborators with *Story Scarves*: One Billion Rising, Khanyi Orphanage in Johannesburg, Solar Sister in Uganda, Agahozo-Shalom in Rwanda, She's the First, Bloom Bars and Sister Circle in USA. In the following personal journal excerpts, I describe two collaborations. The first was with TEDx Tokyo and Kesennuma orphanage in Japan and the second with Trust Art from NYC.

Scarf of the Rising Sun

The community of Kesennuma, Japan, were struggling with rescue efforts after an earthquake, tsunami and fire. TEDx Soweto initiated a collaboration with Story Scarves. Our community crafted the *Scarf of the Rising Sun* by joining upcycled fabric squares transformed into stitched messages for courageous recovery. It journeyed to TEDx Tokyo, where it was exhibited in the auditorium, and then gifted to children at the Kesennuma orphanage which had been used as a disaster evacuation centre. As a craftivism artefact, *Scarf of the Rising Sun* was a symbolic gesture of friendship between countries.



Community made story scarf as an envoy from South Africa to Japan

~ My journal, 2011

Craftivism is our memory keeper stitching our hopes even when reality's harshness leads us to forget. Through symbolic metaphors, our stitched stories capture transient moments worthy of remembering as shown in the following anecdote about the Dream collaboration. The private crafting of individual story scarves unified into the collective of public art.

Hopeful Dreams



Sinalithemba (Sesotho for *"we have hope"*) was our theme as the Sowetan girls stitched their dreams into story scarves to wear at this event. In collaboration with Trust Art from NYC, the Dream photoshoot connected us to a group exhibition of dreamers.

The decommissioned Orlando Power Station set the stage. Three years later, steel scavengers stripped the abandoned power station and it collapsed into rubble. We were left with the dreamy scarves that held memories of a time, place and community.

~ My journal, 2014

Upcycling Leftovers

Ensuring ethical manufacture in our craftivism supply chain by sourcing materials responsibly is important. *"Reduce, reuse, recycle"* relates to the environmental movement and green solutions for our planet. The term upcycling has been embraced by craftivists suggesting alternatives to conventional waste disposal through creative artistry. Innovatively upcycling reclaimed textiles eliminates the short-term usefulness of ephemera, typical of our throwaway society. Rebirthing fabric, that had a purely functional life previously or holds past marks/stitches of a previous hand, allows transmutation into new stitched stories.

Graphic designer, Michael Bierut admires a designer that re-purposes an item rather than invents a brand-new item. The original designer had created the original form which may have fulfilled its purpose for that designer's intention. Sometimes, re-forming takes more

creative juices than to scrap it and start afresh. There's a bigger challenge in re-inventing. (Millman, 2007)

The following journal excerpt describes how Story Scarves upcycled throwaways into meaningful friendship gifts.

Saving Throwaways



I received a large donation of machine knitted snoods, mass produced bargains imported from China and left over from the 2010 Soccer World Cup. Discarding them would have been a wasteful environmental dump. So, we upcycled them. Each girl received two snoods, one for herself and one as a gift for another. By adding handwork of appliqué and embroidery, the snoods were lifted from their unethical roots transforming into beautiful neck warmers.

They journeyed, with eco-friendly dignity, as gifts for girls at a safe house in Nairobi.

~ My journal, 2012

4.3 Rainbowism

Rainbow Nation sugar-coats race relations in South Africa, a deceptive façade hiding the remnants of apartheid. The constitutional laws of racial segregation have been discarded. In reality though, they linger on in the "new" South Africa, 25 years after the birth of democracy. The words of Nelson Mandela do not ring true, *"Never again will this beautiful land experience the oppression of one by another."* Oppression is just invisible to the uninformed eye.

South Africa's eleven recognised languages define us by our communicative vernacular, which partially relate to our race. It is difficult to universally call us South Africans while we still live under the influence of separatism as Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu, Afrikaans and English. (South Africa Gateway, 2019) Language diversity does not fully contribute to the vitality of our nation when it still continues to label us. Being a multilingual society, our differing cultural worlds cohabit

the same country. The dialectic duality of diversity alongside separatism does not forge easy cohesion.

Craftivism initiatives are not immune to the distorted rainbow philosophy and the remnants of colonialism. Although not all are led by white women with disposable income and followed by women with the same white privilege, one is. (Close, 2018) *"Woolly items for our destitute folk"* and *"knitwits for the needy"* repeatedly pop-up on their Facebook feed. Photos show white managerial task teams at a luxury hotel in a Johannesburg suburb. Posts reinforce colonial depictions filled with photos of black children and elders wrapped in blankets made by white people. Over five years, to lessen their colonial profile and their lack of inclusion, they made an effort to include their black maids as makers and taught black male prisoners to crochet. These *"knitwits for Madiba"* pride themselves on the five Guinness World Records they have achieved including the longest scarf and the most crocheters in a theatre while listening to Mozart.

No matter how hard they try though, the racial divide is clearly visible, an inherited South African hue of whiteness that's hard to tint any other shade. Their catchphrase is, *"keeping the legacy of Madiba alive."* Yet, many South Africans would not agree with their intent and question Mandela's legacy. Was his intention to continue colonialism through charitable innuendos induced by social responsibility?

Unthreading layers upon layers of post-apartheid obscurity reveals the realities of a country and its people in continued pain. The separatism of our rainbow nation is manipulated by morality marketing. White South Africans need to introspect about their own white privilege.

> *"All of us – and especially white people - need to find a way to talk about it, even when it gets uncomfortable."* (Rankine, 2019)

Towards Acknowledgement for Craftivists

Malcolm Gladwell speaks of the tweaker, who doesn't invent anything new preferring to nab an existing idea and tweak it. (Gladwell, 2011) This is consistent with Austin Kleon's motto to *"steal like an artist"* because a new idea is a remix of previous ideas, and artists should feel honoured they've inspired a rip-off. Originality is simply *"undetected plagiarism."* (Kleon, 2012) When the artefact copied is one that is made by teen girls in Soweto at a non-profit, the tweaking is ethically questionable, especially when it's so close to home. In my view, copycats may borrow an idea, but they should do it with ethically good practice ensuring *"a climate of sensitivity, dialogue, respect and willingness for reciprocity"* (Preston, 2009)



As a recommendation from my findings described in *"Rainbowism,"* the initiation of a system of acknowledgement for craftivists would be beneficial to the craftivism community worldwide. If one craftivist or craftivism group is inspired by another to create a similar artefact, it would be good etiquette to reference and acknowledge the original craftivists work. Similar to how I have acknowledged other craftivists in this dissertation. It would also promote cohesion of our craftivism community.

Copycats

I did not want Story Scarves to become one of their many donor groups receiving their donated blankets. So, I connected with the *"knitwits for Madiba*" but they were not interested in collaborating despite being well informed of Story Scarves. Instead, to my surprise, they created their own brand of storied scarves named Secret Scarves which went virally global.

madebyme

So, I taught the girls to crochet their own blankets entitled, *Made by Me*. As short-term interventions, *"many projects have a natural lifespan"* (Preston, 2009) and that's sometimes a good thing because, like Story Scarves, they sew seeds that germinate into long-term sustainable transformation encouraging continuity by the community themselves. That's sustainable empowerment without reliance on the haves donating to the have-nots. A humanist trusts the people rather than "*a thousand actions in their favour without that trust."* (Freire, 1972)

~ My journal 2017



Sowetan teens with the crochet blankets they made themselves
in front of Nelson Mandela's statue in Sandton Square, Johannesburg

4.4 Intersectional Diversity

Arguments for craftivism to be a more intersectional practice with diverse participation across borders of gender and race are relevant. Yet, similar to advocating for rainbowism in South Africa, *"Inclusion is important, but advocating inclusion without broader (sub)cultural changes is not enough."* (Close, 2018) The visible racial homogeneity of feminism does not actually exist in fibre handicrafts found in every culture, past and present, especially in Africa. (Greer, 2009) Beyond recorded history, Africans have been weaving mats and baskets using indigenous raw materials of grass and sticks. Preserving ancestral skill by passing on handcrafting techniques, that have evolved over centuries, to future generations is a significant part of African cultural identity. A traditional craftsperson has completed a lengthy ancestral apprenticeship to be a custodian of their craft. (Inside South Africa, 2019)

Intersectional diversity in the South African craftivism community is not as present as it is in the handcrafting community. Using discarded plastic bags (plarn) to crochet may not equate to a craftivist taking a stand for upcycling. It simply shows that the consequences of poverty don't allow for expensive yarns as basic needs. Lack of materials has a positive aspect too by inciting lateral thinking and promoting creativity that wouldn't be present if there was abundancy.



Story Scarves defied the craftivism norm: black teen girls became craftivists and they now are young women with knowledge and skills to pass on to the next generation. I created a space for self-advocacy, *"Instead of speaking for others, we maintain a respectful silence and work to create the social and political conditions which might enable Others to speak and be heard on their own terms."* (Preston, 2009)

> *"Above all in economic development, if people do not wish to be helped, leave them alone."* If they do want to collaboratively innovate then *"shut up and listen to THEM."* (Sirolli , 2012)

It is the communities lived experiences that I am honoured to be invited to observe. By embracing *"respect, deep listening, empathy, solidarity, and creativity, we embody a reality that directly contradicts the dehumanizing forces that act upon us"* (Rivers, 2015)

4.5 Online Dimension

Analogue and Digital Fusion

Craftivism interventions gain traction through online presence. Fourth-wave feminism is defined by technology to campaign for women's rights (Chamberlain, 2017). Social media discussions layer hand-stitched stories and have *"profoundly impacted our practice as tapestry weavers."* (Dufour, 2014) This interdisciplinary resistance threads two fibrous threads - textile fibre and Internet fibre – along with strategic thought, social justice and storytelling. Craftivists mobilise their affiliated communities both actually and virtually across analogue and digital platforms. Facebook's networking, Twitter's microblogging and Instagram's photo sharing increase participatory reach beyond geographical borders. Slacktivism spreads the message even though cause-crusaders don't fully engage beyond a retweet or thumbs-up. (Techopedia, 2019) Vitally important is that cyberspace attracts accidental activists too. (Zuckerberg, 2010) They transform from handcrafters to craftivists, anonymously or known. The ladder of engagement sways them to contribute beyond slacktivist clicktivism by handcrafting an artefact and rising in protest. Pre-disposed or accidental, they are activist-driven bridges between craftivism and the real-world. (Hill, 2013)

Strangers No More

"World Pulse is a global social network where every woman's voice can rise up to transform her community." (World Pulse, 2019) I joined World Pulse and posted blogs about Story Scarves. I connected with women activists worldwide. I felt heard, seen and supported in the virtual realm. An excerpt from my blog posted in 2013 tells more:

> *"I never expected to expand my friendship circle beyond online connections. So, I was pleasantly surprised by an inbox message from Vweta telling me she was visiting Johannesburg. She had travelled from Lagos, Nigeria, for an operation. Three months after we connected on World Pulse, we met face-to-face at the clinic. Vweta cannot talk very easily. I gifted her a Story Scarf with the message of LOVE and there was no need for any vocal words."*

The World Pulse webmaster read our posts telling of our meeting and asked if they could make a video of our story entitled *Heartfelt Connections*. We agreed. I wrote these words and then recorded them on my smartphone and sent the data to the video editor:

"Beyond borders, tangible connection and nurtured sisterhood allows us to thrive. We can find solace together - strangers no more. This is the soul of true friendship. This is the power of World Pulse. May our meeting inspire others to reach beyond the virtual to reality."

Now, six years after we met, Vweta and I are texting each other on WhatsApp chatting about my thesis, her poetry and our solid friendship.

~ My journal 2019



The story scarf I gifted to Vweta at our meeting in Johannesburg that journeyed to Lagos, Nigeria

The genuine connection is in the physicality of action - in the actual materiality of creating. (Dufour, 2014) Yet, when confronted with injustice, neither online nor offline protests are enough on their own. Citizen counterpower needs a constant two-way exchange between on-the-ground and cyberspace – between analogue atoms and digital bits. Similarly, fellow activists for women's rights connect from the ground to the virtual and vice versa.

The making (inner work) of the LOVE story scarf allowed for the processing of my personal story through handicrafts. The gifting (outer work) of the story scarf forged a friendship. Our stitched story threads us to the past we share, reflects upon our present friendship and informs our future. Our narratives are threaded together surfacing the submerged story of two women who blogged about the teen girls, Sheroes, in their home countries on the African continent. We never would have met in real-life if we both hadn't both taken a courageous risk to vulnerably expose ourselves publicly online. Cyberspace coupled with a trusted online platform such that World Pulse is, makes it possible for any two people to be socially connected in less than *Six Degrees of Separation*. Despite geographical distance, there is digital proximity in our small world. (Karinthy, 1929) On Vweta's return to Lagos, she took the LOVE scarf to her Sheroes and told the story of our connection.



The peace story scarf made in Soweto that journeyed to Lizards Mouth, USA

Building Craftivism Communities

I learnt of the Lizards Mouth Yarn Bomb online by following @yarnbombs on Instagram. (Duneier, 2019) Craftivists worldwide were welcomed via online discussions to collaborate on an installation drawing people back to nature in the mountains of Santa Barbara. It was exciting to learn that @yarnbombs was a man, Stephen, who could crochet. The girls created a peace scarf and it joined fibre artefacts from craftivists in 36 countries. Boulders throughout the hiking trail were draped in craftistry. Later, we learnt via online posts that Stephan had suffered a stroke. The community of craftivists he'd gathered together made granny squares that were joined into a blanket and gifted to Stephan in support of his recovery. Stephan had built a community, and that community showed their gratitude and care by supporting their fellow craftivist, on and offline.

~ My journal, 2018



Story scarf inspired by "*I am an Emotional Creature: The Secret Life of Girls around the World"*

Social Media Connections

Twitter propelled change when a representative of VDay responded to a tweet posted by Story Scarves resulting in the nucleus of the project to alter in 2011. Eve Ensler visited South Africa and gifted each girl her book, *I am an Emotional Creature: The Secret Life of Girls around the World*, *"a celebration of the authentic voice inside every girl and an inspiring call to action for girls everywhere to speak up, follow their dreams, and become the women they were always meant to be."* (Ensler, 2011) Motivated by their own life experiences and

willingness to explore social activism, the Sowetan teens became *V-Girls* joining *#1BillionRising* by following *#RiseResistUnite* and *#UntilTheViolenceStops*.

I stayed with the group as facilitator through the shift in focus, ill-equipped to deal with the traumatic nature of the stories that arose. I suffered from receiving those stories, and ultimately had to withdraw from the project. This story therefore points towards the need to research, through practice, a more compassionate methodology infused with mindfulness practices for me as a craftivism facilitator to use going forward.

The Story Scarves girls first protested with the march for justice organised by Eve Ensler's team from Constitution Hill to Mary Fitzgerald Square in Johannesburg. We then made many Vevolution scarves as Christmas gifts that were gifted to supporters by Eve, worldwide.



Vevolution story scarf held at the protest march for justice in Johannesburg







Making the Vevolution story scarves that were gifted to supporters of the cause







Hashtag Activism: #NeverAgain and *#1BillionRising*

In a perfectly digitised world, portraying the Sowetan teenage girls as online activists would be fabricated untruth. They were not African teens fuelling resistance to the inclement ethos of sexual violence through social media. In reality, they were not posting online from grassroots to the world.

Before elaborating on this limitation, an alternate example is worthy of investigation to demonstrate the ideal.

The calendar date, 14 February, indelibly connects two activist movements, *#1BillionRising* and *#NeverAgain*. Both use hashtag activism to promote their cause. For *#1BillionRising* followers, 14 February is the day micro-groups of the V-Day tribe rise to stop gender-based violence, worldwide. (One Billion Rising, 2019) The day will forever remind many of abuse, not of Saint Valentine. (Bender, 2012) For *#NeverAgain* teenagers from Stoneman Douglas High School, Florida, USA, 14 February will forever be remembered as the day gun violence killed seventeen of their classmates. (Time, 2018)

Survivors started a movement demanding gun legislation reform. Living in a hyper-connected digital era, these #NeverAgain teen activists delved into global cyberactivism via their constant companions, *"peripheral sensory rendering engines"* (Masie, 2014) otherwise known as smartphones. Stories streamed from their own hands via social media reflecting the cause they were personally committed to. Internet savvy, they garnered attention for *March for Our Lives* by headlining social and mainstream media globally, themselves. (March for Our Lives, 2018)

These *#NeverAgain* teens were from affluent neighbourhoods, owned their own smartphones, could afford airtime and had wide Wi-Fi access. They were of a generation growing up in a world permeated by the Internet. Social media usage was solidly embodied in their identities. Their individual voices directly tweeted lawmakers. It was not an adult tweeting on their behalf. Ethically, they could engage online without hiding their identities.

The contrast with the Soweto project is distinct and my following journal entry explains the differentiation.

Inaccurate Stats

In my opinion, Africa's high smartphone penetration statistics are misleading. By 2013 in Sub-Saharan Africa, there was a 61% smartphone penetration which is equivalent to 502 million active SIM connections. (GSMA, 2013) Africa's cellular data penetration should rather be termed a portable SIM card infiltration.

All the teen girls had SIM cards; few could afford the simplest cell phones. Those that could, didn't have top-of-the-range smartphones with Internet access. Most carried their SIMs in their pockets and borrowed cell phones to temporarily access their digital data when they could afford doses of airtime. This limited their online timeframe for live social interaction, stunting vital participation from chore group members. It further marginalised by casting them as peripherals to the online conversation. They observed, read and watched but didn't actively participate online. Ethically, they could not be tagged for fear of revealing identities, so they did not 'like' posts. This was debilitating for the online campaign. Inclusivity was imperative yet difficult to attain online, easier to maintain offline.

This limitation was resolved by me becoming their trusted online representative, such as a social media practitioner – but one with deep understanding of the complexities and the inner workings of their story. I drove content, monitored feedback and harvested stories. Yet, *"the written world... always revolves around the hand that is writing"* (Oz, 2002) It was their story through my eyes, not their story from their own perspective.

The immediacy and rapid viral spread of wired publishing made live sharing at public protests risky because the girls' location and identities had to be protected. So, there was a retrospective delay in posting. *"Tapestry weaving is a slow, laborious and manual practice, a contrast to the speed at which social media weaves word threads of connection to others."* (Dufour, 2014)

Even though craftivism encourages gentle calls for socio-cultural change without force or intimidation, social media offer a negative platform for offensive commentary from the public arena that's far from gentle. I received hate speech tweets and pornographic pictures that I could not un-see. Just like Ashley Judd, *"misogynists have amply demonstrated they will dog my every step."* (TEDWomen, 2016) It caused me anxiety morphing me into silence bereft of the confidence to reply.

A protective online boundary had to be set to avoid inflicting further abuse on the girls, and on myself. Foremost, it was inhumane to reduce the girls to data pixels or props in a play. Secondly, why should I have to be the receiver of hate speech? Ethically responsible citizen journalism was a perilous balancing act for me. Legal representatives advised me to delete the social media accounts and unpublish the website. Our online footprint had to be erased. Yet, nothing is ever truly deleted from the archives of cyberspace… and so our story lives on without our presence.

~ My journal, 2018

The aforementioned contrast beckons the question: *"Don't we all deserve to be digitally equal?"* (News24, 2018) South Africans need to be digitally connected, but data needs to be affordable to allow that. The *#NeverAgain* American teens could afford to be digitally connected. Consequences of poverty prevented the African girls from affording the same. There lies the visible truth. Data should not be an expensive luxury item for South Africans.

According to Maslow's Hierarchy, a vulnerable teenage girl in Soweto may achieve her full potential if five levels of human need are satisfied: (The Neurotypical Site, 2011)

1. Physical survival: poverty makes the basics of food and shelter her main concern.
2. Physical safety: personal danger incited by GBV causes her to live in fear.
3. Love and belonging: orphaned she may feel lonely and depressed.
4. Self-esteem: lack of respect leaves her feeling unvalued.

If all of these needs are satisfied (physical, social, emotional and spiritual), she may be:

5. Self-fulfilled (self-actualised): to fully live an embodied life.



The Story Scarves group offered a teen girl in Soweto the means towards reparation of her needs through symbolic mending, darning and patching. She received meals and stipends; knowledge of craftivism to protest GBV; a sense of belonging and valued connection to a caring sisterhood. Communication and connection are as essential as basic needs in order to thrive.



Handmade story scarf as protest banner communicating the message, *Stop Rape!*

4.6 Protest Rising

Two Nobel Prize winners, President Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, lived on Vilakazi Street, an iconic historical landmark in Soweto. (Brand South Africa, 2010)

On 16 June 1976, no Sowetan scholar would have imagined it would be permissible for their future generation teen sisters to protest peacefully near where the devastating Soweto Uprising occurred. (South African History Online, 2019) Now, on 14 February 2013, South African policemen stood peacefully chatting next to their cars at an unobtrusive distance, specifically on duty to protect the teen girls rising against GBV - a vast contrast to the South African policemen who killed Hector Pieterson and 176 scholars 36 years earlier.

Evolutionary change has taken place, sometimes for the better, yet not always. The reason to rise has changed too. No longer are scholars forced to learn Afrikaans at school, now they are raped of their virginity. The invisible visible at play. Yet, as Eve Ensler so eloquently said:

> "*If women on the ground are empowered, if they believe they have a right to determine the future of their countries, their families and their bodies - they will rise up and transform the world."* (One Billion Rising, 2019)



Handmade story scarf as protest banner communicating the message, *We say NO to abuse!*

Cry the Beloved Country

Headlines scream at me:

> *“13-year-old girl raped while crossing Beit Bridge”*
>
> *“Gang rape and murder of 17-year-old Anene Booysen”*
>
> *“Rape: South Africa Still Does Not Care”*

STOP! Stop this horrific nightmare! I live in the *“rape capital of the world.”* (News24, 2014) A sick society, ripping at its seams.

I awoke this morning to a shocking bloody valentine. *#OscarPistorius* has made the hashtag *#1BillionRising* fade into oblivion. No time to wallow in stunned disbelief about murdered Reeva Steenkamp. I pulled myself together and got to Soweto for the protest rising. So much preparation – and then this. Today of all days. Is it ever going to stop? I cannot bear witness anymore.

~ My journal, 14 February 2013 (V-Day for *#1BillionRising*)

Craftivists Rise

Craftivism set the stage for our *#1BillionRising* flash mob. The girls had stitched stories of heartbreak and abuse into protest banners in preparation, echoing the banners of the women’s suffrage movement of the 1900s. Strong bonds were forged in the group through the innate capacity of yarns. In homage to fibre handcrafting, it has been a vital source of creativity, dialogue and self-awareness. In story circles, hands crafted words of violation and yarns were shared of abuse and resiliency.

> *"Arts give us the opportunity to amplify the space in which women present the extraordinary in the human soul."* (Machel, 2019)

Yarn bombs draped tree trunks in crochet blossoms and banners adorned the surrounding buildings. Story scarves pirouetted in the air with their dancing teen craftivists. An artist flaunted her sacred body in a handmade nude costume. Traditional Tswana dancers and djembe drummers added a distinctive South African flair. Survivor, Bridget Makhonza, spoke of her personal story, *“To be the victim of rape is not a life sentence.”* There was a vibrant energy even though a heavy topic. (Please note, Bridget Makhonza has consented to her name being included).



I rose as an answer to a calling so loud it could not be ignored… hiding my invisible pain, in defence of beautiful emotional creatures.



Please note that all faces of teenagers in photographs have been blurred to protect identities.



Multitudes of colourful, vibrant story scarves danced in the air to break the endless cycle…



The above four photographs were taken during the protest rising on Vilakazi Street, Soweto



“Dance is the hidden language of the soul of the body.” – Martha Graham (Graham, 1985)



The above two photographs were taken during rehearsals at the church in Soweto

Underlying the Prettiness

Craftivism is an interdisciplinary medium. While its primary products are visual and material, there is a performative element as well in the ethos of applied drama. A protest includes yarn bombs to set the stage, handmade protest banners as props, participants as performers and followers as the audience. The entire graffiti yarn bomb installation was a participatory object inviting connection and participation. Bystanders watched the entertaining 'prettiness' on Vilakazi Street.

Yet, underlying the prettiness…

Mainstream media did not capture the first time Sowetan teenagers publicly protested to stop GBV on home turf. The Soweto community television station with their office on Vilakazi street, just meters away from our rising, did not arrive as promised. They had 'important' footage to capture at Orlando soccer stadium. That in itself says so much about the priorities in our country. A Swedish photojournalist arrived and, without permission, began videoing. It was intrusive and ethically fraught. We did not know and still do not know what happened to his footage.

Breaking the Chain

The lyrics of *'Break the Chain'* are still replaying in my mind: *"This is my body, my body's holy, no more excuses, no more abuses, we are beautiful, beautiful creatures."* (One Billion Rising, 2013) But beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and when the beholder is a proud South African man feeling shunned by women's empowerment, he doesn't see beauty. He sees the suppressor of his power as the woman who used to be diligently subservient. To re-establish his power, he does it the only way he can, physically.

My heart aches for the men of our country. Not all *#MenAreTrash*. I dislike that hashtag. Our country holds a past stitched with traumatic separatism. Humanity collectively needs healing, no matter our gender. Pro-women doesn't mean anti-men. Attempting to break the chain is difficult, the links are strongly fused. I cry for our beloved country.

~ My journal, 2013



"…beautiful, beautiful creatures"

In 1994 when the new South Africa was rebirthed, multiple women's rights groups formed. Gender-based violence continued. The perpetrated and the perpetrators live lifetimes side-by-side with dire emotional and physical consequences. These are glaring markers of an ailing society as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has proven. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2019)

What hell is…

She sat threading a needle for over an hour. She was raped by her uncle last week. My own shock silenced me. I felt helpless, unable to rescue her from the pain. My taxi arrived. Waving goodbye, I asked mama to make her a cup of tea. Tea?! I didn't know how else to respond. The taxi driver asked if I was ok. Yes, I mumbled. No, you're not, he said. We drove in silence until I felt obliged to ask him how his favourite soccer team, Orlando Pirates, was doing. Then, I met friends for dinner at a fancy restaurant – a world away from the world I had spent my day in. I cringed when an acquaintance referred to me as the chick who makes scarves. Instead of defending myself, my own discomfort silenced me yet again. I couldn't cope with their trivial complaints about the starters when, just twenty minutes away, there was a feeding scheme for children hungry for their one basic meal a day. That restaurant was filled with unknowing eyes. What hell is life dishing me?

~ My journal, 2013

The above journal excerpt hints at my own inability to cope with traumatically stitched stories and further points towards the need to research, through practice, guiding principles that can inform my own practice and other craftivism facilitators' practice going forward.

Healing is essential for both the raped and the rapist, as well as for their loved ones who are witness to the atrocities from both sides. Except, as Brené Brown writes, people *"who instead of feeling hurt are acting out their hurt; instead of acknowledging pain, they're*

inflicting pain on others." (Brown, 2015) There's a lot of healing needed in order to stop the cycle of our collective wound. South Africans cannot continue to accept rape culture as normal. It is a national crisis not an unstoppable horror. The disengaged citizen is an apathetic bystander. So, we rose again… for the love we want…



Smoke and Mirrors

A lone woman sat in front of a panel of six burly policemen, each considering a pamphlet boldly stating: Stop Rape. The air was laden with unease. Requesting permission for a public gathering shouldn't be disquieting when the reason to rise is relevant beyond questioning. *"They won't attract a crowd,"* sarcastically smirked a highly ranked officer. No wonder many rapes are never reported. The top brass attitudes influence an entire police force. A violated person does not easily contemplate approaching a police station. A place of safety it may not be. One girl did report her rape. While walking home she was raped in a nearby veldt. The rapist was arrested. He paid a bribe to a corrupt police officer and her report and medical records were conveniently lost. When the court date arrived, there was no evidence. He roams free. She fears for her sister. Granting permission for a public rising doesn't necessarily constitute endorsement by our countries committed keepers of justice. It's a manipulation of truth. Pure deception. Our system is broken. Where's the justice in that? Reason enough to rise.

~ Excerpt from my blog post 2014

… and again, we rose, each time with a wiser outlook - in the public eye but not in the public arena. Rather in the physical safety of a church or a dance studio, using an online platform to spread our message retrospectively after the event. Being mindful is crucial when there is a revolution.



Revolution to overthrow social apathy in favour of the engaged citizen

Safety Nets

For vulnerable teen girls in Soweto to rise with the world teeters on risky. They are the change makers of tomorrow and there's no doubt that social reform starts with their generation. Consider however... an uprising unleashes incubated emotions ignoring the effects of their release in that moment. Shout louder! Dance harder! Cathartic for some, maybe. For others, fraught with inner turmoil especially when a rape is undisclosed. Spilling open in that context detonates previously contained anguish. Girls and young women are not adults with copious amounts of life's gained wisdom to tap into. Recovery is tough. Healing safety nets must be anchored firmly. Thinking beyond the rising is as important as the rising itself. No matter how difficult the process may be, there needs to be consistent debriefing. There's an ethical responsibility to curtail that riskiness.

~ Excerpt from my blog post, 2014

So, we rose again…



… for the sacred bodies we embody…

… but each time we rose, it got harder for the Story Scarves teenage girls – and harder for me as the teaching-artist, coordinator and story receiver.

> *"Develop enough courage so that you can stand up for yourself and then stand up for somebody else."* (Angelou, 2016)

Slowly but surely, though, my courage was dwindling, my energy was sapped, my painful emotions were harder to hide. I felt torn between the incredible importance of the cause… and my own inner turmoil. The message was clearly embodied in the medium. Why did we have to continue to protest? Why wasn't the violence stopping?



I continued to ask myself the rhetorical unanswerable question: *Why?*

Pause for Self-Care

An interval, a pause, a break, an intermission, a recess. Whatever you choose to call it, in a stitched story, such as this one, filled with struggle and heavy emotions it's important to take a pause and breath. Both for the teller (me the writer) and receiver (you the reader).

On Writing the Deep Stuff

… as an aside to our collective story's thread, I honestly admit that it's hard for me to continue writing this auto-ethnographic personal story. Deeply submerged invisibles have made themselves visible. Therefore, I'm calling upon a writer I admire, Neil Gaiman, to offer me advice from his Master Class in teaching the art of storytelling:

> *"This is your journey as a writer, one word at a time. That's the way it has to be. Nobody can do it for you." "Write your story as it needs to be written. Write it honestly and tell it as best you can."* (Gaiman, 2019)

I live on the cusp of the in-between, not belonging to either side of the borderline. My liminality supersedes my labels of white, woman, creative, South African. I feel most comfortable at the margins. It allows me to thread stories through our country and beyond. I am a profoundly deep story weaver. That's who I am. Life is not one thread for me, but many threads threaded together. It makes telling a story harder for me to do, emotionally and conceptually. I've called upon the multimedia that resonate with me: handicrafts, writing and heartistry. Eve Ensler says,

> *"A story is good if I'm open and honest in telling it. The more honest you are able to be, the more you will allow other people to be honest because when you hear someone with your shared experience you feel safe and that someone knows you. When we tell the truth, we break the silence."* (Mae, 2018)

Finding my own unique way of weaving this story has made the unspoken and the unspeakable visible. The true truth.

… and so, I take a deep breath and continue…

~ My journal, 2019

Craftivist Mothers

Children are raising children. In 2017, there were 97 143 teenage mothers who gave birth in South Africa. (Mlambo, 2018) A South African girl's sexual experience may be forced or under threat of force. A sugar daddy blesser showers gifts in return for unprotected sex knowing, yet not divulging, that he's HIV positive. If the gift receiver refuses his advances, he abuses her. Younger men succumb to peer coercion, raping their neighbours. Teen pregnancy also succumbs to social pressures to prove fertility before lobolo (bride's price).

Transient relationships end when the biological father learns of a pregnancy. The young mother's parents are the lost generation of the Aids epidemic. So, responsibility falls on the girl and her aging granny who relies on a minimal pension. Teen moms can be as loving and imperfect as any mother. Their babies are our hope for the next generation - thriving from growing up with at least one caring parent present instead of none, no matter how young that parent may be.

But she can't cope and drops out of school, social workers send her and her baby to a feeding scheme and the vicious cycle of poverty continues. Yet, that innocent baby, born to a child herself, offers a fundamental human need - to love and be loved in return, imperative to the living of life.

She hears about a handcrafting group for girls at her church, introduces herself to me and is embraced into our craftivism group. She discovers a sense of belonging, non-judgemental support, ability to learn a new craft, tell stories through stitching and can harness hope for herself and her child's future. As the African proverb states, *"it takes a village to raise a child"* (Wikipedia, 2019)

> *"The circles of women around us weave invisible nets of love that carry us when we're weak and sing with us when we're strong."* (SARK, 2019)

Unplanned Parenthood

I know the mother angry at her innocent baby for being a product of rape, the mother who is a child herself swindled by a blesser, the mother begging for food for her toddler reared on an island at a street light, the mother with no choice but to leave behind a child headed household, the mother anguishing over her dying child, the biological mother giving her new-born up for adoption and the single mother adopting across racial lines, the infertile mother unable to birth her own yet mothering many.

Some mothers are made in ways least expected. Babies are born from the womb. Motherhood is born from the soul.

I know the foetus lost during that back-street abortion. I know the young woman not wanting to birth that child. I understand the clinic had to turn her away when she requested a legal abortion after 15 weeks. Yet today, that same clinic, knowing she has an infected womb from an illegal feticide, accepted her for care. Where's the logic in that? I entered that government clinic, the only white woman in sight. I felt an outsider. When I finally found her, I held her in my arms, and we cried together.

~ My journal, 2013

4.7 In the Eye of a Perfect Storm

The idiomatic expression *"a perfect storm"* is a blend of events that create an unwonted situation. (Junger, 2009)

Burning Out

Home alone in the quiet darkness. Only light is from my smartphone as I write to myself. My words are blurred. Uncontrollable tears. Thoughts, more thoughts, so many thoughts. What's the meaning of this intolerable suffering around me? I've witnessed too much. I feel too deeply. My body hurts. I'm tired. I'm depleted. I need a temporary respite from this battle raging within me. A pause. An interlude from myself. A break from the world.

~ My journal, 2015

Being the Conduit Vessel

I would minimise the girls' traumas, my country's traumas and my life's complexity if I didn't admit to the intense secondary trauma I experienced. Vicarious pain embodied me, affecting my physical and mental health. I was not equipped to hold the evolved group. My efforts to handover to a trained counsellor became a nightmare, as they demanded financial support beyond what I could offer. I tried to find the right fit administrator but couldn't get anyone to commit fully. I gripped onto the edges of resiliency continuing to be present until I was totally overwhelmed. Lifting others out of their hell had become lifting me out of mine. It was embodied within my being. Our yarns had irrevocably intertwined. I could not pick up a crochet hook or a sewing needle without thinking of the world's disillusions. Its intensity left me hanging by a thread *"in the body of the world."* (Ensler, 2013) It was imperative for me to release myself fully and breath.

> *"I was carrying their stories; I was carrying their hearts and very real experiences. So, it wasn't about me.*" (Ensler, 2013)

Throughout this case study's story, there is an implicit thread stitching my inadequacies as a teaching-artist who could not hold space adequately. This problem further points towards the need for practice-led research to pilot more adequate methodologies for a craftivism facilitator to cope in traumatic contexts.

Disentangling My Yarn

Naively, I now realise, I simply wanted to share my love of handmade artistry. A naïve white woman from Johannesburg crossing borders into a Tswana/Sesotho community in Soweto as a volunteer teaching-artist and craftivist. Although invited, I was an outsider. I gained experience on-the-fly at grassroots. It was a difficult initiation.

I was wholeheartedly immersed in a community very different from my own… a community harbouring complexity I'd only fully comprehend after deeply knowing them over time. Borders blurred between myself and the girls as I became a mother and friend to my daughters and sisters. This was not a professional teacher-participant relationship. I was un-boundaried, not fully supported and unprepared for the embodied tensions within the group.

Two counsellors from their community visited rarely. I was left harbouring the girls' traumatic stories. Eventually, I was overwhelmed. I could not be an integral participant anymore. By December 2015, I was emotionally drained and physically exhausted. I initiated the disbanding of the group, feeling like the abandoner.

It was the end of the story.

~ My journal, 2018

My burnout was my breakthrough. I realised that I'd never truly wanted to be the director of a Non-Profit Company. The opportunity arose, and I decided to go with the flow. As often happens, good enough creative people become the managers of creative endeavours. I was the project initiator, administrator, artistic director, counsellor and mentor. I lost my passion for curiosity, creativity, artistry, craftistry and storytelling. I needed to find that within me once more. I also needed to forgive not just myself for what I considered my inadequacies but forgive the world and humanity for its inadequacies too.

I had to learn to be soft again.

> *"Be soft. Do not let the world make you hard. Do not let the pain make you hate. Do not let the bitterness steal your sweetness. Take pride that even though the rest of the world may disagree, you still believe it to be a beautiful place."* (Thomas, 2016)

Receivers of Traumatic Yarns

The following activists for women's rights *"are telling the difficult stories, challenging us to reckon with our history, to face our present and pushing us to new altered states of consciousness."* (Ensler, 2018) They each have discussed, with brutal honesty, of being receivers of traumatic stories by bravely putting down the weight of their aloneness and easing into a very important conversation. (Whyte, 2018)

Eve Ensler's cancerous tumour in her uterus partially consisted of the thousands of hellish stories she received over the years during the *Vagina Monologues* (Ensler, 1996) and at the *City of Joy* (V-Day, 2018). *"I heard stories that got inside my body." "The stories saturated my cells and nerves." "They were not separate from each other or from me." Eve* shares how she had to pause her activism, concentrating on spiritually cleansing herself from the *"body of the world".* (Ensler, 2018)

Nondumiso Lwazi Msimanga revealed she had received panties with notes telling of the underwear owner's rape. (SA's Dirty Laundry, 2016) During her performance, adorned with a wedding dress of white panties, she acknowledged the underwear on the laundry lines. In that embodiment, her body physically shook. After the performance, Nondumiso re-entered therapy. She explains, *"The object is pointing its finger towards something. Your job is to find out what it's pointing at." "Activists want to affect people through stories. Stories insight others to protest/act. There should be remnants of stories as a result of the experience."* Yet, how do receivers cope with the negative ramifications of those remnants? Nondumiso has paused her activism, researching cleansing rituals for rape victims and the receivers of their stories.

Redi Tlhabi received the personal story of Fezekile Ntsukela Kuzwayo, known as Khwezi, who was raped by the man who became president of South Africa. Fezekile also told Redi of being raped at ages five, twelve and thirteen. Even with the distanced objectivity of an experienced journalist, Redi could not remain distanced from the person centred in the story she was researching, *"It is difficult to care genuinely for the subject of a book and what she represents."* (Tlhabi, 2017, p. 220) *"I stayed in touch with her constantly, fearing she would harm herself."* (Tlhabi, 2017, p. 215) *"They break my heart every time"* (Tlhabi, 2017, p. 221) *"I am stunned. Broken."* (Tlhabi, 2017, p. 1)

Pumla Dineo Gqola researched the dire topic of rape while maintaining a coherent course of thought yet she too could not remain unemotional, *"I wish that I did not have to think about rape, that it was not so close to home, that I did not have to think about the many times I*

have felt the combination of rage and tenderness as I sat across from someone as they talked about how someone had raped them." (Gqola, 2015, p. 168)

The Boitumelo sewing project is an intersectional offering *"between arts education, income generation, skills development and contemporary art production."* (Outreach Foundation, 2019) It is situated in Hillbrow, central Johannesburg. Erica Lüttich has been their creative director and craftivism facilitator for 18 years. (Please note that Erica Lüttich has consented to her name being included in this dissertation.)

Erica's aim is to *"knit conversations that tactically connect the community through the needle"* allowing exploration of life journeys embodied within stitched stories. Like me, Erica has also led sewing reflections as a response to *#1BillionRising*. She too has been the receiver of many traumatic stories surrounding gender-based violence and migration shared by participants in the Boitumelo sewing group.

In conversation, Erica confided in me that she feels exhausted and burnt-out. *"I have a rising resentment towards the oppressiveness of our environment, the urban decay, the hardships of speaking as a South African woman today across racial and gender lines. I feel responsible for so few people having access to arts and crafts education. I am burned out, sad, weepy and disappointed in the lack of support, understanding and dismissiveness of the actual work we do."*

Erica was truly touched by my own understanding of her emotional exhaustion. She said she felt less alone when I shared with her that I too had felt similarly. I told her how a pause to self-heal and reignite my faith, passion and ability in handicrafts has helped me.

There was a distinct connection between me and Erica in making our invisibles visible. We both agreed that a more supportive holding space is vitally necessary for craftivism facilitators. This is a significant finding resulting from my research. Perhaps, forming a support group for our community of craftivism facilitators is something that can be initiated going forward.



Heartists tell wholehearted stories with commitment and sincerity

Communication Conduits

All five women that I have chosen as interlocutors were communication conduits for hellish stories of rape. They too could not remain unaffected by the stories they received and then retold. Just as I could not remain unaltered either.

I am not an empty vessel. Hellish stories touch me. They move me. They make me.

The conduits need to pause, cleanse and recover. I have taken time-out to de-role from the story scarves that hold so many stories. I'm pausing and caring for myself. I will rise strong again, just as Eve, Nondumiso, Redi, Pumla and Erica.

~ My journal, 2019

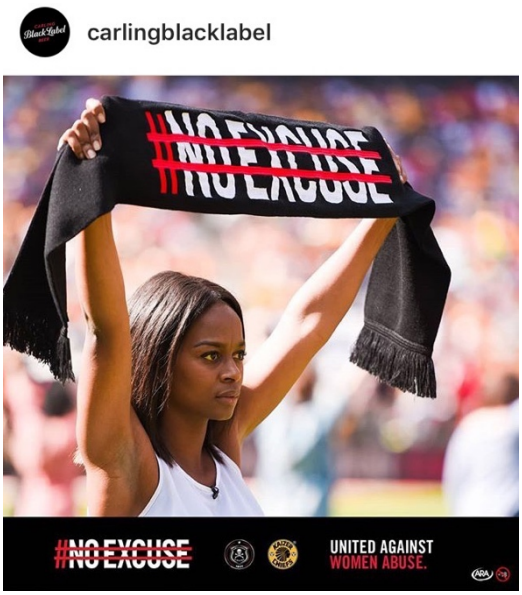
4.8 Unthreading the Patriarchy

George Lakey speaks of cultural preparation for social change through a lengthy process of nonviolent micro-movements that discredit the old order. (Lakey, 2012) Multiple more craftivism projects and subversive activism are imperative to unravel the established patriarchy. Yet, for a healthy society to rebirth, the patriarchal hierarchy must be transformed in a way that's empowering to our social construct as a whole.

> *"Women's issues aren't of concern to women alone. These are human rights issues for us all. They challenge our consciences not our chromosomes."* (Kristof & WuDunn, 2010)

The hashtag activism movement *#HeForShe* has joined *#MeToo #TimesUp* and *#smashthepatriarchy*. They're the micro-movements Lakey speaks of. Yet, some micro-movements are questionable when mainstream media takes advantage of our social fabric. The following story is an example.

Carling Black Label, a brand of beer marketed to South African men, infused their 2018 advertising campaign with socially responsible purpose. By admitting alcohol abuse perpetuates women abuse, the brand aligned itself with stopping GBV. The *#NoExcuse* campaign encouraged men to pledge not to use violence. At the Soweto Derby, an all-female choir sang a rendition of *Mas'hambe Nono* to a stadium of 85 000 predominantly male soccer fans. (YouTube, 2018) The soccer song's lyrics were changed telling the story of a woman abused by her partner after he returns home from a soccer game in a drunken stupor. The choir held story scarves with the hashtag, *#NoExcuse*.



This is a snapshot from Carling Black Label's Instagram profile page. I noticed this post on Instagram, not because I drink beer but because the photo captured protest banners resembling story scarves with the hashtag, *#NoExcuse*. I cheered the fact that the ad execs had borrowed the idea of a craftivism banner instead of a printed placard, even though they were machine knitted. I am not their target market, yet it drew me to click and discover more. I was captured because of the medium they chose to spread their message - fibre crafted protest banners.

> *"Carling Black Label' is for real South African men who aspire to be strong, brave and true."* (The South African Breweries, 2018)



The above image is from an article entitled: *"How Carling Black Label reached more than 45 million people worldwide to fight violence against women"* (de Villiers , 2018)

I'm a curious sleuth, yet… I'm not a superficial stalker. What did *#NoExcuse* mean and was the medium the message? I did discover more - the invisible beneath the well planned visible is where the issue truly lies. Here's what I found…

It had taken years of awareness raising for the issue of GBV to finally enter this context – the sphere of South African men and their strong allegiance to soccer. Yet, the actual pledge did not commit allegiance to reducing alcohol consumption. Ultimately, the brand would never want their gross profits to be affected negatively.

Advertising agencies manipulatively place brands in the flux of the latest trends persuasively manufacturing meaningfulness. Carling Black Label seemed visibly conscious of their target

market's issues. Considering their audience's attention was on a soccer match, their message was fleeting and its impacts minimal.

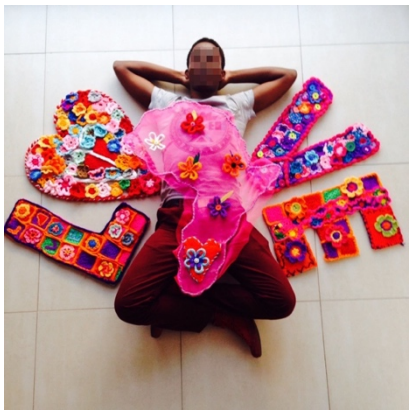
To truly change mindsets, the mega bucks spent on this campaign would have had a greater sustainable impact if aimed at deep meaningful conversations with *Sonke Gender Justice*.

> *"We believe women and men, girls and boys can work together to resist patriarchy, advocate for gender justice and achieve gender transformation."* (Sonke Gender Justice, 2019)

Another option for Carling Black Label's mega bucks would have been sponsorship for Story Scarves to handmake protest banners with creative young women in Soweto who have felt the gender-based violence Carling Black Label speaks of. Advertising campaigns such as this, *"are gimmicks by alcohol brands who are looking for a new market or advertising companies who are trying to win a Loerie in the public service category."* (Thorpe, 2018)

Story Gents





I met a true gentleman from Tembisa, a young photographer whom I employed to take photos for Story Scarves events. Rather than only standing on the side-lines with his camera, he protested with other good men at our risings taking an active stand to stop gender-based violence. He also learnt to knit, taught by the teen girls, and made a mini story scarf of his own.

He then began the Story Gents initiative encouraging young men to be gentlemen and treat women respectfully. He reached men in Johannesburg, Soweto, Tembisa and Alexandra through one-on-one and group conversations. His reason to rise was, *"Women and girls are precious, and our attitudes should reflect that."*

~ My journal 2019

4.9 Story Weaving

The essence of our lives is story-shaped moulding our self-view and worldview.

> *"The ability to see our lives as stories rather than unrelated, random events increases the possibility for significant and purposeful action."* (Taylor, 2005)

In resurfacing my submerged narrative, I've expanded and processed my experiences, pushing through the messiness and acknowledging the triumphs. Our collective story percolated over many years until its heaviness became too hard for me to bear.

"There is no greater burden than carrying an untold story inside you." (Angelou, 2010)

It was as if this story was trapped, stifled and in dire need of release in order to validate its potentiality in eliciting change.

> *"Those who do not have power over the story that dominates their lives – the power to retell it, rethink it, deconstruct it, joke about it, and change it as times change – truly are powerless, because they cannot think new thoughts."* (Rushdie, 1991)

In threading my yarn, the teller of me, into our yarns the stitched tapestry is the teller of us.

> *"When you find a story that works, live that story, make it true, authentic and subject to scrutiny."* (Godin, 2009)

Authentically remarkable stories *"aren't just repeatable: these are the stories that demand to be repeated"* (Godin, 2009) because they are believable. They are the stories that have earned the right to be passed on. It's up to the story weaver to earn the right to repeat that remarkable yarn. I hope I have.



Our stories stir wisdom

"Our stories are reflections of ourselves. Treat them with respect and honour those who are willing to share their experiences with you." - Jessica Vellenga, Yarn Bomb Yukon Collective coordinator (Prain, 2014)

My Gift to You, the Receiver of My Story

This research is not self-revelatory. In sharing my story, it's no longer mine, it's ours. Others have experienced similar. I know I'm not alone. The time is ripe to tell my side of the story, despite its cracks. By confronting myself and unravelling my own yarn, I'm defying its ending - which could be considered a burnout resulting from receiving hellish stories. Rather, I'm changing the ending by showing it's possible to rise strong after a perfect storm.

> *"The danger of a single story is that it creates stereotypes. We must reject the single story."* (Adichie, 2009)

This is my story. It is not my definitive single story, though. There are many other stories layering me into the complex being I am. They tell of how I have successfully incited creative potential in others, with competence and ease.

It is therefore important for me to acknowledge that not all craftivism facilitators are traumatised by working with the traumatised. Yet, for the fellow practitioner with whom my story resonates, I gift you my learnings. Know that you are not alone. Know that I've faced similar hurdles as you and, despite the struggle, have survived to tell the story. You are resilient. Thrive onward in holding space for others and trust that the work will hold us all.

May our yarn be locked in memory for all who wholeheartedly lived the *Story Scarves* story, and all who learn from the stitched story beneath it.
~ My journal, June 2018

From the Ground Up

One Billion Rising is a catalyst for a cause-related campaign. Repetitive yearly action is building momentum over time, globally. I believe in the campaign and am grateful to Eve Ensler for believing in me. Meeting Eve was a peripeteia moment that changed the direction of my narrative and my life's trajectory. While crossing multiple borders of race, culture, language, territory and crafter's substrates, I consciously commuted between my known world and the unknown world of the other as a bridge between the two.
Auto-ethnographically speaking, this voyage has indelibly made me into a much more interesting person than I may have been without it.

Impact Assessment

This story as a qualitative discourse, proves that the combination of craftivism and storytelling can insight conversation and facilitate activism. It clearly demonstrates that the visible narrative, both personally and collectively, is not always what the craftivist's façade reveals. Unthreading the story beneath the craftivist's story makes the invisible visible. Further research as a quantitative study could statistically investigate whether raising public awareness through a craftivism campaign, such as the *Story Scarves* campaign, results in actual societal change. Supported by data, would the statistics of 1 in 3 women raped in South Africa have changed because of a craftivism campaign?



chapter 5
Stitched Stories
Practice as Research

Chapter 5: Stitched Stories - Practice as Research

As a transition from the *Story Scarves* story into the PaR, I have decided to place my findings into re-resourcing myself as a craftivism facilitator here before the section that speaks of the workshop series and findings that resulted from it. The reason for me doing this is because not all my findings resulted from the PaR workshops. My own solitary research began the process of discovering what exactly the burnout I had experienced during the *Story Scarves* project actually was. I sought understanding of Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) which is the term associated with the vicarious trauma I had experienced through the receiving of first-hand traumatically stitched stories. I never knew this was what I was experiencing while I was in the midst of it. STS is more serious than burnout, so I have chosen to include my findings on STS here.

5.1 Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)

"Working with people in trauma — hearing their stories of hardship and supporting their recovery — has far-reaching emotional effect on the provider." (Lander, 2018) Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS), vicarious trauma or compassion fatigue worsen emotional states of overwhelm, isolation and hopelessness. Burnout depletes energy replacing it with exhaustion and disillusion, but STS has far greater recurring effects if not acknowledged. Remnants of anxiety, depression and exhaustion can be triggered.

In order to cope, I have learnt to be consciously trauma-informed, recognise my own biorhythms and never ignore my intuitive self-messaging. Resourcing and re-resourcing through conscious self-care is essential for craftivist facilitators to be able to continue their work. Compassion for self is just as important as empathy for others. I have learnt that self-care is primary before being able to care for anyone else.

> Parker Palmer explains, *"Self-care is never a selfish act—it is simply good stewardship of the only gift I have, the gift I was put on earth to offer to others."* (McBride, 2013)

Preventing STS of craftivism facilitators is key to being able to work to our maximum potential while inciting potential in others. None of us possess a bottomless reservoir of limitless empathy. We're fallibly human yet we need to practice what we preach to other craftivists. Balancing our psychological and physiological resources with the demands made on these resources is key to being able to receive and competently hold the stories of others.

5.2 Re-Resourcing the Self as Craftivism Facilitator

I paused and took a two-year break from craftivism after ending the *Story Scarves* project in December 2015. I continued to work as a graphic designer though. By not having the *Story Scarves* work to do, my workload halved. Yet, I found myself sitting at my desk working on advertising campaign concepts, while reliving *Story Scarves* events embodied within me. I knew I had to deal with my STS compassionately and researched re-resourcing techniques. Then, I had an idea that if I wrote the story and expressed it out of me, I'd free myself of some memories. As the poet, Iain S. Thomas, writes:

> *"When you want something to leave your body, when you've felt too much, write it down and it will leave. When you want to keep something forever, write it down."* (Thomas, 2016)

I had never thought of researching *Story Scarves* while embedded within the project for so many years. Yet, as life happens, new ideas arrive, and I decided to tentatively investigate whether I could do a research dissertation. I contacted a professor via email and simply asked. He replied and the conversation began. My idea was to do a case study on the project as an ethnographic retrospective. As the professor learnt more about the story, he convinced me to rather tell my side of the story auto-ethnographically.

Joe Lambert, a knowledgeable story facilitator, writes:

> *"When you enter into the role of leading a group, no matter your experience, through a creative process, you always feel inadequate to the task. At least I believe you should, because humans are so complex, and their potential for interactions so vast, that if you think you are in control, you are deeply deluded."* (Lambert, 2013, p. 72)

As I began sharing my yarn, I realised that it was ok to be an inadequate craftivism facilitator. That realisation led to my personal journey described in this dissertation. After the two-year hiatus I then began a MA at Wits University in 2018. I had to prepare myself to deeply re-embed into the project's memories and in that embodiment, re-embed myself back into the doing of craftivism. I researched re-resourcing techniques essential for me to regain the passion for craftivism and reenergise for continuance. I discovered the responsibility of the craftivist facilitator as an intrinsic healer. Jung speaks of the archetype of the Wounded Healer who seeks to help others because they are, in turn, helping themselves. The process of consciously healing my own wound has taught me more than the wound ever did. *"It is moments such as this one wherein healers are born."* (Larisey, 2012) Resourcing, re-resourcing, self-care and mindfulness are essential for a craftivism facilitator. This is the

reason why I feel it is important to frame the PaR as an attempt to bring the aforementioned practices into the conscious facilitation practice. I prepared myself emotionally and physically through the following sustenance tools: cleansing rituals, breathwork, somatic experiencing, artistry/craftistry and clinical supervision. They assisted me in recalibrating myself and regaining passion for the work. I offer explanations for fellow craftivism facilitators here.

African Perspective of Cleansing Rituals

Craftivism facilitators can call upon the wisdom of Sangomas, South African traditional healers, and borrow African cleansing rituals to recover from sharing our own stories and receiving stories from others. Africa has an inherent legacy of healing and communicating through multi-model expressive arts. Ancient wisdom teaches life lessons. Elders call upon the expressive arts: sharing legends (storytelling), djembe circles (drumming), dancing (movement), chanting (song). Sangomas heal through channelling the spirit world with their divining techniques. They are the therapeutic healers who created the expressive arts. Sangomas are the vessels through which the ancestors can advise on healing difficult disharmonies in our communities and in our selves. Nondumiso Msimanga told me, *"it involves ukuphahla, a spiritual consciousness, and listening for where my body and spirit need care."* The embodied negative burnout is slowly lessened through energy purifying. I now know I need to be consciously aware of my own energy and recourses depletion, conservation and augmentation.

Somatic Experiencing and Breathwork

Somatic experiencing is mindfully embodied work through the mind-body connection. It propels us to consciously feel our physiology and re-set the rhythm of the body. The self-regulation of breathwork leads to presencing. *"Breathing is the one regular, life-sustaining process we can always observe within ourselves. It is evidence of the present moment rising and passing away."* (van Dernoot Lipsky, 2009)

Clinical Supervision

Similar to those working in the healing professions, craftivism facilitators working in traumatic contexts need supportive structures in place for their own self-care. It's vitally important for us to deal with our own constellation of feelings, not only the issues of the craftivists we work with. Clinical supervision offers emotional support through meaningful conversations within contexts that allow for meta reflection. Dr Corinne Oosthuizen, my personal psychotherapist, elaborates, *"Clinical supervision for craftivists working in traumatic contexts is essential to reflect upon and process both the conscious and unconscious processes at play for the*

intervenor herself, as well as the relational patterns evoked between her and those she is working with. Supervision offers a safe space for recalibrating and cleansing the container of self in order to continue the healing work usefully." Alternatively, because we are inherently creative beings, expressive arts therapy, drama therapy, art therapy, dance/movement therapy or music therapy offer us safe spaces for embodied expression and a way of supervision too.

Artistry/Craftistry and Creativity



Research investigating biomarkers indicate that levels of the stress-related hormone, cortisol, lower in the body after only 45 minutes of art making. (Kaimal, et al., 2016) Creative pursuits, including handicrafts, help psychological wellness and physiological health. STS may result in creative blocks as barriers to creativity. Crossing those barriers is key to reigniting inner creative potential of the self.



It was through my own solo art and craft pursuits that I healed my creative spirit after the burnout. My own craftwork in three solo yarn bomb projects helped me reconnect with my crochet hook, knitting needles and sewing threads that had been patiently awaiting my return to stitch more stories with me. The themes of these craftivism projects were not around GBV but rather activism in other ways: I created a butterfly for a park which brought joy to children. I created an installation of a tap with crochet water for an exhibition making consumers aware of plastic nanoparticles in drinking water. I made a semicolon to prevent suicide ideation at university. I made a gift for myself and crocheted a beanie and gloves while sitting under an orange laden tree. I have chosen not to describe them further in this document except to include them as they helped me relocate my passion for handicrafts. They helped me disassociate my craftivism from the topic of GBV and re-establish my association of my craftivism with other topics.

The aforementioned findings form the rationale behind my research questions for the PaR:

- How can a craftivism facilitator be a more informed, prepared and supported creative arts practitioner?
- How can a craftivism facilitator de-role, cleanse and re-enrol as a committed craftivist for issues pertinent to our communities?

5.3 Practice as Research (PaR)

Aim

This artistic enquiry is directly birthed from the *Story Scarves* story and my need to address my past experience. The starting point is the problematisation of my own practice as a craftivism facilitator and my inability to hold the traumatic space efficiently. Hence, my need to revisit my role in a more knowledgeable way. The topic of gender-based violence is the impulse for this inquiry. However, I specifically did not address the GBV theme or intentionally evoke any traumatic stories during these PaR workshops. In my new role as researcher, I chose a less vulnerable topic in the hope of not triggering myself. The position of auto-ethnographer kept me safe even though I was a subject and a participant. My intent was to reimagine my needs by opening a safe space for women to reconnect with their innate artistic possibilities through stitched stories. These co-researchers assisted me in piloting new methodologies for my practice as a craftivism facilitator going forward.

Target Community

Six adult women agreed to be participants/co-researchers. They had basic handicraft skills and were willing travel from Soweto to be craftivists at the University of Witwatersrand. They were not university students. An advanced level of engagement was possible because participants' hands were honed tools. Each could stitch her own story as the Teller. As the craftivism facilitator, I could concentrate on holding the space, and piloting my methods of practice.

Piloted Methods of Practice

The following methods for my practice as a craftivism facilitator were piloted during the workshops: distancing techniques and the psychic shield, mindfulness techniques, facilitating by osmosis and with empathy, being good enough, making mistakes and feeling the discomfort. These methods of practice will be expanded upon in Chapter 6, Findings and Recommendations.

Data Collection through Personal Journaling

I used personal journaling to capture data during the tracking of the PaR workshops. Stream-of-consciousness writings in a private journal allows for externalising of inner thoughts and feelings during *"the process of recovering your creative self."* (Cameron, 1992) An art journal allows for visual expression through doodles, sketches or multimedia collage fusing images with words. Gina Niederhumer is a stitcher-storyteller who created her *"Sew*

Many Days in the Year" daily journal through stitched stories. By making the invisible visible through her embroidered textile postcards, she could reflect and make sense of her life. *"It's a clue"* to what's going on inside of her. In externalising her feelings, it was redemptive, cathartic in the reparation and mending of her inner being. (Niederhumer, 2017)

Excerpt from My Journal written during PaR

My feelings: *difference, movement, passage, journey, continuance / thread, unthread, rethread / enrol, de-roll, re-enrol / embed, dislodge, re-embed*.

Who am I? At my core, I am a heartist. I am a story weaver. I will always be a curious sleuth. I love the arts. My preferred media are the visual arts of all types, and I'm especially passionate about handicrafts.

What's my intention? As a teaching-artist, craftivist and creative arts practitioner, I am the curator of permissive spaces that incite brave stories.

~ My journal, 2019

Workshop Series Structure



A progressive series of five experiential craftivism workshops employing the methodology of stitched stories by handcrafting personal narratives into textiles. The aim was to make individual yarns for self-activism within the craftivism ethos. Each participant shared a story of her own choice that surfaced in the present moment and selected the handicraft media that resonated with her. Communal craftistry was used for warmups and to sew group cohesion.

The workshops encompassed both groupwork and individual work to explore creativity collectively and individually.



Our yarns are the tellers of us was the theme for the group work and the creation of a communally stitched story.



My yarn is the teller of me was the theme for the individually stitched stories.

The following research instrument shows the five-part structure indicating the progression of the workshop series.



Figure 3 - Infographic describing the five-part Workshop Series

Workshop 1 – Introduction

Aim: Establish group cohesion.

Theme: Threading threads. Our yarns are the tellers of us.

Discussion: Rules of participation, ethical considerations, confidentiality agreements and permission to take photos without identifying features.

Share the Craftivism Manifesto: *"Your craft is your voice. Use it well."* (Greer, 2019)

Warmup: Web of Yarn threading group.

Homework: Start by creating the base.

Debrief discussion.

Workshop 2 – Idea Generating

Aim: Verbally share personal narratives. Ideas for translating verbal to stitched story.

Theme: My yarn is the teller of me.

Check-in: Mindful gratitude offering.

Warmup: Web of Yarn continuance.

Share personal story verbally.

Discussion: Mapping the story journey to discover the key moment worthy of stitching.

Embodiment: Collaborate with drama therapist to create embodied group sculpture.

Homework: Begin stitching the story by embedding it into the base.

Debrief discussion.

Move to dance studio to partake in conscious dance class.

Workshop 3 – Gain Momentum

Aim: Gain momentum in process of creation.

Theme: Stitching stories.

Check-in: Mindful gratitude offering.

Warmup: Stitch web of yarn to canvas and begin creating Threaded Tapestry.

Crafting: Continue creating stitched stories individually.

Homework: Continue to create stitched story.

Debrief discussion.

Workshop 4 – Progress

Aim: Exhibit individual stitched stories within the group and discuss.

Theme: Imperfect = interesting

Check-in: Mindful gratitude offering.

Warmup: Continue and complete Threaded Tapestry.

Embodiment: Solo body sculpture as posed tableau with stitched story.

Homework: Complete stitched story.

Debrief discussion.

Workshop 5 – Closure

Aim: Closure of group. Celebration of completed stitched stories.

Theme: Accomplishment.

Check-in: Mindful gratitude offering.

Share: Completed stitched stories.

Debrief discussion.

Typical Session Plan for a Craftivism Workshop

The following research instrument is an example of a typical session plan of a craftivism workshop in the aforementioned series structure.

Time Allocation

Each workshop was three hours with a break for snacks. Specific timing breakdowns depend on the progress of the work at each stage of the series.

Check-in

Motivation: welcome greeting and sit in the craft circle

Gratitude Offering

Motivation: mindful meditation and thankful reflection establishes group presence.

Warmup as Web of Yarn

Motivation: engage in a gentle activity to encourage group cohesion and trust.

Communal Craftwork

Motivation: promote collaboration as a group.

Example: Threaded Tapestry

Teaching Moments

Motivation: handicraft ideas enlightening the living of life.

Example: mend/patch/darn in craftivism = reparation in life

Theme Focus

Motivation: theme imbues a particular subject.

Example: imperfection can result in interesting beauty.

Design Lessons

Motivation: generate ideas that symbolise story events.

Example: colour theories, shape identities, layering.

Crafting Lessons

Motivation: skill development by learning new stitches.

Individual Story Sharing of Personal Narratives

Motivation: verbal storytelling and active listening within a caring group.

Stitching Stories

Motivation: translate the spoken story into an embodied stitched story.

Debriefing Discussion and Closure

Motivation: gain insight into work-in-process.

Homework

Motivation: create the stitched story in their own time, space and at their own pace.

Ten steps in Creating a Stitched Story

The process of creating a stitched story includes the following 10 steps:

1. **Generate ideas (brainstorm/storyboards/journaling/discussion)**
   Ideas percolate unconsciously and randomly over time in the craftivist's life. Their gathered sparks consciously emerge, either vaguely or clearly, and evolve during the gradual process.
2. **Locate the hook (key moment worth telling)**
   Stitched stories are usually anecdotes or chapters of a full story. A narrative hook is a literary catch that captures the audience's attention persuading them to continue receiving the story. The hook may also be a key moment that acts as a shift-changer or meaning-maker. Similar to a crochet hook, a literary hook pulls the thread of the yarn through the story's stitches to create the fabric of the story.
3. **Design and conceptualise (think laterally)**
   Lateral thinking encourages the craftivist's ability to convert ideas into an actual concept that can be visibly stitched and tangibly realised.
4. **Choose handicraft (crochet, knit, embroidery, appliqué or combinations)**
   Freedom of choice to embrace the most resonating handicraft method for each individual allows comfort in the making process without the craftivism facilitator directing the maker towards a specific method.
5. **Discuss the making and telling of the stitched story verbally in the group**
   Verbal telling precedes the non-verbal symbolic telling. It allows the submerged

invisible story to surface and the craftivism group members to receive the story and offer discussion on its making as a stitched story.

6. **Make the base**
   The base is the substrate that nurtures the story. It is also a starting point that grounds the maker and determines the size and form of the stitched story.
7. **Embed the symbolic narrative into the substrate (create the story)**
   Begin sharing the story by stitching it into mindfully conscious visibility.
8. **Edit, reshape or change story elements**
   The story is not unchangeable. It is malleable and adaptable as the story germinates into existence through the process.
9. **Share the completed stitched story**
   Show, display, exhibit or celebrate the finished stitched story in the group's safe space.
10. **Debrief on the process and close the stitched story's journey**
    Discuss the highlights, problems and insights encountered during the process.

Creative Objective

As the craftivism facilitator, my objective was to inspire creativity towards self-awareness. *"It is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self."* (Winnicott, 1989) Creativity is as significant as literacy for our own abilities to communicate. Everyone has creative potential; creativity is not rare as we are born with the capacity for it. *"We are educating people out of their creative capacities. We get educated out of creativity."* (Robinson & Aronica, 2009) Creative expression is reclaimable through conscious artistry such as creating a stitched story. Creativity begets creativity - the more you practice creative expression, the more creative one becomes. Our inner creative spirit is the impetus for our outer artistry and our sense of well-being.

The acclaimed dancer and choreographer, Twyla Tharp, believes in the *creative habit* as *"an ideal creative state, one where creativity becomes a self-perpetuating habit."* In order to attain the maximum capacity for her personal creativity, the unconscious skillset and knowhow of her craft is an essential resource for her conscious creativity. Twyla believes that *"You're kidding yourself if you put creativity before craft. Craft is where our best efforts begin."* (Tharp, 2003) The 3D textile artist Jean Draper concurs, *"Ideas rarely occur 'out of the blue'; they are based on a sound footing of preparatory work."* (Draper, 2018, p. 124) The preparatory work is the skilled knowledge of handicrafts habitually embodied within

honed hands so that creativity can be the focus. Craftistry is the habitual skill. Artistry is the creative ability. *"I cannot describe myself as an artist because I never studied art,"* a participant shared. I explained that the natural inherent ability for creativity makes us artists.

Person-Centred Approach

For the individually stitched stories, a person-centred approach was used. Similar to Carl Rogers' person-centred humanistic approach (Rogers, 1980), self-direction was encouraged. Each participant chose her own story and directed herself. I affirmed independence focusing on self-actualisation and self-activism through personal narratives.

In considering a form of critical analysis, it is clear that modes of quantitative measurement do not suit a craftivism project such as this. Each stitched story is unique, just as each person is unique. Therefore, assessment criteria cannot be applied uniformly. I have chosen a localised person-centred approach reflecting upon each stitched story individually.

As specified in the aim, although the final product is a tangible output, it is the experiential process in creating the stitched story that is more significant. The Teller gains personal insight through the participatory action-reflection cycle. (Cowan, 2006) As in Playback Theatre, *"people were invited to share whatever story they needed to tell."* (Rivers, 2015) I encouraged each participant to reflect upon their handicraft and story-making journeys as a retrospective contemplation of their own practice. Through this approach, they each uncovered insightful knowledge through interpretation for themselves.

5.4 Making the Invisible Visible

In the context of my main research question which asks how the work of craftivism, specifically through the methodology of stitched stories, makes the invisible visible, there was a definite thread of the visible/invisible discourse threading through all the stitched stories during the PaR process. This will be elaborated upon in the reflections of each stitched story that follows. It is an amalgamation of my reflections on my own experience during the facilitation, excerpts from my journal, my reflections on the participants making their own invisibles visible, and narrative descriptions of what occurred.

In the context of applied drama, the nuanced dialogue of the visible/invisible is informed by Augusto Boal, one of the founders of applied theatre. Boal's work is an analogy for craftivism, yet it is not its main underpin and does not replicate his methods. There is an interesting parallel between the process of crafting a stitched story and Boal's ideas of externalising internal oppressions. This is significantly apparent in Boal's *Theatre of the*

Oppressed (Boal, 1979), a community-based theatre for social change, encouraging critical thinking through analyses, critiques and questioning. It is inclusive of spect-actors, audience members invited to take part in the drama by exploring solutions to the issue. The process Boal referred to as *"rehearsing for the revolution,"* implies that by enacting positions or reclamations of power, in a safe space, spect-actors are more likely to be able to assert their position in the real-world outside of the theatre frame. Primarily, *Theatre of the Oppressed* is about taking mindful action by validating power or reversing power imbalances. Craftivism echoes this practice. The craftivist/maker takes action by being the Teller, fellow crafters are the spect-actors, the artefact is the key chapter or scene of the story being enacted, and the craftivist facilitator is the Joker neutrally guiding the participants to investigate shared experiences of oppression. No professional actors act for them. The community acts for themselves. Just like the craftivists craft their stitched stories themselves. The submerged stories are surfaced and made visible in both instances using differing media – drama for Boal and handicrafts for craftivism. There is similarity in many ways, yet my focus has been on the role of the facilitator, which in craftivism has not been as well documented as that of the Joker in Theatre of the Oppressed.

Craftivism facilitates the border crossing between the invisible internalised story and the visible externalised story.

> *"It is often the silences and omissions in the stories that are most revealing: the most precious information may lie in what the informants hide, and in the fact, they do hide, rather than what they tell."* (Nicholson, 2014, p. 89)

In trusting the metaphor to represent the story:

> *"The symbols of the self arise from the depths of the body, and they express its materiality every bit as much as the perceiving consciousness. The symbol is thus a living body."* (Jung, 1968).

Symbolism is representative and symbols are suggestions of ideas, thoughts and emotions that are easier to express non-verbally. The applied arts offer multiple platforms for symbols to become visible through creative dance, drama, poetry, music and visual art in its forms from painting, printing, drawing, collage and sculpture to handicrafts.

The following stitched stories demonstrate trust in the tool/carrier/vehicle as medium to communicate the submerged, unspoken and hidden message. The significant core of the work is in the actual crafting process as that is when the medium allows the message to surface and make itself visible, externalising it for the maker/teller. The final artefact holding

the stitched story becomes a transferable medium. *"To be human is to become visible while carrying what is hidden as a gift to others."* (Whyte, 2013)

Group Work: Communally Stitched Story

"Art helps us identify with one another and expand our notion of we." (Eliasson, 2018)

In collaboratively co-creating the artwork entitled, *Threaded Tapestry*, the group was cohesively entwined in an embodied sisterhood of the collective narrative. There are inherent possibilities in the organic threading of yarns symbolic of real-life threads. In trusting and supporting each other wholeheartedly, the group is woven through the common endeavour.

The creative process progressed from a single strand of yarn threaded into a web and then gained complexity through weaving until it became attached to a canvas. The group process of craftivism in creating this communally stitched story made the invisible interdependency between the individual craftivists transform into visible collaboration and connection.



Photos showing the process of creating the artwork entitled *Threaded Tapestry*

Threaded Tapestry incorporated significant moments of insight during its making process:



Mistake = visible interestingness

Securing the number 1 back-to-front, encouraged celebration of the mistake as an intentional design addition. I managed to promote a visible shift in perception for the makers.



Upcycling = visible surprise

Instead of throwing fabric offcuts away as if they are invisible bygones, they were upcycled by visualising and imagining a new form for their existence. A butterfly appeared into visibility.



Border crossings = adventure to the mystery

Crossing the substrate's border encouraged the group not to be restricted by the visible canvas edge. The space beyond its inhibiting squareness welcomed hanging threads adding interest to the artistry.



Signing the craftwork = ownership and accomplishment

In visibly signing the artwork/craftwork on completion signified willingness to claim ownership as the proud craftivists who created it. There was a sense of accomplishment.

Individual Work: Stitched Story as Personal Narrative

Capacity for Communication

The medium became the visible message. The stitched story is the conversation mediator, a vehicle for inciting dialogue through the materiality of textiles. This participant verbally told her story which held a problem of communication between her and her sibling. During the craftivism process over time, she added embroidered speech bubbles which made visible the words she wanted to say to her sibling but hadn't been able to.

Stitched Story: Conversation with Sibling

By adding embroidered speech bubbles, the words were found and made visible to convey the message that was too difficult to say face-to-face. The stitched story became the mediator between them. The process assisted the maker in discovering a way towards resolving the problem. Craftivism has the capacity to symbolically make visible a conversation that can then become reality. The participant said she was then able to speak to her sibling.









Creative Connections

> *"During the Creative Connection process, one art form stimulates and nurtures the other, bringing us to an inner core or essence which is our life energy."* (Rogers, 1993)

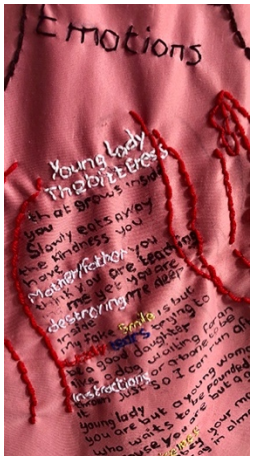
My intention was to explore connections between expressive arts modalities. (Palmer, 2018). I collaborated with a drama therapist who facilitated a conscious dance class. The theme was *visible presencing* which paralleled with stories in the present. By introducing embodiment through dance, there was a different energy. The mind and the body are deeply interdependent emotionally. (On Being, 2018) The following stitched story demonstrates the creative connection.



Stitched Story: Invisible Girl in a Visible Woman's Body

Multiple expressive art forms creatively connected: sketches in a journal; creative writing as poetry; verbal storytelling translated into embroidered symbolism; consciously dancing the story. Descriptive metaphors included a tree of life and traditional Sesotho titanna skirts. Craftivism allows uncomfortable invisible emotions to be visibly expressed in a safe manner.







Capacity for Healing

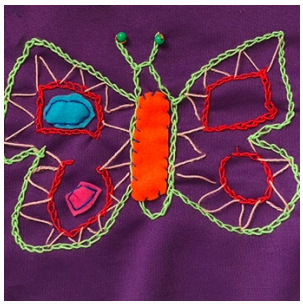
Craftivism is a milieu for healing as invisible somatic imagery residing in the body's cellular level visibly emerges in the stitched story. The facilitator and participants can empathically witness the Teller's stitched story and *"having one's pain witnessed, is a powerful container for healing."* (Matchet & Mokwena, 2013, p. 119) My realistic objective is to demonstrate evidence proving that, in documenting the making of a stitched story, behavioural change occurred through self-insight.

The reparative aspects of handcrafting while mending, darning or patching, applies to the fabric of our psyche too. Handicrafts have an innate capacity to be therapeutic-in-nature. The *"curative force"* (Rogers, 1993, p. 13) in the aesthetic space enables self-healing. Craftivism is performative: handicrafts embody action (performance) by the craftivist/Teller of stories (performer) invoking witnessing and visibility (audience) on the substrate of a stitched story (stage). The Teller conveys a lived personal narrative and *"awakening occurs through the sharing and embodiment of real-life stories."* (Fox, 2015) The following stitched story demonstrates change through the craftivism process over time.

Stitched Story: Humble Elephant, Beautiful Butterfly

This participant missed workshops because of a family bereavement. Stitched stories help express invisible sorrow into visibility. An embroidered elephant with its trunk down shows sadness. An elephant with its trunk beginning to lift symbolises depression lifting. The butterfly symbolises rebirth. The portability of handicrafts allows a stitched story to travel and be a supportive partner on life's journey, anywhere and at any time.





Pliability and Adaptability of Method

This participant enjoyed textile and fabric but did not like a needle or handcraft implement. For her, the tools of craftivism are not the needles and hooks, but the hands. As a craftivism facilitator, I was impressed that she felt comfortable enough in the group to make visible which handicrafts honestly resonated with her and which did not. I learnt how to manage the situation by reinforcing that there was no need for conformity, but rather made visible the fact that craftivism offers unique individuality. There was space for debate and adaptability.

If a participant resisted the slowness of stitching, I could offer her a more immediate, tactile way of hand weaving. Through lateral thinking on-the-fly, I could weave my session plan into a different form.

It was also an opportunity to upcycle fabric offcuts and a plastic mesh left over from a garden plant. By giving her this alternative option, I learned that each participant individually offered me an opportunity to discover a new way of facilitating.

In the final workshop of the series, the participant decided, without coercion, to sew a phoenix. She picked up a needle and we all cheered her on. I learnt to patiently trust the process of creation through craftivism and let it unfold in its own way. I never directed her. I held the space for her. She directed herself.



Stitched Story: Fire, Ash and Phoenix

Fire, flames, ash and a phoenix rising. Fabric strips weaved through a plastic mesh, one strip at a time with the tool of embodied hands. During the final workshop, the phoenix rose with a carefully sewn edging. The maker/storyteller symbolically rose too, from her own life's ashes. There was a wonderful artistry in the imperfection of the weaving.

Mindfulness Practice

There was conscious presencing through the inclusion of mindfulness practices in the form of gratitude rituals and breath activation. The inherent mindfulness of handicrafts through rhythmic repetitive stitching has a *"positive impact on mind health and well-being".* (McKay, 2018) The following stitched story demonstrates trust in the work as mindful teacher of wisdom. Mindfulness also taught me as a facilitator to be more conscious and compassionate to myself. I will expand on this in the recommendations.



Stitched Story: Peace Emoji

Visibly overwhelmed with ideas, the conceptualising of a stitched story can be mindfully simplified through lateral thinking. The minimalist approach of *"less is more"* translated into a real-life lesson. Visible clarity on the focal point decreases deluge.

Passing on Handicraft Skills

Just as the circle of life continues evolution, so does the cyclic circle of handicrafts continue its evolution from generation to generation. Inherited handicraft skills, coupled with the knowhow of threading a stitched story, is passed on through an oral history from hand to hand. The drama therapy volunteer had no handicraft skills. Instead of me teaching her the basic skills while facilitating a more advanced process of storytelling, I suggested the participants all teach her different techniques during the workshop series. On reflecting upon how this personally impacted upon me as a craftivism facilitator, I learned to trust that I could hand over responsibilities to the participants in suggesting they teach her themselves. I became more trusting of the process and of the craftivists in the group. I could let go of control and rather focus on holding.



Stitched Story: Travel Journey

In the participants handing over their own skills, the group dynamics changed affirming the participants as knowledgeable beings with the ability to pass on their skills and knowledge that had been handed to them.

Bridget Makhonza's Stitched Story

The following stitched story makes public the name and identity of the craftivist. Bridget Makhonza is one of the adult women whose stitched story I have received as a craftivism facilitator and she has partaken in craftivism workshops facilitated by me. I would like to clarify that Bridget Makhonza wants her story to be told here. I did not pressure her in any way, and she has reviewed and approved my writing of her story to be included in this dissertation. Bridget's story reveals the complexity of our sisterhood and the communicative relationship between the craftivism facilitator and the traumatically embodied stitched story. I am truly grateful for Bridget's trust in me and her bravery to go public with her story.

Please take heed of the trigger warning relating to gender-based violence included at the beginning of this dissertation before continuing to read this story. You may consider having a supportive person on hand for conversational reflection.



'I will always carry the scars'

Bridget Makhonza spent three years in jail for a crime she didn't commit

The newspaper article entitled: *'I will always carry the scars'* (Raphaely & Makhonza, 2011) introduced me to Bridget Makhonza. It tells of her nearly four-year confinement in Johannesburg Women's Prison for a crime she did not commit. She had defended herself and her girlfriend against a drunk man intent on corrective rape. Her prison experience was not easy, and she speaks of her time there in the newspaper article which can still be accessed online.

As a wrongfully convicted sentenced offender, Bridget studied courses in law from her gaol cell and appealed her own case. After proving her innocence, she was released. Her personal narrative holds many other traumatic chapters too. Bridget had been kidnapped at the age of 13 and held for months as a sex slave. The collective emotional scars were deeply embodied within her.

As the co-ordinator for *#1BillionRising* in Soweto, I was looking for women from the Sowetan community who could rise with teenage girls as supportive mentors. I contacted Bridget and asked if she would rise against gender-based violence with Story Scarves. She said yes without hesitation. Bridget and I met face-to-face for the first time in 2013, on the 14th of February at the *#1BillionRising* on Vilakazi Street. Two very different South African women

whose dialectic lives had brought them to this moment in meeting for a cause we both were fighting for.

As a privileged white woman, I will never understand what it's like to be a black woman, no matter the deep meaningful conversations we share. Yet, I can empathise with a black woman for the commonalities we do share as women in a patriarchal world. This gender-based fact somehow unites us - even though we are still referred to in black and white terms because of our historical inheritance of South Africa's apartheid residues. Despite our very different life experiences, we protest together.

Bridget stood midst all of us in front of a yarn graffiti backdrop of story scarves declaring her a survivor, and shared her story encouraging the girls to rise up against gender-based violence.

"To be the victim of rape is not a life sentence," she said.



Bridget Makhonza at Story Scarves #1BillionRising on Vilakazi Street, Soweto, 14 Feb 2013

That was the start of her connection with Story Scarves in the role of mentor, big sister and lay counsellor. We've known each other for six years now and we've had many one-on-one conversations about her past experiences and her current life labelled with a criminal record. Many times, I have felt helpless, not knowing how to make life easier for her. I've been

deeply touched and hidden my sad emotions instead of visibly expressing them to her. All I could do was listen. All I can still do is listen but now I know through my PaR findings that real active listening is a valuable offering I can give her. It allows her to feel truly heard. And it is good enough.



Bridget's association with Story Scarves allows her to feel valued and has given her a sense of belonging. I now know of distancing techniques and my use of the psychic shield in order to be compassionate to myself. My self-care in receiving her story is paramount.

When I first met her, there was a defensiveness about Bridget, both in the way she built her muscles and her demeaner - perhaps that grew from her prison experience and having to defend herself. She hid her emotions. Over the years, I've noticed an openness to her. She's less defensive and more accessible emotionally.

Bridget had no knowledge of handicrafts, yet she was always interested in what we were making and spent time chatting with participants as they handcrafted. She was a witness to the Story Scarves girls' stories and she too at times, like me, received their stories - yet I never asked her how that affected her and regret that mistake. Her visibly brave outer façade hides a tender and sensitive heart. She too needs to learn distancing techniques as a mentor and lay counsellor. I hope she can learn from my findings too.

I invited Bridget as an assistant to help me during the PaR workshops, setting-up space, and general prep for this new group. I did not expect her to actually partake in the stitching of stories. During the first PaR workshop, Bridget turned to me and said she wanted to make her own stitched story. She picked up an embroidery needle for the first time of her own accord and without prompting.

It is a key piece of research in terms of my findings. The moment Bridget picked up her needle, she became a participant, a craftivist and a maker/teller of her own stitched story. Not only an assistant. As her craftivism facilitator, I consciously had to figure out how to communicate with Bridget differently now in our new relationship as facilitator and participant. Conscious mindfulness helped me hold the space and myself differently in our

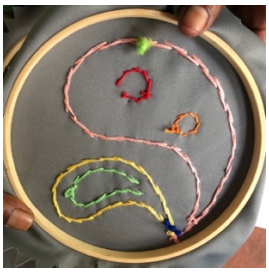
new connection. It was an adjustment for me but one that I managed because of my mindfulness practice. Previously, before this PaR, I never knew how to facilitate mindfully.

Bridget chose the theme of her stitched story as Yin Yang. We discussed how the principle speaks of all things being indivisible yet contradictory. She said Yin Yang symbolised her life in multiple ways. I have chosen not to reveal any more of Bridget's own reflections on her theme choice as they were shared confidentially, and as her craftivism facilitator I respect her privacy.

As the process of stitching continued over the workshop series, Bridget shared how she was fully immersed in the mindfulness of the stitch work, finding herself sitting for hours at home calmly stitching one stitch after another.

Her stitches were incredibly tidy. Usually, the backside of an embroidered work is messy with threads in comparison to the frontside which is stitched neatly. In Bridget's stitched story, perfectly equally sized stitches are visible on the backside of the work as well as the front. The work could be reversible. The yin/yang essence of the visible/invisible dialectic duality reveals itself in her stitched story. Perhaps it represents the hiding of the messy side of her life while projecting a tidy façade. Perhaps it is a message for her to accept the imperfection embodied within all things, both human and crafted. Perhaps it will lead her to celebrate imperfection as beauty. Bridget is mindfully pondering the meaning-making for herself. The craftivism workshops were meant to incite contemplation towards growth that will influence the creation of her next stitched story.



Bridget sent me a text message after completing the workshop series: *"My light and life. The process of making was healing, and I closed painful chapters of my life. Art is healing."* Craftivism has stitched Bridget's resiliency as a survivor.

> *"This is the healing power of sewing: a way to express, sometimes exorcise, pain using a tactile language scripted by a needle and thread."* (Hunter, 2019)

Bridget is telling her own story in her own voice now. In its expression, she is self-healing in multiple languages: verbally through storytelling in our Story Scarves group and in a podcast that is about to be released by a news channel with the topic of incorrectly imprisoned

people; through the book she is currently writing of her life story; and creatively by making her own stitched story embodied with her personal narrative in the PaR. In every way, Bridget is expressing her invisible story and making it visible. In my view, it is unconsciously inviting her into a transitional stage of her life between her past experiences and her future new experiences. There is movement and Bridget and I chatted about how she needs to trust this movement now as it proves she is not static or stuck. As friends, our conversations have shifted towards deeper understanding because of the craftivism process we have shared.

Fine Cell Work is a needlework project in British prisons. Teaching embroidery to prisoners *"boosts their self-worth, instils self-discipline, fosters hope and encourages them to lead independent, crime-free lives."* (Fine Cell Work, 2019) If Bridget had been offered the same opportunity in the South African prison system, she may have found that the privacy of stitching alone in her cell would have given her *"respite from the clang and boom of prison life"* through the peacefulness of *"the rhythmic, repetitive act of sewing"* as a *"tactile antidote to the harsh and hard environment."* (Hunter, 2019)

Ruth First was a South African anti-apartheid activist. She was the first white woman to be arrested, charged and imprisoned for treason. Ruth too was, in my eyes, wrongly convicted under the laws of apartheid. While in solitary confinement, the companionship of her needlework offered Ruth self-preservation. On her lapel, Ruth stitched lines to count her days and unpicked lines to gain time. (Hunter, 2019) For all prisoners, needlework can offer a calming mindfulness practice as relief from the invisible inner turmoil. Bridget has found her connection to needlework and the passion she now has for it will last a lifetime.

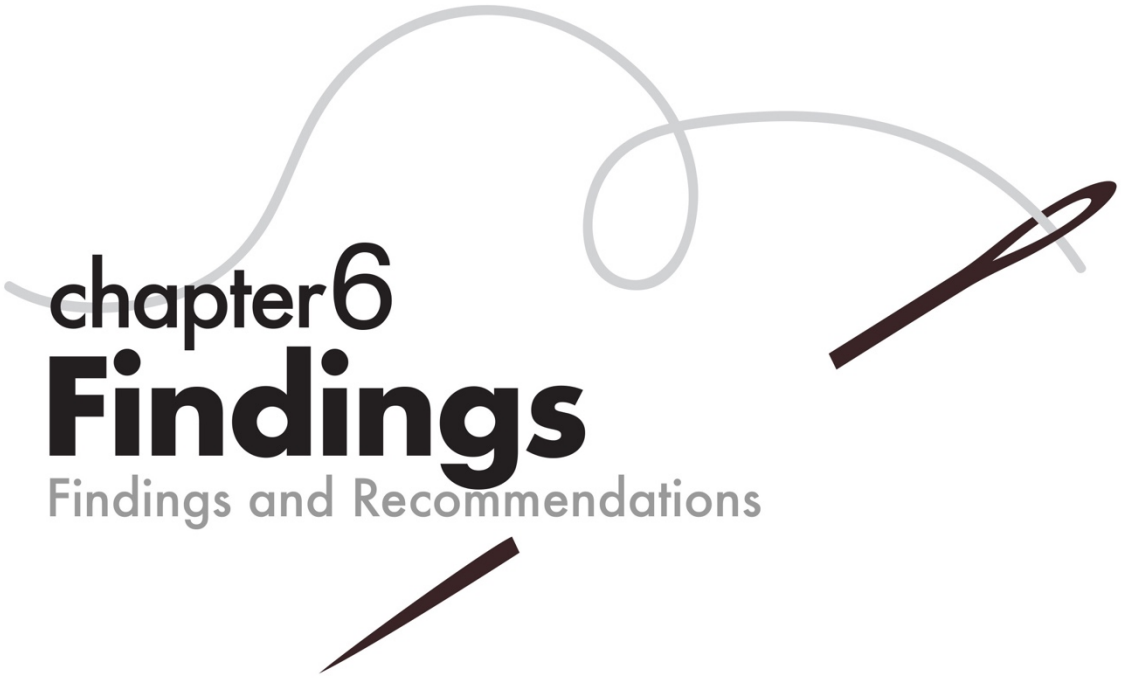
Through the Eye of the Needle – The Stitched Story of Esther Nisenthal Krinitz

In summing up the impact craftivism has on our humanity through the sharing of personal narratives in stitched stories, I hereby honour Esther Nisenthal Krinitz. (Through the Eye of the Needle - The Art of Esther Nisenthal Krinitz, 2014) Esther was a Holocaust survivor. Embodied within 36 fabric panels of intricate embroidered collage, she stitched her memories of genocide and the trauma of World War II. Esther's language was composed of an alphabet of stitches. Once she discovered the medium of handicrafts, she could express her difficult memories and her life story spilled out of her. In her daughter's words, *"Nobody could tell my mother's story. It was her story to tell."*

Through the eye of her needle, Esther stitched the chapters of her childhood in rural Poland. Her connection to nature is obvious through the stitched blossoms that continued to bloom despite the human injustice she witnessed while hiding her Yiddish from German soldiers and watching her community being taken to concentration camps. The dialectic contrasts of the living of her life - the birth of new flowers, the death of innocent people.

Esther's self-activism through craftivism connected her to lost family and loved ones. In connecting her to her ancestors, it also connects her to future generations she is passing her story onto. Zillions of her stitches confronted zillions of her memories safely through the emotional distancing and holding technique of craftistry. Mindfulness practice allowed Esther to be consciously aware of each moment, each thought and each anecdotal recollection through her repetitive rhythmicality of stitch by stitch. She literally stitched visual snapshots which had been invisibly imprinted into her being for decades. In their visible externalising, healing took place and Esther was then able to verbally talk about her experiences through her stitched stories.

By Esther's daughters making the documentary of her stitched life, digitised imagery, photographs and their embodied heartistry extended the reach of Esther's story, globally. Me, a stranger, deeply resonated with Esther's stitched story at the southern tip of Africa - a geographical distance Esther never would have dreamt her story would reach. Esther has made my own grandparents' stories in Vilna, Lithuania, become more visible to me – something my Boba and Zaida could never speak of because of the loss they invisibly held their entire lives. Esther's needlework has not only documented her personal human experience. Her craftivism gently yet powerfully communicates her message - stop xenophobia and genocide which are still repeated by humanity in our current time. Esther's medium is her message.



chapter 6
Findings
Findings and Recommendations

Chapter 6: Findings and Recommendations

6.1 Findings from the Practice as Research (PaR)

Feeling the Discomfort

I cannot deny that it was difficult for me to rethread into craftivism again after my hiatus. I inherently know that to grow I need to be uncomfortable at certain moments because comfort equals stagnation. I had to *"lean into the discomfort of the work"* (Brown, 2010) because *“discomfort brings engagement and change. Discomfort means you’re doing something others are unlikely to do, because they’re hiding out in the comfortable zone.”* (Godin, 2009)

Disassociating with Secondary Traumatic Stress

I realise now, that I was unconsciously associating craftivism with STS because of my embodied memories. When I became conscious of this, I acknowledged it and dealt with my feelings until I didn’t associate craftivism with those past memories any longer.

Body Memory

As much as I put everything in place to prevent it, my unconscious destabilised me with its invisibly stored repository of memories. The burnout and secondary traumatic stress (STS) I’d previously experienced, was still in my body’s memory. Triggers evoked deep visceral recollections. Slowly but surely, I was succumbing to cumulative bombardment stressors through the continuous aftershocks that swayed my recalibrated being until stress enveloped me fully. Like an addict in recovery may relapse after rehab, I experienced the overwhelming feelings again. They resurfaced slowly, activating over time.

They began surfacing while I wrote the case study retrospectively. I reconnected with archival photographs embodying their own materiality. My interpretive process incorporated visual observations and image-based analysis. (Mitchell, 2011) Visuality coupled with semiotics, metaphors and memorial voices in my journal entries played fundamental roles in evoking innately felt emotions within me. “*There are inherent risks to the practitioner and client in trauma counselling such as vicarious trauma and retraumatisation, respectively.”* (American Psychological Association, 2018)

Then, delving into my research, I watched the documentary, *City of Joy*. (City of Joy: The Film, 2016) Bearing witness to the stories of Congolese women who have survived horrific gender-based violence, left me drained. I was angry at Western mining conglomerates who caused the militia to rape women and land so that they could mine coltan, an ingredient

used in smartphones. Coltan is causing harm for humanity on one hand and communication for humanity on the other hand. This dilemma and its association with my smartphone made me feel disillusioned.

Then, I sat in the audience witnessing *Performing #MeToo: The Practice of Protest*. (Msimanga, 2018) It reflected upon the ways we protest rape and the war on women's bodies. I watched as the performer swallowed a round of real bullets. My uncontrollable tears poured from me. Afterwards, I wrote her an open letter which I posted on Facebook. Certain fellow audience members read it, though they didn't respond. The next day, I overheard one say that I should have attended a reflective debriefing. There hadn't been one following the intentionally trigger stirring play. I was exhausted.

An Open Letter to Nondumiso Lwazi Msimanga

Dear Nondumiso,

As I stood before you, your hands in mine, I could vicariously feel the metal projectiles firing through your innards, invisibly propelling along the barrel of your intestine. I looked into your eyes and had to turn away from the front line of combat. I was an ally in active duty contemplating disserting our army, wondering when cessation of this unbearable war will be in our visible sight, not just in our dreams.

Yet, upon reflection, I turn back to you now. I continue to stand by you in soldiering on. Dodging bullets as art-ivists births a fine line between art-illery and art-istry. We must wage a gentler war on ourselves, on our bodies, on our beings... because the war we're fighting is harsh enough.

Know that you do not have to ingest the calibrated calibres in order to batter yourself more than this war has already battered you. You do not have to do it for the multitudes of us women in solidarity with you, either. Be gentler on yourself, Ndu.

Gratitude abounds for your bravery in standing before me, before us and making the invisible visible.

Walking beside you always,

Stacey

Revisiting *Ukuphahla*

I'd experienced burnout before surrounding similar topics so, I could cope with it better this time around. Instead of criticising myself, I realised that I'm an empathic human being touched by others. I am alive. I felt it, I acknowledged it. I faced it and the world I live in.

In experiencing burnout again after recovery, I realise that my own ancestors were guiding me to revisit certain lessons through *ukuphahla.* I was meant to revisit the cleansing of my energies and the story that lead me to the initial burnout in order to truly learn my lesson. Running on empty does not equate to conserving my precious energy. My own spiritual consciousness listened to my body and its need for self-care.

> *"We must be willing to encounter darkness and despair when they come up and face them, over and over again if need be, without running away or numbing ourselves."* (Kabat-Zinn, 1994)

Externalising Embodied Stitched Stories for Healing

The practice-led research has demonstrated through stitched stories, inherent healing is in the externalising of the internalised story. The same happened for me. By creatively writing my story, I surfaced my difficult memories into an externalised imprint. The border crossing of my body boundary incited change.

Through telling my own story, the expressive art of creative writing allowed me to express my introspective invisibles which were sewn into the lining of my being. In the movie, Phantom Thread, a dressmaker tells, *"You can sew almost anything into the canvas of a coat. Secrets, coins, words, little messages."* (Wikipedia, 2017) The coat was the conduit medium for hidden messages as was my embodied being. *"Storytelling enables the teller to reconcile the past with the present, validating the present by the sense of its history."* (Morris, 2013, p. 15)

Stitched stories illuminate the invisibly hidden layers by surfacing the submerged. Through their sharing, they encourage shift by allowing the actual to meet the possible *"which provides the same externalization process so we can see ourselves in the story as a character and hopefully dis-identify with the act of being traumatized*." (Lambert, 2013)

Joe Lambert continues to explain how reframing embodied stories can allow healing: *"Once we re-frame the story, our bodies can release the pathologies and we get both emotionally and physically healthier."* (Lambert, 2013) Brain surgeon James Doty concurs that cerebral

action affects our physiological body because the brain and the heart are connected *"both physically and metaphorically and talk to each other"* (Doty, 2018)

Self-Defined verses Self-Differentiated

One of my most important personal findings as a craftivism facilitator, has been in balancing being self-defined verses self-differentiated. Me being self-defined is to truly know myself. Me being self-differentiated is being able to cope with other's traumas and joys because I know who I am and know how to negotiate my boundaries from one context to another. This insight emerged from a conversation I had years ago with Walter Pike, a marketing specialist whom I had met while working at an ad agency and then reconnected with via his own activism initiatives. Speaking to me about *Story Scarves*, I hadn't fully understood Walter's wisdom at that time, until it resurfaced in my thoughts during the PaR and made sense to me. (Pike, 2014)

The advanced work of this dissertation could not be done directly after my secondary traumatic stress (STS) event as the Teller, me, needs to be in a phase of insightful self-growth with the ability to self-differentiate in order to cope with the revisiting of traumatic events. The reason why this work could be done now is because I had an accountable and trusted connection with my support team and coupled with the passing of time it has allowed for meaningful understanding for myself and of myself.

I share now an anecdote as an example of how I delved into the negotiation between the self-defined and self-differentiated of me as craftivism facilitator.

During the PaR workshops, I felt calmer during facilitation than I had during the *Story Scarves* workshops because of my use of mindfulness practices. Yet, there were many disquieting moments that fractured my calmness. The new techniques I was piloting to create a more compassionate ease for myself weren't the be-all and end-all solutions to becoming a perfect facilitator.

In the second workshop during the verbal telling of stories, one participant began to cry. She had multiple problems and a complex story that she needed to express and stitch. There was an awkward tension. I felt overwhelming helplessness. I was almost about to take on her problems and suggest solutions when I reminded myself that **her problem was hers to hold, not mine to solve**. I consciously told myself to remain self-differentiated. ***"It can touch me but it's not mine to hold,"*** I repeated to myself silently. The participant had to encounter her own struggle in order to fathom her own journey. All within a few quick

seconds, I managed to check myself, scan my emotions, acknowledge my discomfort and then put into action my newly learnt mindful practice.

Overall during the PaR, I grappled with the dialectic dualities of my personal struggle and opposing renewal. It was exhausting yet invigorating. Bewildering yet enlightening. It was filled with blurred flashbacks of the past while in the present. I self-sabotaged myself with doubt and then encouraged myself with bold certainty. There was a discourse between the differing opposites and their duelling arguments constantly surrounded me. I realise now, that it was me in the midst of my own transformation into becoming a good enough craftivism facilitator. The renewal did not come easily, it was a struggle.

Another anecdote describes my battle with myself. I had envisioned the theme of imperfection for one of the PaR workshops to highlight that a good enough stitched story, despite its flaws, was more interesting than a perfectly stitched story, and how that relates to life.

During the group artwork process of creating the *Threaded Tapestry*, one participant took the lead without being appointed the leader. She directed the other participants telling them not to pull the canvas while they all worked closely huddled together side-by-side around the table. I hadn't wanted there to be definite direction. Group work needs collaboration and I suppose the hierarchical formation unfolded without actual intent. This caused one participant to stop participating totally and move to stand outside the group near the food table. When I asked why she had stopped participating, she said she didn't want to do anything wrong by pulling the canvas. I knew the solution was for me as facilitator to gently sway the group to a more lateral collaboration where each participant was contributing despite the imperfections of a pulled canvas. I needed to show that groupwork is a give-and-take democratic process by giving support to each other and taking shared experiential knowledge from each other. I also had to lead them to realise that a pulled canvas could be cut, allowed to breath, and then darned.



Imperfection = visible possibility

Intentionally cutting the imperfect warped canvas allowed the fabric to breathe and offered slits for mending. The visible darning of the imperfection allowed possibilities for creativity and added interest.

I decided to pose a question surrounding the idea that an imperfect mistake allowed interesting outcomes. But I couldn't seem to phrase that question properly. I realised that each participant's definition of perfection was unique. Afterwards, my lecturer chatted with

me and suggested that I should have posed the question thus: *"What does perfect look like for you?"* I bashed myself silently on my inability to pose a simple effective question instead of gently affirming to myself that I needed to practice effective questioning tactics so that next time I'd know how.

Just like writers seek the right descriptive word that fits a phrase, so craftivists seek the right spool of thread, a button saved for sentimental reasons or a specific fabric scrap to use at the right moment on the right artefact. So, as craftivism facilitator, I too had to scrounge for the right way to silently affirm my own ability in myself, quietening my inner critique, just as I was affirming the participants faith in their own ability.

I had to remind myself that being a good enough craftivism facilitator is good enough. I too am not perfect. It was ok if I *dropped a stitch* now and then. A dropped stitch may either lead to an unintentional hole in knitted fabric or it can be a technique drop-stitch included in a knitting pattern that results in an interesting vertical run in the fabric. I'm human. It's ok.

I had to mediate between my solitary invisible internalised conversation and my visible conversation with the group. Either way, a conversation is a two-way exchange. It was a delicate border crossing. I know I'll get better at it over time.

6.2 Recommendations for Craftivism Facilitators

The following recommendations for craftivism facilitators were piloted during the practice-led research. They may assist other teaching-artists, craftivists and creative arts practitioners. I examine and evaluate each recommendation by framing my course of action in my own practice as a critically reflexive practitioner.

Research Instruments and Teaching Aids

My two research instruments were the Workshop Series Structure and the Typical Session Plan included previously. I used an action-reflection cycle informed by Playback Theatre's *"shift, adapt and adopt"* process. (Rivers, 2015) I wrote a reflection after each workshop which included descriptions, analysis and interpretations. My reflections determined the session plan for the next workshop.

My teaching aids included: Craftivism Manifesto, print outs of quotes on the theme to inspire conversation, relevant books on handicraft skills and storytelling, and I made sample examples of differing handicraft finishes and techniques.

Facilitate by Osmosis and Knowhow

As a teaching-artist prior to this practice-led research, I learnt to facilitate through osmosis. I gradually assimilated my know-how through trial and error. I depended greatly upon my own intuition during fieldwork. As Guy Claxton says, it was my Tortoise Mind - slowly but surely gathering proficiency and skill in facilitating craftivism projects. Claxton explains that for real understanding, we must balance both our *"Hare Brain and Tortoise Mind to liberate creativity."* (Claxton, 2000) He says that sometimes *"intelligence increases when you think less."* So, sometimes I let go of percolating and made vitally important quick decisions on-the-fly and in the moment. *"Know-how is, as I say, formatted differently to knowledge in that it grows by osmosis (rather than comprehension)."*

Gaining know-how before theoretical knowledge is opposite to how practitioners usually learn. Yet, this has been my unique journey of discovery. During this PaR, I implemented the theory I've recently learnt to guide me in being a more conscious facilitator. The researcher in me can now name my knowhow. With the additional knowledge, I do feel more competent now. Yet, I still fully believe in the osmosis of organic knowhow.

Good Enough is Good Enough

An important finding: *good enough is good enough*. For a craftivism facilitator, letting go of what Winnicott calls the *"the toll exacted by perfectionism"* allows gentler self-care, just as we promote gentle activism. (The School of Life, 2019) Previously, my inner critic played havoc with me. Now, I'm aware of my own critical thoughts and replace them with advice: there is no wrong or right, simply good enough. As the Sufi poet Rumi wrote, *"Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing, there is a field, I'll meet you there."* (Barks, 2003) Neil Gaiman also speaks of imperfection through making mistakes, *"if you are making mistakes, then you are making new things, trying new things, learning, living, pushing yourself, changing yourself, changing your world."* (Gaiman, 2012)

With the wisdom these interlocutors have shared foremost in my mind, my personal good enough guiding principles for my practice include:

I'm a gentle catalyst inspiring meaningful creativity in others.
I'm a discussion initiator both verbally and creatively.
I build group cohesion and hold space while we encounter real-life together.
I actively listen and pose effective questions.
I advocate for the group/community to take the lead.
… and I can make amazingly imperfect mistakes.

Holding Space

Previously, there were times when I could not hold the traumatic space of the craftivism group effectively. I had desperately wanted to fix other's problems and felt powerless when I couldn't. Eventually, as shown in the story beneath *Story Scarves*, I could not continue doing the work.

In the PaR, I consciously concentrated on holding space effectively. As a craftivism facilitator, I offered a container space for myself and the group. *"While supporting their boundaries and protecting our own, we offer unconditional support, compassion, and gentle guidance."* (Plett, 2019) In the liminal space of transition, I was present with the group while we allowed and waited for the next transitory moment. I noticed and observed what was evoked within me instead of being reactive. In holding a balance between engagement and reflection as an empathic facilitator, I was aware of the duality between sharing and silence to *"walk besides, to be on the path"* with others. (Rogers, 1993) It is in this holding of space where transformation occurs.

Most importantly, while I held space for the group, I'm grateful to my space holders for holding space for me. My space holders included my supervisor, my lecturer and my classmates. My own psychotherapist has held space for me during clinical supervision and walked beside me insuring my consistent debriefing. I know my space holders are being held by other space holders. The holding expands until we all hold each other. So, I kept in mind that the participants in the group were actually in the centre of a collective holding container.

> *"It's virtually impossible to be a strong space holder unless we have others who will hold space for us."* (Plett, 2019)

The holding relationships between all the holders creates a safe space where survivors of gender-based violence can heal. It reminds us that *"bearing witness even within the confines of that sanctuary, is an act of solidarity."* (Herman, 1997) I have realised that in this solidarity, I may have to face the trauma of both the victim and the perpetrator. I now know that in holding space for the other to be heard and acknowledged, there is a container to make the unspeakable speakable in the communicative dialect of craftivism. The pain can be encountered and processed in new and corrective ways.

> *"Perhaps the most "spiritual" thing any of us can do is simply to look through our own eyes, see with eyes of wholeness, and act with integrity and kindness."* (Kabat-Zinn, 1994)

Mindfulness Practice

"Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally." (Kabat-Zinn, 1994) By fully committing to cultivating presence through intentional awareness of the now, we *"embody as best we can an orientation of calmness, mindfulness, and equanimity right here and right now."* Mindfulness practice through presencing leads to finding our inner sanctuary of calm and the realisation of ability without need for improvement.

At the start of each workshop, similar to Jon Kabat-Zinn's mindful meditation guidance, I led a simple mindful practice with breath-work. *"Just watch this moment, without trying to change it at all. What is happening? What do you feel? What do you see? What do you hear?"* (Kabat-Zinn, 1994) This concept relates to the Buddhism teachings of *Mindfulness of Body* through embodying the breath. I continued with *Mindfulness of Feelings* by acknowledging our emotions. Then, I led a gratitude offering with awareness of the *"heart-mind"* (citta) connection through *Mindfulness of Mind.* We then did a warmup exercise interconnecting individual balls of yarn into a Web of Yarn, which manifested the inter-existence of all things for the *Mindfulness of Dharma.* (ThoughtCo., 2017)

Ellen Langer speaks of a Western scientific notion and that being present is not what mindfulness is. Mindfulness is actively noticing new things that result in you being present. Either way, whether Eastern or Western practice, *"When people are encouraged to be mindful, enormous improvements occur."* (Langer, 2014) We become centred and calmer.

I also used mindfulness practice to shift heavy energy into a lighter vibrancy. When one participant was tearful, I asked her to sit, breath and notice something new in the room which helped to calmly re-balance and re-centre her. This was a significant achievement for me as I hadn't managed to distil any heaviness successfully during my previous work. I hadn't used mindfulness practices then.

Langer says that, *"you're either doing something mindfully or mindlessly."* I do not think I was a teaching-artist who did things mindlessly, I just didn't consciously know how to be fully mindful then as I do now as a craftivism facilitator.

Mindfulness practices allowed both me and the participants to feel present and grounded. We each automatically self-adjusted to being in this time and space. A craftivism facilitator needs to gently guide the group's emotional quotient in the direction of collective well-being, and in my opinion that's what mindfulness can do.

Take it Slow

In contrast to the fast pace at which we live our lives in the 21st century, the slow movement suggests a consciously mindful and measured pace to find balance at the right speed. The slow philosophy has been applied to various subcultures from slow food to slow cities. The Slow Cloth Movement follows these low-impact principles valuing quality over quantity for *"joy, skill, contemplation, beauty,* and expression." (Lipson, 2012)

Slow Cloth activists rise against poor labour practices in the fast textile industry that produces huge quantities of cheap clothing. In contrast, the handmade context is by nature slow allowing connection and reflection within the crafting circle. The mindful embodiment by hand, *"means the maker has a relationship with the object being made because he or she physically engages with it."* (Wellesley-Smith, 2015) Needle and yarn offer an inherently mindful and thoughtful approach especially with the simplicity of *'plain sewing'* using the basic running stitch in a repetitive rhythmic action.

Similar to chanting and breath work during meditation, the repetitive nature of hand-stitching calms and centres the being. Repetition does not equate to exact duplication of a stitch in length, texture, weight or colour. Rather, it is a repetition of a stich that is harmonious with other stitches in harnessing hand-stitch rhythms. Mindful rhythmic stitching creates the *"relaxation response,"* also referred to as *"in the zone"* or in *"flow,"* which incite calmness. Mindful stitching emphasises the process not the end product. Its sensory tactility connects the feel of the fabric and the way it reacts when the needle embodies it. *"Whole process"* work involves the wide sphere of hand making, including ethical use of materials, acknowledging cultural attributes and thoughtful reflective meaning making.

> "*The combination of engagement with materials, using one's hands and the level of absorption in an activity can be highly therapeutic."* (Wellesley-Smith, 2015, p. 88)

Stitched stories embrace mindfulness in the processing of personal narratives. As in the textile artistry of embroidery, there is *"no hurry, time is on my side"*. (Drenth, 2018) There is time for the work to emerge from the nurturing substrate and transmute into the message.

The act of handcrafting is therapeutic and *"the repetitive nature of hand sewing is a soothing rhythm, which nurtures and helps mend."* (Mr X Stitch, 2013)

The artist Bettina Matzkuhn speaks of the slowness of handicrafts in comparison with other parts of our modern lives: *"I like my Mac, my phone, my digital camera, but embroidery gives me time to think."* (Prain, 2014)

Distancing Techniques

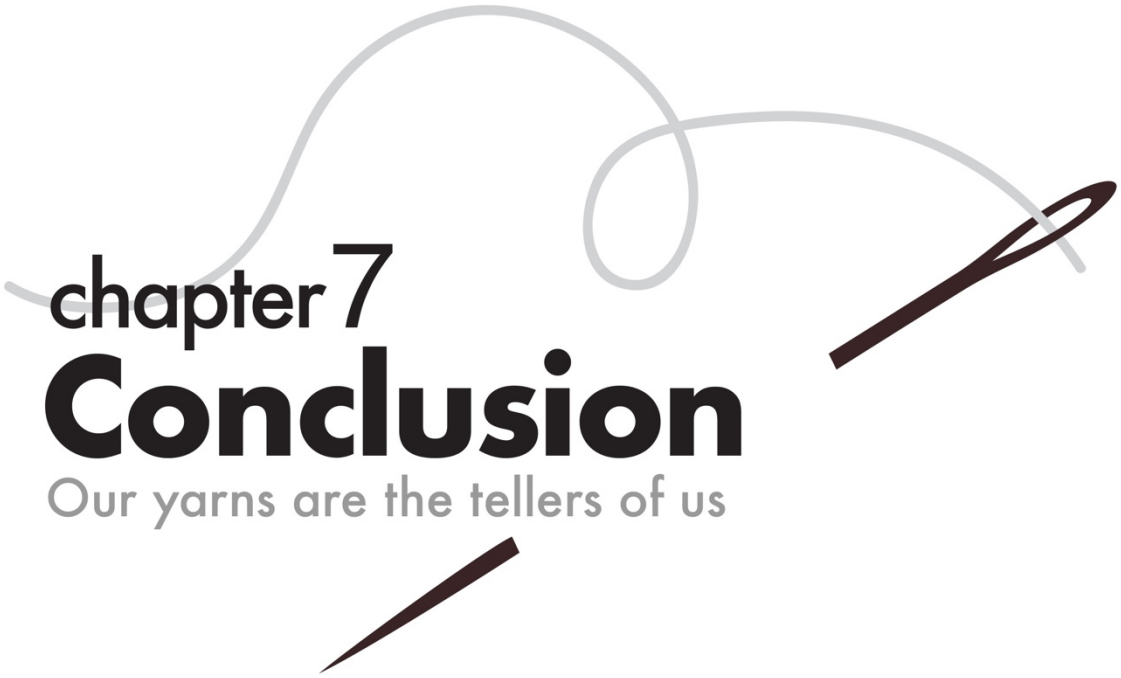
I didn't have knowledge of any self-distancing and perspective broadening techniques in my previous work. I sat in a clinical supervision session in reflective conversation after my perfect storm and asked how I could cope with my sensitive soul while still being able to be moved by other's stories. I didn't want to be numb or uncaring. I just wanted to know how to cope better when receiving traumatic stories. *"Their stories can touch you but they're not yours to hold,"* my psychotherapist said. I reframed it as my own: *"It can touch me but it's not mine to hold,"* and saved it in a note on my smartphone. I read it back to myself over and over and over again... and I still do. I mindfully remind myself each time I'm touched by someone else's story – I feel empathy, yet it's not my story to hold. I am a separate being to the Teller. I do not have to mitigate other's relationships with themselves while being empathic. This distancing technique assisted me immensely through the PaR.

Psychic Shield

I created my own psychic shield as a distancing technique. It was a defender around me to protect my physical body and mental wellbeing, anchoring me in strength. As my secret invisible membrane, it protected me by either absorbing or reflecting psychic energies. Before each workshop began, I put it in place using the following steps: define my goal, centre, draw energy, set my intention, set my shield and shell. My shield assisted me in coping with receiving stories. I remained a listener, not an absorber or a solver. I lowered my shield after the workshop.

Yet, my psychic shield was penetrated when I was off guard. A participant's wound triggered a similar wound of my own. Curator Sarah Quinton says that *"the intimate nature of such handwork creates a deep connection between the artwork and its maker – and ultimately the viewer. Textiles can be the medium through which I can get closer to you."* (Prain, 2014) Yet, as a craftivism facilitator the closeness to the participant needs constant checking and awareness of the unconscious invisible relationship between us. My personal boundary crossing must stay intact. I can be touched by her story, but I mustn't be overly affected by it.

In this acknowledgement, I realised that each participant invited me to create a new strategy of engagement for myself. There was a definite change for me from being completely unboundaried in my previous work to mostly boundaried and supported during the PaR.



chapter 7
Conclusion
Our yarns are the tellers of us

Chapter 7: Conclusion - Our Yarns are the Tellers of Us

7.1 Summing Up

To sum-up in answer to my main research question, the work of craftivism, specifically through the methodology of stitched stories, makes the invisible visible on multiple levels.

Firstly, it manifests in the participants through the transforming of their submerged personal stories into physical artefacts stitched with symbolic images, patterns, lines and colours. Each expresses an internal struggle that's made visible. It occurs in two ways: their stories become visible for their fellow group members to witness and for themselves personally in the form of self-activism.

Secondly, it manifests in me as the auto-ethnographer surfacing my submerged story which embodied internalised trauma. For my own self-activism, the externalising and making visible of my stitched story is self-healing while offering a visible platform as a conversation starter for other craftivism facilitators to share their similar stories. By expressing my internal struggles as a teaching-artist/craftivist of *Story Scarves*, it also offers me a different way of being with the participants - a more consciously compassionate way for myself.

Thirdly, it has created a clear method for craftivism facilitators to follow while holding space for craftivists to make their invisibles visible in their own communities.

The findings and recommendations that resulted from the PaR answer my secondary research questions on developing a set of boundaries, methods and processes for craftivism facilitators and teaching-artists working in the intersection between community-based projects, issue-led activism and mindful creative expression.

Resourcing and re-resourcing tools include cleansing rituals, breathwork, somatic experiencing, artistry/craftistry and clinical supervision in order for a craftivism facilitator to de-role, cleanse and re-enrol. A sensitive paradigm for compassionate facilitation through self-preservation recommends mindfulness, embodied reflection and artistic expression in order for a craftivism facilitator to be an informed, prepared and supported creative arts practitioner. Further recommendations include facilitation by osmosis and knowhow, knowing that being good enough is good enough, holding space mindfully, taking it slow with mindful stitch work and using distancing techniques such as a psychic shield.

7.2 Communication through Craftivism

In summing up the idea of the medium is the message, the vocabulary of our varied stitches, whether blanket stitch, lazy daisy, French knot, double crochet or purl 'n plain, offer us the dialect for conversing with each other to transform a thread of yarn into a tapestry. Our uniquely individual ways of stitching offer us each our own sewn autograph, signature and identity.

The philosopher Martin Buber refers to the heart of interconnected dialogue between people as the *"I–Thou"* relationship. Interpersonal communication allows the living of life in relation to others. As an auto-ethnographer, by expressing my intrapersonal thoughts I have transferred my inner dialogue to the interpersonal dialogue between me and the craftivism collective. This embodied encounter is essential for human connectedness. As Buber affirms, *"I–Thou can only be spoken with the whole being."* (Popova, 2018) With our hearts. It provides a platform for meaningful conversation about the causes craftivists impact upon.

The weaver Consuelo Jimenez Underwood speaks of her work with Indigenous people: *"My work is not about beauty. It is about life. Blood. Angst. Energy to the maximum."* (Prain, 2014) Her stories are wholeheartedly woven with the whole being of her community.

My intent now is to create an interpersonal dialogue between Buber and McLuhan, to consider their two philosophies.

Buber considers that *"I–It can never be spoken with the whole being"* and *"It exists only through being bounded by others."* McLuhan considers the medium as the message. In craftivism, that medium can be considered an "it" as a handcrafted item. From this perspective between both interlocutors, the "it" as handcrafted item exists only by being embodied by beings – the craftivist/maker, the teller, the conduit and the receiver. Therefore, the beings surrounding the stitched story artefact are the communicators.

Yet, in my experience and as shown throughout this dissertation, an "it" as a stitched story is an embodied being. An embodied stitched story can communicate a message in its own craftivism dialect because of the narrative held within its fibres, threading the stories of all the beings who created it, witnessed its creation and received its story. Thus, the medium is the message.

7.3 Dialectic Duality of the Visible and Invisible

The inverses of visible and invisible cannot exist alone as their dialectic duality creates the full story. A stitched story is the vessel holding the tension between the two while genuine congruence is sewn. Similar to invisible and visible mending, they co-exist and co-create.

Craftivism holds dialectic duality in order to activate the message:

> *"Art should comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable."* (Cruz, 1997)

The duel between comfort (uninformed complacency of the bystander or savvy knowledge of the informed) and discomfort (during agitation) leads to impactful craftivism. Gender-based violence discomforts the fabric of our society. A craftivism facilitator may be discomforted through the receiving of traumatic stitched stories. Yet, the craftivism process comforts the craftivist through the mindful action of handicrafts and the ability to take action against the abuses imposed on our community. The tough conversations and difficult messages are comfortably communicated through gentle craftivism instead of uncomfortably violent protests.

The dialectic duality of the idiomatic expression, *"a picture is worth a thousand words"* (Wikipedia, 2019) refers to the concept that an image can visually communicate the complexity of an event more successfully than a written description could. In my view, this is both true and false. Its truth is confirmed in the fact that the essence of a yarn bomb has to be visibly seen, either in real-life or in a documented photograph, in order for the viewer to fully comprehend its essence. A thousand words could never fully describe it. Yet, an image can hide the invisibles that lie beneath its facade. A snapshot of vibrant scarves carefully crafted and perfectly cropped in pursuit of the perfect façade may be deceptive. It may hide the reality of multitudes of invisibles. Then, a word-by-word description is needed to unthread the stitched story embodied within the perfect picture to reveal the imperfect truth. Then that picture is worthy of a thousand-words.

Another dialectic duality exists within us.

> *“Artists are people driven by the tension between the desire to communicate and the desire to hide.”* (Winnicott, 1989)

Communicating the message through storytelling takes brave risking while it may be easier to stay silent in hiding. Winnicott continues, *“It is a joy to be hidden, and disaster not to be found.”* As a creative storyteller, trusting the metaphor and the language of symbolism assists in crossing the border from invisible to visible, silent to heard, hidden to seen and private to public.

A whole-heartedly distilled narrative is creatively sewn when there is a balance between the multiple dialectic dualities. The essential key is in how the concealed is revealed – gently and consciously through a mindful process in a trusting ethos. Then, the Teller may "*walk inside your story and own it"* rather than *"stand outside your story and hustle for your worthiness."* (Brown, 2015)

> *"A black swan is an event, positive or negative, that is deemed improbable yet causes massive consequences."* (Taleb, 2010)

The black swan event is an *outlier*, a random yet significant occurrence marginalised outside the expected. Yet, this highly improbable event can elicit high impact. There have been multiple black swans embodied within the stitched story of *Story Scarves*. One of those black swan events, was the reading of a tweet which led to us joining *#1BillionRising*. It led to the invisible of us becoming visible to others. Social media makes a craftivism project visible worldwide – without that platform *Story Scarves* would have remained invisible to a larger collective. That visible tweet sparked an improbable journey that has led me to write this visible dissertation. It has taken courage to embrace the black swan and ignite that incandescent particle into a wholehearted flame threading our lives and our stories.

7.4 Stitched Stories

A stitched story is a handmade narrative embodied into textile fabric with threads of fibrous filaments creating an object shaped by the human hand skilled in handicrafts. A stitched story also suggests a metaphorical stitching with symbolic meaning. The narrative can be visual or verbal.

Fundamental to a stitched story, described as a *"form of thought"* (Parker, 2010)*, is the* artisan/craftivist's ability to transform that thought into a visibly embodied *"expression of their inner life."* (Kandinsky, 1977) In this externalising, the invisible becomes visible making possible the authentic weaving of the complex narrative.

> *"Thought is a thread, and the raconteur is a spinner of yarns - but the true storyteller, the poet, is a weaver."* (Bringhurst, 1992)

A stitched story's essence supersedes its visible aesthetic. The painter Rothko intentionally created thought provoking environments, not paintings. (The Silence of Mark Rothko, 2014) To the unconscious viewer of his paintings, they may be interpreted as colour washes, yet they hold so much more for the insightful eye. The abstract artist Kandinsky speaks of his devotion to the inner essence of his artworks:

"*The relationships in art are not necessarily ones of outward form but are founded on inner sympathy of meaning."* (Kandinsky, 1977)

The aesthetic façade overlays an invisible true essence that becomes visible through meaning-making. Similarly, craftivism aims to create both analogue and digital thought-provoking media, that primarily invite significant dialogue on our society's issues.

"We think of our lives – and of stories – as spun threads, extended and knitted or interwoven with others into the fabric of communities." (Prain, 2014)

Time Travelling

Stitched into the handwoven tapestries of our lives, our yarns beckon contemplative pauses.

"I don't think it is possible to contribute to the present moment in any meaningful way while being wholly engulfed by it. It is only by stepping out of it, by taking a telescopic perspective, that we can then dip back in and do the work which our time asks of us." (Popova, 2015)

Distancing, pausing and the passage of time have harvested clarity on the visible and invisible that elucidate this story. By stepping out of it, I have managed to dip back in and see more clearly. Time has shown that a comprehensive yarn is more than the sum of its individual anecdotes or singular threads. My yarn is simply one strand woven into the multiple strands of our collective yarn, just as one simple stitch has limitless potentiality for embroidered complexity.

"Each of our stories is a universe. Each one of us is living a story. To discover its shape and essence is essential to soul making." (Metzger, 2019)

The soul of the story gathers meaning as our past articulates with our present and is remembered for our future. Time has offered me a chance to distil my "*crafterthoughts" or afterthoughts* by capturing, shaping and re-shaping the right writing of my own story in the context of our collective. I could not write this dissertation rightly, by discarding my previous experiences. They have shaped my life and, inseparably from it, my artistry. They form the basis of my current insights, no matter whether the ethical premise in research is to stay with the present. I cannot deny my past, it travels with me. There's been enough redacting, censorship and obscurity in our story already.

"Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards." (Kierkegaard, 1996)

Similarly, *"We write to taste life twice, in the moment and in retrospection*." (Nin, 1974) I can weave this story now, in spite of and despite everything that I've experienced. The substrate on which this story lives nourishes the current learnings/messages growing from it.

Owning this story, my story, has forced me to peel layer upon layer of the cloth swaddling our material worlds over time. Lesley Millar speaks of that materiality through cloth and how it is a metaphor for the living of life:

> *"Cloth, in its intimate relationship with our body, bears the marks of our being, both on the surface and embedded within the structure. The strains, stresses, stains and smells we impress upon this second skin form an archive of our most intimate life. At the same time, cloth is also the membrane through which we establish our sense of 'becoming' and formalize our relationship with the external world, while the fabric remorselessly records the evidence of those interactions."* (Holmes, 2015)

Unfurling my layers both physically and emotionally through craftivism has taken courage.

Le Coeur in Courage

The word *courage* originates from the French word for heart, *le coeur*. Wholeheartedness equates to courageous aliveness because *"courage is necessary to make being and becoming possible."* (May, 1975) Permitting ourselves to be wholeheartedly seen takes bravery.

> *"Intimacy requires courage because risk is inescapable. Escapist creativity is that which lacks encounter."* (May, 1975)

I have intimately encountered the vulnerable messiness of me by trailing my craftivism work *"into its darkest corners and strangest manifestations"* (Saltz , 2018) unveiling aspects of myself that I didn't want to make known, until the work required me to.

I realised that *"Humanity is a tapestry. Remove one thread and our social fabric can unravel."* (Naido, 2018) That one thread was mine. In its removal, the visible tapestry slowly unravelled to reveal the invisible interestingness.

In courageously revealing the interestingness of an auto-ethnographer, raw moments of overwhelming angst dialectically followed by shear relief have embodied me in the right writing of this yarn.

The unravelling birthed from *"a deep-seated need to express something that provides a clarifying perspective on what our lives and experiences have brought us to."* (Lambert,

2013) In the seeking of clarification, this intimate heartistry has led to the real humanity of us - an embodied somatic experience of the deeply felt sense. The phenomenology of the *"embodied mind"* and the consciousness of the lived experience, has guided me to this present moment when I can courageously say, *"I feel, therefore I am"* and even in my own messy imperfection, *"I feel the living, breathing fibre that is humanness."* (Ensler, 2016)

My humanness. My heart. Our courageous hearts.

7.5 Behind the Seams: Invisibly Hidden, Visibly Revealed

… and this heart-full courage leads us to flip our handcrafted stitched story over, turning the seams inside-out. The back side of the stitched story is often referred to as the wrong side with its invisible messiness of hidden knots and loose threads. The front side is referred to as the right side with its façade of visible prettiness. Yet, who is to say which is the wrong and right sides? The messy side may be the most interesting side.

The South African embroiderer, Danielle Clough, concurs. She attracts worldwide praise when she posts photographs of the visible frontages of her artworks. Yet, when Danielle completes a needlework, she becomes:

> *"fixated with the back. It feels like a map and reminds me of what really happens in our lives. We present the best, neat versions of ourselves, but what it takes behind the scenes to be who we are, or have what we have is often a scrappy, knotted mess."* (Clough, 2019)

The acclaimed ballet dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov speaks of this messiness too:

> *"Know thyself and know that all of thyself won't be pretty. Sometimes that's the most interesting* discussion." (Baryshnikov, 2013)

The messiness of our yarn has incited the most interesting discussion offering profound insight compared to its perfect façade. That's where the heart of the learning, the healing and the interestingness lies. As the story of the Little Prince teaches us:

"One sees only with the heart, the essential is invisible to the eye." (Saint-Exupery, 1982)

The courage to express that hidden messiness into visibility is what leads to the interconnected journey from transition to transformation to transcendence to transmutation.

> *"You cannot have 'transcendence,' which is this sense of meaning in your life, unless you take this journey outward."* (Doty, 2018)

Mindfulness holds a transitional space for externalising invisibles which leads to transformation/change. Transformation can manifest into transmutation - the metamorphosis of a new form. This dissertation has transmuted, not simply transformed, my stitched story as craftivism facilitator of *Story Scarves* into a new ending - which equates to a new beginning, a new form. As Joe Lambert articulates for me:

> *"To shift from one perspective of self-knowing, one that might have been a dominant narrative for thirty years, to another way of knowing. I turned a corner. I wrote a new story."* (Lambert, 2013)

It is in the weaving of this newly stitched story that my own transmutation as a craftivism facilitator and creative arts practitioner is visible.

There is no true measure of what a designer is, other than their cross-disciplinary body of work. All designers can create significant good as a consequence of the creative ideas they generate… not the best design in the world, but the best design for our world.

> *"Designers have far more power than they realise: their creativity fuels the most efficient (and most destructive) tools of deception in human history. The same design that fuels mass over-consumption also holds the power to* repair the world." (Berman, 2009)

Consequently, my multiple design ingenuities, from graphics to handicrafts, offer me varied abilities to sculpt movements for social change that unravel the destructive and the deceptive. I choose to focus my designer abilities on issues that touch me deeply in the hope that my creativity will fuel positive change to repair our world.

As an interdisciplinary designer, I ask myself auto-ethnographically: has my aesthetic sensibility projected onto my handcrafted story? As the originator of this personal narrative with a forward-thinking outcome, the finished artwork/craftwork seems imperative to my completed job. I'm not able to leave threads dangling without trimming and tying up loose ends. Yet, in this mindfully present moment, I truly feel that it's more a strong inner calling than an aesthetic intention to share this story now.



7.6 The Beginning

I have chosen to commence this conclusion as a new beginning. My reasoning is framed by T. S. Eliot:

> *"What we call the beginning is often the end. And to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from."* (Eliot, 1942)

The end of the stitched story of *Story Scarves* has transmuted into a new beginning. Its source of wisdom plays a pivotal role in birthing its new narrative into visible existence, despite its previously hidden layers. The *Story Scarves'* legacy is an offering for every life it has touched. As the auto-ethnographic story weaver, I have not denied the story but rather defied its ending…

> *"to rise strong - recognize our story, and rumble with the truth until we get to a place where we think, Yes. This is what happened. This is my truth. And I will choose how the story ends."* (Brown, 2015)

The work of craftivism has made my previously invisible stitched story visible. The process in attaining that visibility has birthed a new beginning for me as a craftivism facilitator. Yet this experience, over a very intense year of introspection while writing this dissertation, has done much more for me than just that. It has offered me the telescopic perspective Popova speaks of - a telescopic perspective on myself that is significant beyond discernible comprehension.

Jonny Steinberg eloquently puts this into words for me:

> *"The importance of this experience is ineffable. It is to watch oneself from a distance and imbibe the contingency of who one is and what one feels. This is a secular incarnation of the oldest religious experience."* (Steinberg, 2015)

It has been a profane embodiment of the most soul-full encounter with *me*. The *"I–Thou"* relationship Buber speaks of has been the dialogue I have had with myself.

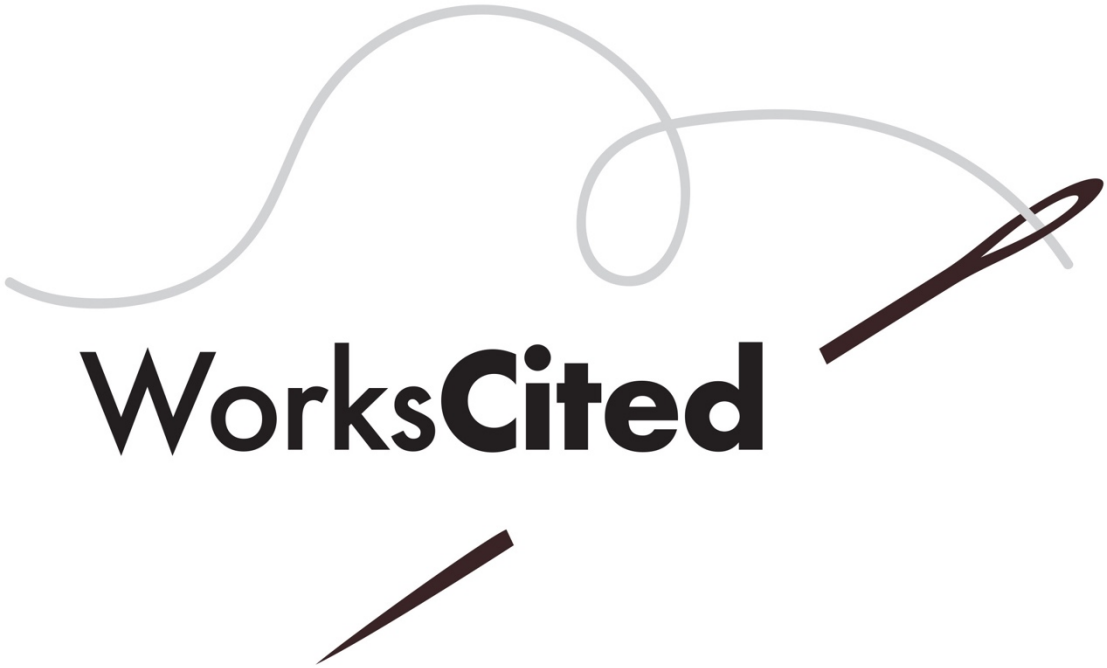
"When a woman tells the truth, she is creating the possibility for more truth around her." (Rich, 1995)

So, I gift you my story as an offering in the hope that many more courageously truth-full yarns will be the tellers of what our world is, how we live in it, and our hope for its future.

> **My yarn is the teller of me.**
> **Your yarn is the teller of you.**
> **Our yarns are the tellers of us.**

And this is our new title…

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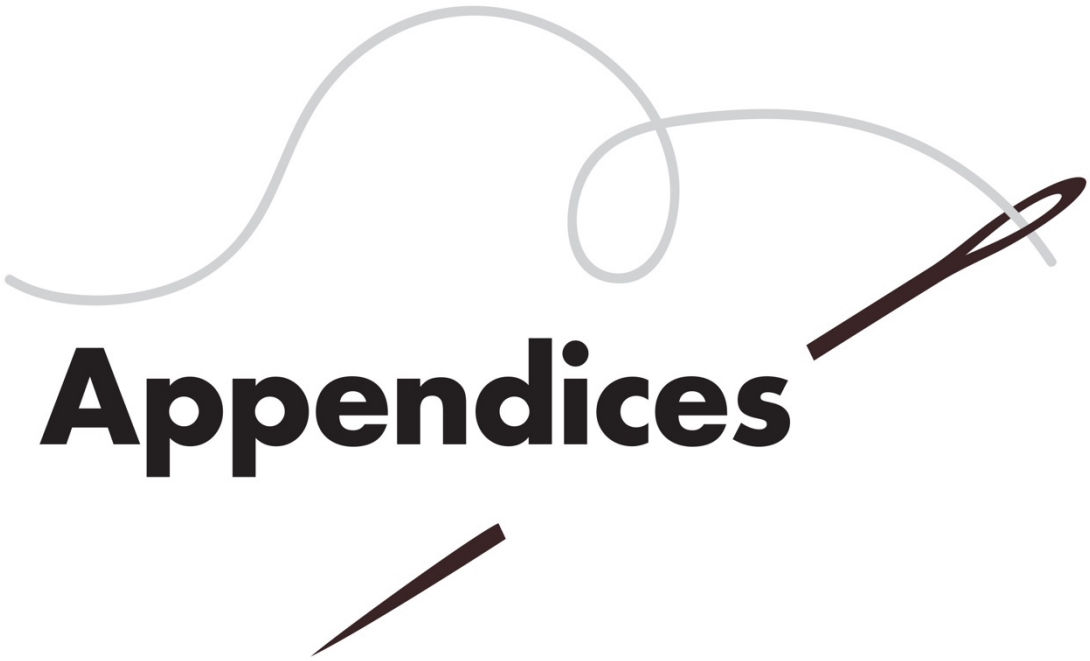
Appendices

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Ethics Clearance Certificate

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Rozen

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: H18/09/27**
PROJECT TITLE	Craftivism: Our yarns are the tellers of us
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Miss S Rozen
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Wits School of Arts/
DATE CONSIDERED	14 September 2018
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved
EXPIRY DATE	09 December 2021

DATE 10 December 2018 **CHAIRPERSON** (Professor J Knight)

cc: Supervisor : Ms T Schulz

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10004, 10th Floor, Senate House, University. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a yearly progress report.**

Signature

15 / 03 / 2019
Date

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

Appendix 2 - Consent from Bridget Makhonza

UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

Researcher: Stacey Rozen
MA Arts by Dissertation
February 2019

Letter of Consent for Inclusion of My Story in Dissertation

I, Bridget N. Makhonza (name and surname) agree to participate in this Craftivism research. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation involves.

I hereby give Stacey Rozen permission to write my story and include it in her dissertation. If there is inclusion of photographs, I allow my face to be identifiable.

_____ (signature)

6 March 2019 (date)