

THESIS

ENTIRELY DIFFERENT STORIES: AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AS WOMEN'S  
LITERACY PRACTICE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Submitted by

Stacey J. Johnson

Department of English

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Summer 2011

Master's Committee:

Advisor: Tobi Jacobi

Sue Doe

Jonna Pearson

## ABSTRACT

### ENTIRELY DIFFERENT STORIES: AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AS WOMEN'S LITERACY PRACTICE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

This thesis suggests autoethnography as one methodology for more democratic adult literacy instruction in rural Southern Africa. Because of my experiences working as a Rural Education Development volunteer in Zambia, I am concerned with the postcolonial implications of many of the educational initiatives employed in the region. Using a postcolonial feminist framework, I seek to situate autoethnography as one way to both resist what Chimamanda calls the “one story of Africa” and to sponsor dual language literacy acquisition in rural Zambia. In this thesis, I work to analyze the mission statements of existing educational projects as representative of the limited narratives written for people in rural communities. I also propose a collaborative autoethnographic writing project based on existing community writing projects/theory that locate literacy as a site of resistance and hybridity, encouraging story-telling by and with others rather than about Others.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Feminist Postcolonial Approaches to Sponsorship, Representation, and Relationship in Educational Development.....	6
Chapter Two: Autoethnography Methodology as Response to Postcolonial Feminist Concerns .....	23
Chapter Three: A Rhetorical Analysis of Educational Development in Southern Africa.. ..	42
Chapter Four: Proposed Autoethnographic Project in Rural Zambia.....	68
Chapter Five: Personal Autoethnographic Reflection and Conclusion .....	92
Works Cited .....	105

## Introduction

*“If you want to dispossess a people, the simplest way to do it is to tell their story, and to start with, “secondly.” Start the story with the arrows of the Native Americans, and not with the arrival of the British, and you have an entirely different story. Start the story with the failure of the African state, and not with the colonial creation of the African state, and you have an entirely different story” –Mourid Baghouti*

One of the damaging and long-lasting conditions of the colonial project has been the dominance of a particular narrative of pan-African experience. Many American students I’ve worked with frequently misname Africa a “country” rather than a continent. This seems to be indicative of a greater assumption, that Africa itself is a continent of sameness. Rather than being a continent made of many ecosystems, multiple political systems and peoples, there is one Africa, and an Africa with “One Story.” Adiche Chimamanda, Nigerian author, expresses her concern with this very assumption in a presentation for TedTalks titled, “The Danger of the Single Story.”

Chimamanda says that as a young middle-class Nigerian, she was exposed primarily to Western writing, not Nigerian writing, and these stories inevitably shaped her understanding of what could be written. For her, all writing was fundamentally about foreigners—people she had never met having experiences she had never had. Even as a young woman living in Nigeria, finding multiple stories of Africa was difficult. She instead read English stories of English people drinking tea under rainy skies. The stories she did read about her continent and her country were stories composed by Westerners, stories depicting a single story of catastrophe. Adiche is concerned that this single

Western-owned story pushes out both the plurality of Africa and limits the audience's response to simply pity and distance.

Historically, Africans have been narrated as “half devil, half child” (Kipling 78). European writings have both infantilized and demonized both African peoples and African experiences. Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* expresses the uneasy tension felt by early colonists when he writes, “what thrilled you was the thought of their humanity—like yours—the thought of your remote kinship....ugly” (76). Though African humanity is recognized in the Western telling, it is removed, distant, terrifying in its “savagery.” It is “unearthly,” “wild,” “passionate,” “remote.”(76). It is a type of bestial humanity overcome, matured through civilization, which for Conrad and other colonists, meant intervention by religious, political, and industrial institutions. By initiating and directing these interventions, the English and other colonizers identified themselves as morally and intellectually superior.

Though explicit British colonization has been over for more than forty years in many African countries, much of the narration about Africa and African peoples remain the same. While Kipling's “White Man's Burden” is no longer expressed in overly racist terms, the imposition of foreign aid in a colonial tradition-- sponsored by churches, governments, and corporations (private and nonprofit)-- continue to limit and control the stories told by and heard about people in developing communities. These rich and diverse populations are reduced to “silent” and “sullen” people unwilling and/or unable to help themselves (Kipling 80).

I was able to see how these narratives continue first-hand during my year of service with the United States Peace Corps in Zambia<sup>1</sup>. After completing an undergraduate degree in English Literature at Colorado State University, I joined the Peace Corps and left behind six years of employment with an international software development company, a comfortable home, and a supportive community. In my mid-twenties and disillusioned with work I found both mundane and meaningless, I set out for adventure, with an idealistic hope to make a difference to people in need. I was assigned to a position as a Rural Education Development volunteer in Zambia, and eventually moved to Mufumbwe, a remote town in the Northwestern Province.

During my year of service, I grappled with the complexities of living and working in educational development, and became increasingly frustrated with available aid resources. While the community I lived in certainly expressed their dissatisfaction with existing medical, education, and sanitation services, the narratives I had inhabited -- as a person of privilege exposed to a single African narrative -- in no way prepared me for the complexities of living and working in rural Zambia. I was not living with people who were constantly sad or constantly in need. The indigenous people of Zambia demonstrated tremendous ingenuity and agency. I made powerful relationships with women who taught me new forms of self sufficiency. I encountered and engaged in elaborate social structures, customs, and tribal cultures. I found myself struggling to be

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<sup>1</sup> Peace Corps terms for volunteers are typically 27-months. Due to injuries sustained during a traffic accident, I was only able to complete one year of service.

relevant in such a rich culture and to contribute my skill sets to my community's expressed needs. I was both student and teacher.

When I returned to the US and enrolled in graduate school studying English Rhetoric and Composition, I continued to ask questions of how postcolonial power dynamics can be undermined in the interest of more democratic development in rural Southern Africa. I wanted to know if there is potential to work with underserved populations in ways that explore localized complexity, honors local language, and encourages more reciprocal relationships.

Chimamanda asserts that multiple stories can combat the power that has concisely reduced African experience and made it always exotic, always different, and always negative. She reminds us, however, that while stories have the power to break the dignity of a people, they can also repair the dignity of a people. In my graduate studies, I have come to believe that partnering in the production and distribution of unique and multiple narratives is one way to both meet literacy needs and resist the dangerous single story. In this thesis, I propose that the methodology of autoethnography, which Mary Louise Pratt identifies as a genre "in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made for them," can provide a way into this type of partnership (34).

I contend that autoethnography provides a space for a multiplicity of story-telling that may both increase community literacy in underserved areas and resist postcolonial relationships and representation as they have been historically inscribed. The purpose of this project is not to tell the story for the othered, but rather as Deborah Brandt proposes,

to sponsor and facilitate skills for writing by and with Others and to make visible pathways toward the production of multiple stories.



## Chapter 1: *Feminist Postcolonial Approaches to Sponsorship, Representation, and Relationship in Educational Development*

In order to more fully unpack how autoethnography can work toward disrupting the single African narrative, I work to situate this project as part of interdisciplinary conversations between stakeholders in educational development. This literature review will introduce the criticism postcolonial theorists have had regarding the intervention of foreign aid workers, whether working in education or in other sectors, in formerly colonized nations of Africa. I will outline the way that postcolonial, feminist, and composition theorists have recognized and responded to these concerns by asserting that the role of the aid worker, or foreign instructor, can be transformed through themes of sponsorship, representation, and relationship. I will also demonstrate that though there is a tremendous amount of scholarship on both ethical responses to development and the possibility of literacy education as resistance to oppressive social systems, there is a paucity of research on women's literacy in Southern Africa. It is in this space that I propose autoethnography as one response to postcolonial concerns, a methodology that encourages both literacy and resistance to the one narrative of Africa.

### **Aid as Postcolonial Narrative**

Many contemporary international writers and critics such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Paul Theroux, Graham Hancock, and Dambisa Moya, are concerned with development in African countries and have openly criticized aid projects developed and implemented by

Western workers in a postcolonial era. Though they do not necessarily see aid as re-enacting a single story, they see these “institutional charities” as performing work detrimental to the people they are intending to serve (Theroux 193). In her book *Dead Aid*, Zambian international economist Dambisa Moya, writes a scathing indictment of aid interventions in Africa. She asserts that the recipients of aid are no better off because of intervention, but “worse off, much worse off. Aid has made the poor poorer and growth slower” (9). While traveling in Zambia’s capital, I saw evidence of the tremendous disparity between the material condition of aid workers and local citizens, and found myself challenged by the rows of beautiful homes owned by expatriates working in ‘development’ juxtaposed with the jumbled masses of crumbling huts where people break stones for a living. Were these development workers, sequestered behind their gates and their national guards, actually aiding the people they had moved across the world to help?

These theorists would argue that foreign ownership of charitable project implementation and distribution may be one of the many reasons aid organizations have failed in their goals for meeting the needs of underserved populations. Journalist Graham Hancock writes in *Lords of Poverty: the Power, Prestige, and the Corruption of the International Aid Business*, “Here is a rule of thumb that you can safely apply whenever you may wander in the Third World: if a project is funded by foreigners, it will typically also be designed by foreigners, and implemented by foreigners using foreign equipment procured in foreign markets” (155). By completely owning the process of aid, foreign organizations position needy communities as helpless, powerless, and less-than. As journalist Paul Theroux contends in his travel memoir *Dark Star Safari*, these non-profit aid programs simply work to increase the wealth of privileged stakeholders, which can

include government officials and donor executives (294). Because of their inability to achieve externally imposed goals, underserved communities continually remain indebted to aid providers, creating a cycle of dependency that reflects Chimamanda's argument that "Africa's" story is a story of catastrophe.

In many ways, this dependency aid cycle smacks of the colonial oppression examined by postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha. Bhabha has said that "Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference" (122). Though African countries have declared independence from former colonizers, colonial influence remains present both materially and ideologically in the interactions between institutionalized charities and those in need. Rather than moving nations out of poverty, debt, and disease, and into independent and equal relationships with their former sponsors and colonizers, aid organizations often reinforce a postcolonial narrative of dependence and acculturation. In failing to meet Western standards, underserved communities stretch toward "same"ness, but continually fall short, and the Other remains in its subordinated position.

Women are further impacted by colonization, and its residual effects, in what Guyatri Spivak refers to as 'double colonization' (McLeod 175). This term refers to the ways in which women have simultaneously experienced oppressions of colonialism and patriarchy. As such, "women are subject to representation in colonial discourses in ways which collude with patriarchal values" (McLeod 175). Women's development projects, like the autoethnographic writing workshop I am proposing, should take into account the

way in which colonization has not only been an oppressive force to entire populations, but has also gendered oppressive patterns. Currently, few projects exist in Southern Africa that are particularly gender sensitive, though there is evidence that this is changing through projects developed by organizations like Room to Read and Voice Flame Writers International, which I will refer to again in Chapter Four.

Here, it is helpful to define what I, and the theorists I refer to in this chapter, mean by the term “postcolonial.” I will use this term to refer to the residual impact colonization has in formerly colonized countries. John McLeod in his book *Beginning Postcolonialism* says it this way,

Postcolonialism is not the same as after colonization, as if colonial values are no longer to be reckoned with. It does *not* define a radically new historical era, nor does it herald a brave new world where all the ills of the colonial past have been cured. Rather, ‘postcolonialism’ recognizes both historical *continuity* and *change*. On the one hand, it acknowledges that the material realities and modes of representation common to capitalism are still very much with us today, even if the political map of the world has changed through decolonization. But on the other hand, it asserts the promise, the possibility, and the continuing necessity of change...” (33)

In other words, as Bhabha notes, the postcolonial project did not simply cease following independence, but continues in how formally colonized communities are structured and relate to their formal colonizers. Postcolonial perspectives work toward resisting these normalized oppressive patterns by making them more transparent. Postcolonial theory does not deny that these relationships have shifted and changed through time, but rather acknowledges that the impact of colonization did not cease post independence.

Critics, such as Hancock, Theroux, and Moya, have suggested that the most ethical response to the needs of formerly colonized countries is for foreign aid organizations to close all aid projects and abandon the objectives of global aid. From

their perspective, oppressive patterns codified and normalized during colonization cannot be transformed without severing the relationships between aid organizations and developing communities. They assert that allowing developing countries to create their own strategies for recovery would interrupt the development dependency cycle. They envision the “use of African labor to solve African problems.” (Theroux 193).

As ideal as the exclusive use of local labor and solutions for local problems might seem, members in many Southern African communities continue to face staggering obstacles that seem insurmountable even with the assistance of outsiders. Disease epidemics, poverty, and lack of access to educational services, continue to keep communities in Southern Africa from being active participants in a global economy. In Zambia alone, 800,000 of the 6.5 million children under the age of 18 do not go to school. The Zambian Ministry of Education (MOE) in 2006 declared that the national completion rate through grade 12 is at 17% (Hollow 20). Even these statistics may not completely represent an accurate portrait of the completion rates, since the MOE is inclined to use samplings from urban rather than rural populations. In my experience as a Peace Corps volunteer, I observed few visits from higher level Ministry officials in my district because of the financial constraints of traveling to more rural areas.

One of the keys to more successful educational development in Zambia is literacy acquisition. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) asserts that “Literacy is at the heart of basic education for all, and essential for eradicating poverty, reducing child mortality, curbing population growth, achieving gender equality and ensuring sustainable development, peace and democracy” (“Education”). According to UNICEF, Zambia’s total adult literacy rate is around 68%,

making it one of the least literate countries in the world. If, as UNESCO contends, literacy as is an indicator of educational development, then Southern African nations such as Zambia have a long road toward development.

With statistics like these, well-intentioned aid workers are understandably reluctant to simply abandon people in need. And as academics and writing instructors, we run the risk of creating even more separation between the 1<sup>st</sup> world “ivory” tower and communities outside of the academy when we use the criticisms of current aid and educational programs as an excuse for *lassaiz-faire* complacency and self-congratulatory scholarship *about* others while not working in advocacy *with others*. If working only to theorize and not to act, we distance ourselves from the lives of people outside of the academy, and particularly those we study. In theorizing, we perpetuate the distance and voyeurism of a postcolonial ideology As Paolo Freire says, “To affirm that men and women are persons and as persons should be free, and yet, to do nothing tangible is to make this affirmation a reality, is a farce (Freire 50).

Compositionists like Ellen Cushman, author of “The Rhetorician as an Agent of Social Change,” have strongly advocated for the need to bridge the tremendous gap between the privilege of the academy and the needs of the community through community advocacy. Here, I imagine the term “community” in a global way. Rather than limiting “community” to define the neighborhoods and people who live next door, down the hill, or across the train tracks from the academy, I move to extend our notion of community to those neighborhoods and people who live in more distant geographies, yet in a rapidly globalizing world, are just as important to conversations about education and literacy. I take up her call for activism by compositionists in arguing that though existing

development educational models might continue oppressive postcolonial cycles, these models might be transformed by reimagining the educational literacy space (on a global level) as a place of resistance where sponsorship, relationships, and representation are turned “inside out, upside down, back in upon” themselves (Cushman 8). I do this by moving through an examination of how literacy has been used as a site of resistance, how the role of sponsorship can attend to the concerns of activists, and how postcolonial feminists have theorized the potential for transformation in colonial relationships and representation.

### **Literacy Space as Resistance**

Literacy development, historically and in colonial terms, has been used as a tool of oppression (Janks *Literacy and Power*; Rassool *Global Issues in Education*; Anzaldua “How to Tame a Wild Tongue”). Colonial educators used literacy instruction as a way to “bank” a type of education that mimicked colonial education, privileging European languages, culture, and religion (Freire 70; Tiffin 144). Colonized subjects were viewed as empty slates that could have civilization, through literacy education, “deposited” into them (Freire 70). Kenyan writer Ngugi’ wa Thiong’o writes in “The Language of African Literature,” that colonial schooling and language learning as its vehicle, made “conquest permanent” by holding “the soul prisoner”(436).

Critical literacy, in the tradition of Paulo Freire, however, can overturn this tradition and engage with literacy as a tool for transformation. Freire asserts that it is through “dialogics,” or the interactions between people as mediated through language, that the world is “named” (69). By naming the world, reality is constructed. Freire

resists the action of “banking” a culturally privileged canon and instead argues that when those who inhabit positions of privilege and those outside of privilege engage in dialogue together, a possibility for renaming, and for eventual social transformation, becomes possible (Cushman “The Rhetorician as an Agent”; Cushman, Powell, and Takayoshi “Accepting Roles Created for Us”; Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*; Janks *Literacy and Power*; Shor “What is Critical Literacy”). In Freire’s words, “Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer the one-who-teaches, but one who himself is taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teaches” (Freire 80).

New literacy and community literacy theorists such as Deborah Brandt (“Introduction”), James Paul Gee (“Teenagers in New Times”), Anne Ruggles Gere (“Kitchen Tables and Rented Rooms”), Cynthia Selfe (“Politics of the Interface”), The New London Group (“A Pedagogy of Multiple Literacies”), and many others, have taken up Freire’s concern with the divide between the privileged and the underserved by asserting that academics, instructors and activists expand the definition of literacy from the practice of academic reading and writing to that of literacy as situated practice. As the New London Group write in their pivotal article “A Pedagogy of Multiple Literacies: Designing Social Futures,” literacy pedagogy must “account for the context our culturally and linguistic diverse and increasingly globalized societies, for the multifarious cultures that interrelate and the plurality of texts that circulate” (2). This definition of literacy resists a privileged “true” literacy created and protected by a privileged few, but rather works toward an appreciation of multiple discourses and multiple narratives.



This kind of partnership, of course is dependent on those who Cushman says “lend [their] status for achievement,” to recognize that they do not provide liberation for others, or even liberate themselves, but rather work together toward mutual liberation (Cushman 15). As Gerard Huiskamp warns, it is important for intellectual-activists to be humble about their “knowledge claims” (77). An educator activist does not enact liberty on herself or others, but co-constructs change through mutually beneficial relationships. Freire hopes to “illuminate the ‘leftist’ intellectual of her own ‘colonized mind’” (Huiskamp 74). If the intellectual becomes aware of the ways in which she has been implicated in the creation and circulation of a single African story, a space is opened for the transformation of relationship and representation. Thus, it becomes vital for intellectual activists to understand that they act within a role Deborah Brandt has called “sponsorship”.

### **Sponsorship**

Sponsors are defined by Brandt as “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, and withhold literacy” (19). In defining ‘sponsorship,’ Brandt moves away from the idea of the codified and limited role of the literacy “instructor.” These sponsors include all gatekeepers into sites of literacy—parents, siblings, spouses, friends, pastors—anyone who has an influence on the literacy process. Brandt writes that “literacy is valuable—and volatile—property,” a resource—economic, political, intellectual, spiritual--“which like wealth or education, or trade skill or social connections is pursued for the opportunities and protections that it potentially grants its seekers” (5). So as all literacy

is situated practice, it is important for educator/researchers to remember that they are part of a complicated and socially constructed web that both supports and restricts literacy involvement (Gee 122). Historically, educational aid sponsors have viewed themselves as the only gateway into formal literacy, but Brandt asks sponsors to reimagine themselves as one of many actors who support or facilitate entry into multiple sites of literacy.

While Brandt's notions of sponsorship has been taken up by multiple disciplines including critical literacy, community literacy, and sociolinguistics, there is little imagining how a Western-instructor sponsorship role might apply to Zambian women in a community writing context (Shore "What is Critical Literacy"; Carter "Living Inside"; Reder "Context and Literacy"). Following Brandt's proposal, the sponsor of a community literacy project should always inquire about the community's motivations for acquiring additional literacy skills. Why would community adult groups want to pursue auto(ethno)graphic writing experiences? What are the stories they want to tell? Who do they want to tell them to? By proceeding in literacy work without asking these questions and simply pursuing a pre-determined agenda, the literacy sponsor runs the risk of simply re-creating dominant hierarchical relationships.

Re-imagining the role of the literacy instructor as sponsor begins to open up the possibility for enacting democratic relationships. Still, even in this space there remains a risk of literacy sponsors behaving, even unwittingly, in ways that continue to marginalize or disempower the population in pursuit of literacy skills. So how can literacy sponsors work in underserved population without dominating the curricular discourse or speaking for the Other?

## **Enacting Democratic Relationships**

As postcolonial feminists like Gayatri Sivak, Gloria Anzaluda, Chandra Mohanty, and Susan Jarratt, have asserted, culturally oppressive systems effectively silence minority voices both within educational structures and other social infrastructures. In her landmark book *Borderland/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldua writes, “Wild tongues can’t be tamed, they can only be cut out” (76). She asserts here that the normalized privileged position toward minority subjects is inherently one of violence. When Western educators are involved in the educational process there is great risk of attempting to transfer particular ideologies (often called “truths”) and beliefs without regard for the wishes, the needs, or the input of the community. This, in effect, “silences” the voices of the community. Whether consciously or unconsciously, the non-native aid worker has the capacity to seriously devalue and undermine cultural identity.

Martin-Alcoff, as well as these other feminists critics (Jarratt “Beside Ourselves”; Spivak “Can the Subaltern”), have expressed concern that even the very action of speaking for, or as I interpret, taking the responsibility for silenced voices, can be a type of “discursive coercion and even a violence” (Martin-Alcoff 6). They contend that speaking for others—even other women— [can be] arrogant, vain, unethical and politically illegitimate” (Martin-Alcoff 1). Yet, they would also suggest that in capacity building relationships where solutions, direction, and action are initiated by the underserved, a space, however tenuous, is open for the privileged academic to stand alongside in an activist or sponsorship role, and in the translating toward a home audience, to speak alongside. The feminist activist and sponsor can begin to work toward building more democratic relationships by moving for localization, solidarity, reflexivity

and interdependency. As Martin-Alcoff persuasively states, to retreat from doing so would justify a “narcissistic yuppie lifestyle in which a privileged person takes no responsibility for her society whatsoever” (10).

To ethnically stand alongside, the sponsor must defer from speaking and acting out of assumptions about the oppressed. It is essential that the sponsor move away from gross assumptions about the universality of any type of oppression (Mohanty “Under Western Eyes”, *Feminism Without Borders*; Martin-Alcoff “The Problem of Speaking”). Historically, feminists have seen social activism through the lens of Western (read: white) middle-class feminism and have developed a troubling habit of identifying the needs of women in all communities as part of that tradition. Rather, in order to stand in what Freire has termed “solidarity” with any community, it is essential to collaboratively identify the particularities of individual community groups. As Cushman writes, “Our civic duty is to empower people with our positions, a type of leftist stealing from the rich to give to the poor. To empower, as I use it; means to enable someone to achieve a goal by providing resources to them; to facilitate actions—particularly those associated with language and literacy; and to lend our power or status to forward people’s achievement” (Cushman 14).

Additionally, in order to form truly democratic relationships (if such a thing is possible) with the other, it is important to engage in interdependent, rather than dependent relationships (Cushman, “The Rhetorician as an Agent”; Cushman, Powell, and Takayoshi, “Accepting the Roles”). For Cushman, Powell, and Takayoshi, researcher and participant roles are not strictly codified and hierarchical roles. Rather, they propose the necessity for continually defining and redefining relationships through a collaborative

process co-constructed both by the researcher and participant(s). This collaboration requires a relationship of reciprocity. They write, “This nonhierarchical reciprocal relationship, in which both the researcher and researched learn from one another and have a voice in the study, is informed by a feminist desire for eliminating power inequalities between researchers and participants and a concern for speaking for the ‘other’” (395). When projects are imposed on others, and given without the engagement of the other, the aid becomes “a debt, a lasting obligation” (Cushman 16). Reciprocal relationships undermine the likelihood of oppression as terms of giving and receiving are constantly negotiated and reflected upon (Cushman 16)

This is not a type of “missionary activism,” a term used by Cushman to indicate activists who promote ideologies, intervene without invitation, and slip into “paternalistic imposition” (Cushman, Powell, and Takayoshi 395). Rather, activist sponsors attempt to work toward a place of mutual benefit for the researcher and for the participants in their lives both inside and outside the study. The same, of course, must be possible for literacy sponsors. Research that encourages democratic relationships necessarily foregrounds and prioritizes the building of these relationships. In a capacity building approach aid workers, who have particular sets of knowledge and skills, work alongside community partners towards developing these skill sets in other community members. This collaborative approach comes closer to positioning community members with non-members as democratic partners. But potential pitfalls exist even in this framework. Aid workers can fall into the trap of enforcing the goals and ideologies of a privileged partner and excluding the perspectives and goals of community members (Eade 2).

In order to refrain from the impulse to implement known western strategies, the literacy sponsor should remain cautious, working to avoid assumptions about the needs and goals of members, and continually interrogate her motives for leveraging agendas (Eade 2). The literacy sponsor must also work to consciously reflect on her own positioning in the relationship. It is important to “interrogate the bearing” of our own subject positions, the location and the context for what it is we are saying (Martin-Alcoff 15). The literacy sponsor should also always be accountable for what she says. She must analyze the probable or actual effects of the words on discursive and material context. (15) It is important to deeply examine the genealogy of discursive positioning. The sponsor might ask how her “position or view is mediated and constituted through and within the conflict of historical, cultural, economic, psychological, and sexual practices” (18). Though feminist postcolonial theorists have grappled with how to renegotiate relationships between activist educators (sponsors), there has not yet been a link to how these roles are being implemented in writing projects in Southern Africa. I will extend this conversation in the proposal of a collaborative writing project as method for literacy sponsorship in rural Zambia.

### **Ethically Representing the ‘Other’**

Critical literacy theorists and postcolonial theorists have taken up the issues of resistance, sponsorship, and relationships, but have also focused on how representation has constructed oppressive normalized postcolonial patterns. As Susan Jarratt and Gayatri Spivak confirm, the act of speaking for—or with—is always an act of representation. There are currently many popular texts, such a *Three Cups of Tea*,

*Schools Without Stones, and Leaving Microsoft to Change the World*, that narrate stories of development from the point-of-view of a first-world teacher/researcher. In these texts, the teacher shares his experiences of helping the Other using what might be called an “ethno colonial gaze” for the consumption of a 1<sup>st</sup> world reader (Lindner and Stetson 45). Because I argue for a collaborative autoethnographic writing project, a life-writing project where both sponsors and community members each work together to construct their own life stories, I push for work that “speaks alongside,” and creates space for particularization rather than the univocal telling of an educator’s limited narrative.

Spivak is particularly concerned that theorists and activists do not represent people in ways they would choose to represent themselves. Images of the 3<sup>rd</sup> world ‘other’ woman, an image created most often by 1<sup>st</sup> world intellectuals, activists, and aid workers, begins to completely stand in for the people themselves. Spivak says that the solution to these acts of misrepresentation is not for the intellectual to begin completely “abstain[ing] from representation,” but rather to “suspend (as far as possible) the clamor of his or her own consciousness” (28). Much as Freire has suggested, the intellectual must first make steps toward unpacking her own conscious and unconscious oppressive positioning before representing the Other.

In order to move beyond representation as a way of reinforcing the colonial gaze, Susan Jarratt encourages a methodology of metonymy that “create[s] a narrative or contextualized understanding of the word [the textualized image] without displacing or blocking out the word itself” (1384). In this way, Jarratt supports reflexive representation that acknowledges historicity and context. This methodology also encourages multiplicity, a way of opposing knowledge that “reduces, generalizes, or subsumes to a

universal” (Lindner and Stetson 46). Representation then must always be specific, and in some cases, allow for contradictions and competing narratives. It also must allow for what Lindner and Stetson, authors of “For Opacity: Nature, Difference, and Indigeneity in Amazonia,” have suggested as the beginnings of “non-colonizing knowledges”--that difference can remain different without being reduced to ‘the same.’” (46). In other words, representations of others should not continually return to a static image or worse, mimicry of the privileged sponsor (Spivak 28).

Spivak argues that there is no central and consistent generalized “native voice” and demonstrates that rather there is the multiplicity of voices within every culture. Spivak suggests that when representing the other, intellectual activists might use a method of “speaking to” a particular community through imagined dialogue as a way to stay ethically reflexive. This approach encourages an identification of personal subject position and the transparency of the construction of “the other” while recognizing the particularities of multiple others. In a co-autoethnographic writing space, this “imagined dialogue” might actually be translated into a more literal dialogue where the sponsor’s writing is reviewed, analyzed, and responded to by literacy participants.

Even in this space, however, it is possible to bring in sexist and postcolonial assumptions and misconceptions that must be unlearned through dialogue. Constant internal reflexivity, which can occur both in the writing process, and through interactions in the community literacy space, is required to continually combat deeply embedded thought patterns. As bell hooks wrote in the 1980s, it is impossible to build a sustainable feminist movement without unlearning thought patterns and proactively engaging with



hidden sexist/imperialist attitudes to explore how race, class, and sexual orientation impact women outside member groups (128).

\* \* \* \* \*

Development models have certainly begun to move toward a model of capacity building, a more ethical approach to work within developing countries, however, little has been done to connect the work that postcolonial feminist theorists and new critical theorists have done. An autoethnographic method, however, provides an intersection for all of these concerns. In this research, I will assert that the practice of autoethnography allows for feminist activist compositionists to ethically engage in development and literacy sponsorship. Chapter Two will outline Autoethnography as a methodology that responds to the concerns raised by postcolonial feminist theory. Chapter Three will review current educational projects in Zambia and reflect on how the “civilizing” story created during colonization continues to be replicated in religious, government and corporate development projects. Chapter Four will propose a collaborative autoethnographic writing project, a project I call the Chizela Women’s Writing Workshop, as one localized solution for complicating postcolonial narratives. Chapter Five will demonstrate autoethnography through a reflexive analysis of personal life-writing and suggest implications for global literacy work.

## Chapter 2: Autoethnography Methodology as Response to Postcolonial Feminist

### Concerns

*“Feminist democratic practice cannot be about self advancement, upward mobility, maintenance of the first-world status quo. It has to be premised on the decolonization of the self on the notions of citizenship defined not just within the boundaries of the nation-state, but across national and regional borders”--Alexander and Mohanty xli*

In the epigraph above, Alexander and Mohanty contend that feminist practice cannot be about continuing the first-world status quo, but rather about decolonizing the self and reaching across borders with the intent of increasing equity and understanding. As Carolyn Ellis, foremother of autoethnography as sociological practice says, autoethnography offers the possibility of opening hearts and increasing understanding of difference.” (Anderson, “Analyzing Analytic Autoethnography” 435) In the decolonization of the self, the opening of hearts, and the increasing of understanding, opportunities for new versions of representation and relationship exist.

In this chapter, I will attend to how these ethical concerns might be responded to through the methodology of autoethnography, or autoe. I will foreground how some of the ethical concerns taken up by this methodology are at times being attended to in existing projects in Zambia, but are often ignored in the re-telling of multiple versions of one story. I will review definitions of autoethnography, situate how autoethnography opens up resistance to single narratives, examine my methods for this project, and acknowledge some of its limitations. Autoethnography as an educational literacy method can provide an opportunity for this to occur through writing as it allows for reflexivity on

the part of the educator/researcher and the student/writer during the process of composing/story-telling.

### **Defining Autoethnography**

Mary Louise Pratt writes in *Arts of the Contact Zone* that an autoethnographic text is “a text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made for them” (2). By rewriting themselves, and revising representation that others have made of them, writers enter into what she terms a “contact zone.” Pratt identifies contact zones as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often *in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power*, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world” (1). Pratt notes that this contact zone text is not a comfortable space or space of safety for readers; it is described in terms of conflict. These texts can be interpreted in many varied ways depending on the position of the reader. Pratt says, “It [an autoethnographic text] will read very differently to people in different positions...” (3). Literacy sponsors should always be aware of their positioning as interpreters of the text when meaning becomes muddled or incomprehensible.

Pratt notes that there are multiple “literate arts” in the contact zone, which she lists as autoethnography, transculturation, critique, collaboration, bilingualism, mediation, parody, denunciation, imaginary dialogue, vernacular expression. However, the perils of writing in this zone include miscomprehension, incomprehension, dead letters, unread masterpieces, absolute heterogeneity of meaning (4). By listing these arts and perils, Pratt delineates the delicate spaces for growth as well as the opportunities for

communication breakdowns. Yet it is in the contact zone, according to Pratt, that transculturation occurs. Transculturation is a process where members of subordinated and marginalized groups can choose, incorporate, deny, and create from the materials they have accumulated from the dominant culture (Pratt 2). The transculturation process is important to the autoethnographic method, because it grants a space of agency to subordinated groups. Through writing back to “representations others have made of them,” the “oppressed,” to use Freire’s terms, actively determine what it is they want to appropriate and what it is they want to challenge (Pratt 3).

### *The Importance of Self-Narratives*

Autoethnography, while certainly a type of self narrative, has a writing tradition of its own that bridges ethnographic and life-writing practices. Not only related to the anthropological discipline of ethnography, but also traditionally ‘non-academic’ and better-known cousins--memoir, journal, personal essays and personal journalism--autoethnography shares many traits other creative nonfiction projects have brought to liberal arts education. Self narratives work not just as a way to record the personal stories of self-narrators, but also work toward embracing sociocultural contexts of personal stories. Rather than specifically just learning about an individual, the writing locates the individual as part of a community, or multiple communities, in an effort to synthesize a localized perspective. In this, then, both writing self narratives and studying self narratives provide valuable ways for learning about self and others (Chang 41). While there are multiple ways of approaching a self-narrative project, there are necessary distinctions to be made between the various genres. Autoethnography may certainly

seem fundamentally similar to memoir, or autobiography. However, there are important differences to both the genre process and production. Heewon Chang's definitions of life-writing genres from her text *Autoethnography as Method* are helpful in delineating the differences:

Autobiography: Chronological and comprehensive outline of a person's life

Memoir: Thematic approach to highlights of a person's life

Journals: Logs or records of daily growth, musings, and insights

Personal Essay: Personal insights in response to author's environments

Traditionally, these genres have most often been employed in providing an insider narrative on the lives of culturally privileged or significant individuals. While huge marketing schemes surround autobiographies like President Bill Clinton's *My Life*, and curricula has been written around Frederick Douglas' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas*, most often the life-stories of non-celebrated people have either not been written at all or have been simply ignored. This is certainly not always true, as in the case of holocaust narrative *The Diary of Anne Frank*, a tale of a teenage girl, and has increasingly become less true with the advent of Web 2.0 and the explosion of personal writing available via the web. Contemporary life writing production, distribution, and consumption has become less focused on cultural figureheads and more on narratives of less prestigious individuals. Autoethnography continues this trend in the academy by formally pushing the study of the common, privileging the value of individual experiences, and strives to recognize that the personal can never be completely extricated from the academic. Autoethnography, however, goes further than simple personal narration, by contextualizing personal experience within the collective experience and

attempting to make larger connections to the greater culture or cultures. As Chang says, autoethnography, for us both a method of research and composition, “transcends mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation with narrative details” (43).

Leon Anderson, noted research sociologist, tracks the beginning of the study of the personal in community as part of ethnographic research to the Chicago Second School in the 1940s, which began under the tutelage of Everett Hughes. This group of academics undertook ethnographic research in workplaces and other spaces where students had highly personal roles and investment (375). He notes that in following decades, researchers continued to write about environments that had personal significance, and communities in which the researcher was a member. However, “they were neither particularly self-observational in their method nor self-visible in their texts” (376). Hayano, one of the earliest researchers to use the term “autoethnography,” wrote that this type of methodology is a way to approach ethnographic study in a new postcolonial age when researchers would no longer focus as exclusively on exotic and foreign cultures, but more on cultures the researchers themselves inhabited. Ellis and Bochner, two prominent autoethnographic sociologists, note that while the term autoethnography has been in use for more than thirty years, it has only more recently become a term of choice for describing studies of a personal nature and has taken an important, if still controversial role, in multiple fields including sociology, anthropology, journalism, and composition studies (“Autoethnography, personal narrative”, “Analyzing Analytic Autoethnography”). Because autoethnography is an emergent and shifting methodology, multiple definitions are available in practice. My purpose here is not to

provide a complete comprehensive analysis of all the forms and varieties of autoethnography, but to define in general terms the foundational properties of the practice that are most important to responding to postcolonial feminist composition practices and that have been evidenced by multiple researchers and theorists.

### **Principles of Autoethnography:**

*Autoethnography is a reflexive methodology*

The primary principle of autoethnographic composition is the transparency of the “I,” and the reflexivity, the turning in and subjective analysis of the self, in the creation and development of any scholarly work. As Kevin De Vryan writes, autoethnography is “one way to employ self-study; specifically, it is a way to conduct traditional ethnography with significantly enhanced researcher visibility and reflexivity” (406). In traditional ethnographic practice, the presence of the researcher was mysteriously absent. By using a scientific approach to qualitative studies through the processes of data collection, analysis, interpretation, and the potential for replication, the researcher became a purveyor of unchallenged ‘truths’ (Chang 45). “Real” science was assumed to be “quantitative, experimental, and understood by only a select and elite few” (Wall 147). Not only did the science of ethnography preclude the multiplicity of how truth is experienced, but also limited access to the research itself by making it virtually unreadable and inaccessible to anyone outside the particular discourse community.

With the postmodern turn, however, social scientists have become more comfortable in admitting that all research is informed by what Kenneth Burke calls “terministic screens.” Burke asserts that our worlds, and experience of these worlds, are

constructed through linguistic “terms” (*Language as Symbolic Action*). As such, we learn the world through our positioning; therefore, anything mediated through us, like writing, can never be totally objective. But while social sciences certainly have become more comfortable with reflexivity, subjective analysis has often become a mere coda for more traditional qualitative and quantitative approaches (Chang 45, Wall 148).

Autoethnography, however, privileges reflexivity as an essential and prioritized component of research and writing. Rather than simply relegating reflection to a few summative paragraphs, self analysis should be a substantive component of the work. In doing so, autoethnography moves toward establishing transparent self positioning that undermines normalized power hierarchies.

*Autoethnography privileges qualitative narrative and story-telling approaches over quantitative scientific inquiry.*

Leon Anderson, autoethnographic researcher, notes that traditional ethnography approached the study of culture from a space of detached observation that attempted to use scientific analysis to quantify the experiences of the “other”. Autoethnography, however, turns toward a sociological inquiry that privileges reflexive ‘story-telling.’ Ellis and Bochner say, autoethnographic practice was about “creating a space which, as a mode of inquiry, [that] was designed to be unruly, dangerous, vulnerable, rebellious, and creative (“Analyzing Analytic” 433). As a rebellious, unruly method autoethnography has been viewed by some researchers as unreplicable and unscientific; however, the purpose of this methodology is to destabilize the normalized hierarchical position of the analytical researcher. Rather than seeing culture and society as frozen, fixed, static, and objective, Ellis and Bochner see autoethnography as a way to narratively represent and



analyze the fluidity, particularization, and subjectivity of culture through the action of story-telling. Since the story-telling action is also reflexive, the person recording or composing the research does not become invisible but becomes a “feeling and vulnerable actor” (Anderson, “Analyzing Analytic” 441). Autoethnographers may, however, choose how much focus the narrative has in the story-telling. Since autoethnography connects individual narratives to greater cultural claims, some autoethnographers may heavily emphasize narrative pieces and some may choose to highlight more sociological analysis. The point of autoethnography is to link the points of individual reflexivity, narrative, and analysis.

*Autoethnography requires the writer have a stake or membership in the culture of inquiry.*

Though autoethnographic practitioners have conflicting opinions on what qualifies for “membership,” or who gets a right to inquiry, all do agree that some level of stakes *must be* present for the researcher. This principle resists the impulse in cultural studies to casually observe an “other” and construct and distribute ill-informed and naïve representations of unfamiliar cultures. These fly-in/fly-out representations have often created partial, misinformed, and voyeuristic narratives that circulate in the dominate discourse and create limited and destructive stereotypes and knowledges.

For Leon Anderson, autoethnographers must have *full membership* in the community of study. Full membership may be attained either through birth or conversion, but the membership must occur *prior* to the determination of study (“Analytic Autoethnography”). This explicitly avoids the temptation of acting as a temporary voyeur into a culture and then acting as an outsider spokesperson for that

culture. Anderson also argues that not only should a researcher have full membership status, but since individual members carry one perspective of events and of culture, other members of the community should be interviewed and dialogued with in order to capture more reliable and reproducible narratives. Thus, he asserts that data should be “triangulated” in much the same way it would be in more traditional qualitative methods.

More evocative ethnographers, such as Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner, respond that though they do not contest the necessity of outlining a stakeholder’s position in autoethnography, they are more flexible about how those stakes and relationships have been developed. In my case, although I am not a Zambian woman, I have lived in a Zambian culture for a year, have developed relationships and stakes within the community, and might return as a member who has developed reciprocal relationships and can write autoethnographically as a member of the expatriate and sponsor communities. Part of the work of autoethnography is to reflexively engage in how this membership and the relationships between members are constructed and engaged in and with. In addition, evocative autoethnographers are less concerned with reproducible narratives, and ‘getting it right’ by member checking and triangulating data than they are with privileging an individual narrative experience. The autoethnographic researcher and writer must determine the most reasonable and ethical approach for her purpose and audience.

*Autoethnography requires the writer to reflect on the self within a broader cultural context.*

Autoethnography is not simply story-telling or reflexive analysis, but is defined by the connection of these methods with cultural investigation. Stories are not written

simply for evocative purposes, nor for creating an empathetic response, though they may certainly *do* that, but are written for the intent of exploring larger cultural ideologies, practices, and relationships. This can mean composing reports that are scholarly and can be interpreted, but can also mean writing less academic texts that engage in cultural reflection. Either way, autoethnographies should always be reflected upon, analyzed, and interpreted within their broader sociocultural context (Chang 46). The self is always an available subject to analyze and also a lens to look through in order to develop greater understandings of culture; however, the emphasis on learning must always lean toward larger sociocultural discoveries and theoretical analysis.

Data collection for this type of analysis can include participant observation, reflective writing, interviewing, and gathering documents and artifacts. (Duncan 5) Reflection on the data can be done through the composition of traditional black and white narrative text, or through other forms of media—film, television, radio, web pages, or musical lyrics. Engaging in the data collection, reflection, analysis, and composition, writers and researchers gain insight into how their systems of culture work and examine relationships of connection and difference with others.

### **Outcomes of Autoethnography:**

The autoethnographic methodology resists traditional postcolonial perspectives in multiple ways. Following are a few outcomes of autoethnography that undermine and subvert single colonized narratives:

*Autoethnography speaks back to assumptions created by dominant discourses about others.*

Autoethnography is a powerful tool of the “contact zone” (Pratt “Arts of the Contact Zone”). As texts that engage with representations others have made of those marginalized by slavery or colonization, it creates a “curriculum of multiple voices” that resist simple labeling (Chang). This multiple-voice curriculum pushes against the necessity of a universal truth, a truth that Caroline Stivers says “legitimizes a dream of power over other” (411). Autoethnography, as an alternative knowledge production process, is a liberatory, emancipatory project (Stivers 411).

*Autoethnography makes transparent representations of self and others.*

This methodology also particularly speaks to feminist concerns that male-oriented scientific perspectives have given way to very limited, and normalized demeaning representations. Because the objective, distant, exclusive, and product oriented research characterized by impersonal abstraction has helped create—in participation with other sympathetic narratives written by other stakeholders-- what Chimamanda has called the dangerous “single story,” feminist researchers are more interested in subjective, empathetic, inclusive, and process-oriented social research. The reflexive nature of the work requires a transparent grappling and negotiation with representations of self, culture, and cultural interactions.

*Autoethnography complicates generalizations.*

Autoethnographic research moves away from context-free, universal “yardsticks” that are liberally applied to specific cases (Leon, “Analyzing Autoethnography” 442). Postcolonial feminist Chandra Mohanty reminds researchers that not only have male social scientists, ethnographers, colonizers, and power figures, worked toward creating gross generalizations about the other, feminists have also fallen into the trap of reifying

women as an “already constituted group with identical interests and desires” (“Under Western Eyes” 61). Autoethnography complicates the essentialized grouping of women as women and pushes toward analysis that both recognizes postcolonial women as victim of “double colonization” yet unique in their localized lived experience.

*Autoethnography evokes empathetic rather than sympathetic responses to formerly ‘unknown’ cultures*

Non-Western cultures have been exoticized, vilified, and pitied through differing versions of the colonial narrative. While social scientists and anthropologists have often objectified others through ‘scientific’ analysis—one might think here of eugenics, or the scientific phrenology experiments mid 19<sup>th</sup> century—other stakeholders, such as religious organizations, have relied on narratives of pity to appeal to the pocketbooks and moral superiority of donors. One of the ways to resist both of these story approaches is through telling silenced or unheard stories in more complicated ways and in ways that transfers ownership to those who inhabit these stories.

Ellis and Bochner call this type of evocative story telling an “epistemology of emotion” (Anderson 377). This kind of evocative autoethnography intentionally creates a subjective emotional experience that breaks down the boundaries of normal scholarship and pushes for emotional complexity. Through an emphasis on evocative story-telling and personal narrative, autoethnography helps to rewrite the world in a way that privileges new stories. These stories undermine dominant Western-controlled narratives and pave the way for solidarity.

## **Current Study Method**

As shown above, autoethnography is one methodology that works with a postcolonial feminist framework toward resisting oppressive stories told about the Other. It also has the potential to disrupt the single African narrative of catastrophe. This narrative, however, is deeply entrenched in the ways in which organizations and governments relate to and represent African peoples. While historically, colonial literatures used overtly racist and oppressive discourse to advocate for and excuse imperialist action, current discourse still constitutes African and Africans through the same marginalizing practices. The types of religious, government, and business institutions that were responsible for justifying the colonial project are still implicated in the replication and distribution of an oppressive narrative.

In order to examine the potential impact of autoethnography for this study, I employ a set of multi-modal methods including postcolonial feminist rhetorical analysis, an application of autoethnographic methods for a potential writing workshop (the Chizela Women's Writing Workshop), and an autoethnographic reflection on personal life writing. This research trajectory has been influenced both by personal experience, by networking with peers, and by coursework completed as a Rhetoric & Composition graduate student.

Chapter Three uses postcolonial feminist criteria, developed from common themes arising in the preceding literature review, to rhetorically analyze existing educational projects. I overlay these criteria onto three current projects in Zambia developed by World Vision, USAID in partnership with Peace Corps, and Room to Read, to reflect on how the "civilizing" story created during colonization continues to be

replicated in religious, government, and corporate development projects. I reflect both on spaces where aid organizations are continuing to reify a single African narrative, but also indicate places where power dynamics between the privileged and underserved are beginning to be disrupted. It is in the space opening up in these narrative disruptions that I position my own proposed collaborative autoethnographic literacy project, the Chizela Women's Writing Workshop.

I have selected to examine the following three educational development projects: the educational sponsorship program of World Vision, a mission-centered religious organization, USAID and Peace Corp's collaborative Learning at Taonga Market interactive radio instruction project, and the 1st-grade local literacy program implemented by Room to Read, an American non-profit company. I chose these organizations and these projects because they are representative of different sectors working in educational and literacy development all over Southern Africa. All projects have a visible presence in Zambian communities and also demonstrate remarkable project visibility via the web. I have personally seen and experienced the work of World Vision, USAID, and Peace Corps on the ground in Zambia, and though I did not work with Room to Read, have close friends and acquaintances in Peace Corps who have spent significant time working on that organization's library projects. I have engaged in multiple conversations with my peers and their colleagues about their experiences with this organization, and have had informal phone conversations with Room to Read's staff members. Through these conversations and research conducted via their website, I discovered that all four of these organizations rely heavily on the participation of Western aid workers and educators for the implementation of their projects. Though there are

certainly many other educational projects occurring in Southern Africa, and some of them with a literacy component, I have selected to use these four because of the extent of their local influence, their web presence, and their visibility to Peace Corps workers.

I have developed the following five principles from common themes reflected on by postcolonial feminists as referenced in the first chapter regarding sponsorship, relationship, and representation as a way of evaluating development projects for their alignment with postcolonial feminist theory.

### ***Collaborative***

Is there mutual engagement in work processes? Or does the project engage in ‘paternalistic imposition’ and ‘missionary activism’?

### ***Action-centered***

Is the project focused solely on theory and research, or on action, community organization, and advocacy? Is the sponsor engaged as an activist in the project or acting primarily in the more traditional roles of instructor, researcher, or charity worker?

### ***Reflexive***

Is there evidence of organizational and participant reflexivity? Are the processes of the project and the organization transparently reflected upon? Do the project allow for critical interrogation of the meaning, location, and context of the work?

### ***Reciprocal (or Interdependent)***

Is there evidence that the community is involved in some material and/or ideological and epistemological exchange with the sponsoring organization? If a researcher is involved, does the researcher give back to the community? Is the



community actively involved with defining the relationship between the community and the organization/sponsor? Does the project or organization represent and define others as they would represent and define themselves?

### ***Hybridity***

Is there evidence that the organization privileges home discourses and local knowledge? Does the project encourage a multiplicity of voices?

For purposes of this research, I am defining these principles as concrete and separate from each other, but I recognize they often overlap and work in relation with each other. In Chapter 3, these criteria are applied to the mission statements and project web sites of the implementing organizations toward a rhetorical engagement with the continuation of postcolonial narratives as evidenced by the visual and textual representations on the organization's websites. I also use these criteria to highlight where current projects are beginning to disrupt these narratives toward postcolonial feminist solidarity.

Chapter Four applies autoethnographic methodology as a way to actively practice these five feminist postcolonial principles. I will situate the proposed Chizela Women's Writing Workshop as both part of current community writing project theory, and as an extension to the spaces where current projects *are* already resisting single narratives. I offer up the Chizela Women's Writing Workshop as one localized solution for postcolonial writing resistance and adult literacy acquisition in Mufumbwe, Zambia. I suggest practical solutions for project implementation and also acknowledge potential challenges.

Chapter Five uses autoethnographic reflexivity to engage in the close reading of personal writing created during my year of service in the Peace Corps as an example of the way literacy sponsors might interrogate their own cultural positioning. I also use this exercise as a move toward personal transparency in reflecting that through research and life experiences in Zambia, I have begun to expose my own, conscious and subconscious, normalized oppressive construction of a single African narrative. I propose that this type of exercise can help, as Freire says, to “illuminate” our own entrenched ideologies and begin to engage in spaces of more diligent cross-cultural dialogue. Using these multiple methods, I conclude with a call to action for more transnational compositionist activist and sponsor work in rural postcolonial regions.

### **Limitations of Current Research:**

Ideally, in Chapter 3, I would have liked to overlay the postcolonial feminist rhetorical principles on adult literacy programs, which are directly related to the work I propose. Though there are some life-writing projects and several literacy programs occurring in Southern Africa, it has been tremendously difficult to locate adult-centered sustained life-writing/literacy projects. Nearly all current literacy projects in Zambia are focused on children’s literacy and there are currently, to my knowledge, no life-writing projects taking place in Zambia. The lack of adult literacy programs in Zambia has been noted by the Zambian Ministry of Education, which in 2008 published in their report titled “The Educational Sector National Implementation Framework 2008-2010,” that though the country has expressed commitment to ‘lifelong’ education, no programs are currently in place for the development of adult literacies. To that end, the MOE has been

actively looking for alternative modes of education, a space in which the proposed Chizela Women's Writing Workshop might well fit. Though there may be very small life-writing programs similar to the one I propose, because I am geographically removed, and dependent on published research, networking with colleagues in international development, and the web presence of organizations, I elected to analyze the work of other educational projects that have significant impact in the country.

I also acknowledge the outsider status of my subject position. As a middle-class white woman in the academy, I can never truly identify with or adequately vocalize the concerns of the women who live in rural Zambia. I do, however, have a vested interest in the Mufumbwe community. I have personally experienced the tremendous benefits of living in that community, have grown to love many of the women whom I worked with, who cared for me, and who often asked for my help with their needs. It is because of these relationships that I work toward becoming more self aware of my embedded postcolonial perspectives and seek to find ways that I, and others, might ethically return to these communities as allies and activists rather than as missionaries or charity-workers.

I also recognize the limits of being a single voice in a sea of powerful voices that perpetuate a single story of Africa. My small critique of a few organizations, and this one small proposal toward change might be considered miniscule and not effective for systemic change. I take my cue here from Cushman, referencing James Scott. She writes, "those who choose to say resistance only counts when it takes the form of overt and collective political action might describe us [literacy activists] as using nothing more than coping devices with this literacy. Choosing to see this interaction in isolation, they may be correct; however....thousands of such 'petty' acts of resistance have dramatic

economical and political effects” (14). Thousands of small unique stories might just begin to dismantle the carefully crafted story of a single Africa with a single people and a single story.

Despite all of these research limitations, this study offers a way into thinking about educational development projects as historically situated within postcolonial narratives. It also offers suggestions for evaluating how sponsors might more ethically engage in solidarity with formally colonized communities, and provides some space for agency to the Western sponsor toward more active resistance and advocacy.

### Chapter 3: A Postcolonial Feminist Rhetorical Analysis of Educational Development in Southern Africa

*“That is how to create a single story, show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become.”*

*Adiche Chimamanda*

In the above epigraph, Chimamanda outlines the way a single African postcolonial narrative has been constructed. Representations and stories are normalized through repetition, and the story of Africa as “beautiful landscapes, beautiful animals, and incomprehensible people, fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and AIDS, unable to speak for themselves, and waiting to be saved, by a kind, white foreigner” has been repeated by a multitude of stakeholders for centuries (Chimamanda). Though AIDS is a relatively recent historical development, disease has been linked to the African narrative since early colonial times (Dunn 494).

Chimamanda asserts that it is impossible to talk about this single story without talking about power. She says, “Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person.” Institutional powers have helped construct and repeat these narratives even when in the guise of charitable giving, particularly when it comes to English literacy acquisition, a taught skill that was often supplemented by the teaching of English literatures about Africa. As Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong’o so poignantly states, the “real aim of colonialism” was to control “the entire realm of language in real life” (442). “The domination of the people’s language by the languages of the colonizing nations was crucial to the domination of the mental

universe of the colonized” (442). In controlling the mental universe of the colonized through English language and literature, the colonizer in effect forced colonized people to stand outside themselves and look at themselves always through the perspective of the colonizer. Thiong’o relays a powerful illustration of this outside-in perspective as he tells the story of Professor Micere Mugo, a Kenyan writer and scholar, who was so influenced by the description of Rider Haggard’s monster Gagool in *King Solomon’s Mines*, that she experienced mortal terror every time she encountered old African women (444). The actor Sydney Poitier also describes how that as a result of the outsider representations he had read of Africa, he associated Africa only with snakes. Upon visiting Africa, this fear kept him from sleeping<sup>2</sup> even in a modern hotel in a modern city (Thiong’o 444).

These anecdotes illustrate the power and longevity of damaging postcolonial narratives. It is important to note that the same types of organizations used to “civilize” Africa during the colonial project continue in their civilizing mission through educational programming and other aid. Foreign mission organizations, governments, and companies repeat patterns of both colonial representation and relationship through discourse. The end result of this repeated narrative is to “rob people of dignity” (Chimimanda). This is not to say that there are not disruptions in the primary narrative, and its multiple versions, but that these disruptions have not yet overturned the powerful influence of colonizing language.

As noted in Chapter One, there are many ways that current aid reflects the historical imposition of narratives that have repeated this Single African story. I will use

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<sup>2</sup>My initial written experiences of Zambia echo Poitier’s fear of snakes. See pp. 88.

the postcolonial feminist principles of collaboration, focus on action, reflexivity, reciprocity, and hybridity-- referred to and more extensively outlined in the preceding chapter<sup>3</sup>-- in order to evaluate and push back against the postcolonial narratives of dependence, charity, and lack. I will examine the work of World Vision, USAID, PeaceCorps, and Room to Read, which are representative of the organizational interests operating in Southern Africa, by analyzing their mission statements and primary project home pages through the lens of these five principles. While it is impossible due to the scope of this research to analyze every aspect of the work itself, project implementation reflects the directives proposed in carefully constructed banner statements. In order to fully situate these programs within the context of a Zambian environment, I will first outline a short history of Zambian education and how these development projects are historically connected to contemporary work.

### **A Short History of Zambian Education**

In order to fully grapple with the impact of colonization and its residual effects on Zambia's schooling, and to demonstrate how current educational programming and aid is informed by postcolonial representation and relationships, it will be useful to offer here a short summary of how schooling has functioned in the country since English colonization in the 1890s and post independence.

During the seventy years of colonization in Zambia, the British introduced formal schooling into the country and attempted to replicate their own school systems. This

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<sup>3</sup> See page 40-41 for details.

tradition is noticeable in many Zambian classrooms as young people continue to wear the blue slacks/jumper uniform, the buildings themselves remain in the style as implemented by the British in the 1950s, and teachers in both rural and urban locations typically teach using lecture and rote memorization.

As postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha states in *The Location of Culture*, “Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must **continually** produce its slippage, its excess, its difference” (86) (emphasis mine). The educational project in Zambia has been an excellent example of how the colonial project has left a residual mark. While modeled after the British educational system, the “slippage,” “excess,” and “difference” continues to mark the story of education, a story co-opted and written by non-profits, foreign governments, and religious organizations. The colonial project, despite its at times, charitable justification, was never intended to fully ‘develop’ a colony or make it as valuable as the imperial nation. Colonial education itself worked toward approximating a more British environment. The colonized student was asked to become an approximate version of the privileged, learning the language, culture, science, history, and stories of the oppressor and erasing the forms of knowledge produced by the home culture (Bhabha “of Mimicry and Man”). Colonial education “stressed the ‘universal’/’imperial’ at the expense of the local’; it fostered and validated the centrality of and the belief in the excellence of all things English and instilled its pan-colonial companion, the ‘cultural cringe’ (Tiffin 144). Since its aim was a social control whose effective mechanism was the spread of English values, it focused on the language,



religion, and, in particular, the literary culture of England” (Tiffin 144). If the colonized were to become as powerful and as autonomous as the colonizer, the colonizer would lose its control and imperial position. Even post-colonization, there remains an uneasy relationship between the formerly colonized and the former colonizers, embodied in colonial residues of materials, institutions, and traditions. The four organizations selected here (World Vision, USAID, Peace Corps, and Room to Read) are not exempt from colonial influence. Rather, their community positions and programming are informed by a long tradition of Western intervention on African soil.

Following the country’s first multi-party democratic election in 1991, the country experienced rapid political liberalization and educational decentralization (Hollow 20). In 2002, Zambia implemented a policy of universal free education for primary school, grades 1-7, and eliminated all school fees including examination fees and compulsory uniform purchase (Hollow 20). The country did not, however, have the funding or personnel infrastructure to support the new policy. As primary schools became more autonomous and decentralized, many schools implemented new funding strategies which required school children to pay fees for textbooks, learning materials, and technologies (Hollow 20).

In my experience, these fees contribute to keeping many children who live in subsistence farming communities from attending school. The attrition rate at each level of education is quite high as students begin each year with the necessary funding, but are forced to leave when funding runs low or family farms require attention. It is important to remember here that rural Zambian families most often have more than four children

and even a small fee can become a tremendous sum when the family income is based on the marketing of crops, crops that require full family participation to grow and reap. Government Republic of Zambia (GRZ) schools also struggle with poor educational quality at the school level. Those who are able to attend school find themselves attempting to learn in overcrowded classrooms with poor infrastructure. Many schools hire untrained teachers who use a restrictive examination system, inflexible curriculum relying primarily on rote memorization, and the use of English for teaching as a primary classroom language even when it is a second language (Learning at Taonga Market: Technical Manual 39). These processes are remnants leftover from the historical British systems that have faltered and do not effectively support the production process of either local or wide-spread knowledge. As such, the Zambian population has low literacy rates, low secondary school completion rates, and low employment rates.

Zambia's struggle for development to become "a prosperous middle-income country by 2030" and create a sustainable educational environment for its populace has attracted world-wide attention (Fifth National Development Projects). The capital, Lusaka, and the Southern Province has become an international hot spot for aid workers, nonprofit, governmental, and religious organization. As noted in their 2008-2010 FNDP report, the overall movement of formal education is toward more "dynamic" relationships with "cooperating partners" (10). Historically, these cooperating partners have been tremendously influential in shaping educational programming and policy through large amounts of funding. The sustainability of these programs have been called into question, however, as countries who have led the charge for development have had to limit their aid expenditures. For example, the United States has decreased its aid to Zambia \$200

million in the years from 2005 to 2009 (Fifth National Development Projects). Though aid has often been ample, the FNDP acknowledges weaknesses in partner alliances based on unclear procedures of mobilization, community reception, planning, and budgeting.

Due to shifts in the global economy and perhaps more awareness of the implications of postcolonial power dynamics, aid relationships are changing and sustainability is becoming prioritized. Large organizations are not as able to support the types of monolithic aid support they have historically dominated in the Southern Africa. As a rhetorician, I am aware of the *kairos* of the scholarly and development climate for resistant narratives to emerge out of African/American partnerships. As the environment of aid is shifting, I hope to participate in the dismantling of a one African narrative in favor of multiple, diverse, rich, complicated, hybrid, and challenging stories told by and with Africans.

World Vision, USAID, Peace Corps, and Room to Read both reify and resist the African postcolonial narrative in a variety of ways as demonstrated by the language used on their mission and vision statements as well as their programming sections on each organization's web site. I examine the language used on these web pages to explore how the organizations attend to sponsorship, relationship, and representation through written evidence of engagement with postcolonial feminist principles—collaboration, an action-centered approach, reflexivity, reciprocity, and hybridity. I explore these in order of the organization that evidences the least attention to these concerns, the religious charity World Vision, to the project currently most attendant to postcolonial feminist principles, the nonprofit organization Room to Read.

## **Existing Projects: Replicating and Resisting Postcolonial Narratives**

### ***#1- World Vision's Narrative***

Even in Mufumbwe, a Northwestern area so remote that NGOs and other aid organizations rarely frequent it, *World Vision's* white Land Rovers are sometimes seen in the boma, vernacular term for town with government offices, carrying volunteers who distribute mosquito nets and assist local churches. Their nearly ubiquitous presence in developing countries began in the 1950s through the work of Dr. Bob Pierce, an American evangelist and war correspondent, to help children orphaned in the Korean War (World Vision). In the past sixty years, the work of World Vision has expanded into other Asian countries, Latin America, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. They accept donations from more than three million donors and distribute aid to “abandoned and exploited children, survivors of famine and civil war, refugees, and children and families in communities devastated by AIDS” (World Vision). They assert that their “extensive global infrastructure” gives them the ability to respond to needs anywhere in the world.

World Vision's involvement with educational programming in Zambia is through their child sponsorship program. As explained on their home web page, for \$35/month, individual donors can help provide “clean water, nutritious food, health care, educational opportunities, and spiritual nurture” (World Vision). Donors have the unique opportunity to ‘select’ the child they choose to support through the organization's website. Potential donors can choose a child by birth month, day, age, sex, or location. Much like internet dating websites, potential donors can scroll through children's profiles and identify

children they would like to sponsor by filtering through photos and brief descriptions.

The program represents the children in these head shots as serious and unsmiling, staring into the camera lens, as if imploring for help. Donors have the power to ‘special order’ their needy child and receive proof of their charitable decision-making in the form of a photograph of their unsmiling ‘dependent’ they can hang on their refrigerator. The sponsors of this educational project hold all of the power, do not actively engage in relationships with their sponsored children, and are able to terminate these relationships without any noticeable personal loss.

The purpose of this critique is not to vilify the intentions of many compassionate privileged Americans who want to build international bridges and support a work that portends to help meet the basic needs of suffering children. Rather, it is to assert that the narrative of compassion used here is not as innocent and reasonable as it may first appear. The donor may feel they are impacting the world—and changing lives-- through a manageable donation of their “spare” income. It is, after all, ‘only’ \$35/month. The donor is encouraged to feel connected to their sponsored child through letters and photos, but the relationships between sponsored children and their donors are limited to one-dimensional photographic representations and text mediated by World Vision volunteers and employees.

As part of the sponsorship program, sponsored children are required to write letters and establish communication with the partnered (often American) individual or family. From the organization’s web site, it is unclear how the \$35/month is distributed to individual children, but the website’s FAQ section does indicate that World Vision uses the money to “partner with sponsored children’s communities over the long term to

address critical needs and help communities become self sustaining.” The language in this statement implies that the power of World Vision to define these ‘critical needs’ and how communities become self-sustaining. Though here World Vision states their mission is for ‘community partnership,’ their vision statements and mission statements disavow this more democratic relationship.

Their stated vision statement, as demonstrated on the web site, is as follows:

*Our vision for every child, life in all its fullness; Our prayer for every heart, the will to make it so. World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organization dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. Inspired by our Christian values, we are dedicated to working with the world’s most vulnerable people. We serve all people regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, or gender.*

Their state mission statement, as demonstrated on their web site, is as follows:

*World Vision is an international partnership of Christians whose mission is to follow our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in working with the poor and oppressed to promote human transformation, seek justice, and bear witness to the good news of the Kingdom of God.*

The language used in both the mission and vision statements is part of a long discursive tradition of Christian mission endeavors on the African continent (Janks 2010).

The organization displays religious ideology as part of the programs *raison d’être*.

Embedded in these statements is an explicit appeal to a redemptive narrative. The organization is interested in “overcoming,” “promot(ing) human transformation,” and “bearing witness to the good news of the Kingdom of God.” This discursive positioning narrates the developing world as requiring salvation, both spiritually and materially.

Implied in these statements is the assumption that this salvation is something that can be provided through the financial contribution of privileged 1<sup>st</sup> world donors (read: white, affluent, Christian.) Though the vision statement states that the organization is dedicated

to “working with the world’s most vulnerable people,” and the web site affirms the commitment to “sustainability,” the focus here is on how donors can *make* this happen through financial donations. There is little emphasis on the ownership and the collaboration of community partners. Rather, these statements are positioned to make stakeholders feel their charity is the primary contributing factor in creating an environment for a child to live life “in all its fullness.”

Through these statements, I infer that World Vision’s relationship with the communities it supports is crafted through a lens of moral superiority. Though World Vision asserts that they “work with *all* populations regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, or gender,” their very “extensive global” influence commands a power over the values and structures of the communities they assist. While they may be in service to others who do not share their religious affiliation, their vastness and financial backing by necessity impacts the ways in which food, health care, education, and ‘spiritual nurture’ are dispensed across communities. For example, World Vision’s political and moral perspectives might inherently shape how they approach HIV/AIDS educational concerns. Their religious and ideological positioning would inevitably impact their approach toward a full range of prevention techniques for sexually transmitted diseases. When referring to ‘spiritual nurture’ for sponsored communities, the assumed nurture is a Christian nurture, even for those unaffiliated with Christianity.

World Vision represents the populations they work with as “the most vulnerable” people of the world. I question, however, if the populations World Vision works with would identify themselves as such. This limited narrative reduces experiences of people, of real lived individuals, to lack. Even the photos of the children represent a very limited

experience. Children are not shown smiling, in action, or in relationship. Rather, they are disembodied, alienated, and frowning.

Neither the mission or vision statement evidences any engagement with the adults in these children’s lives. The children appear unmoored, detached, and not part of pre-existing supporting communities. Families are removed from the narrative of support as a way to encourage the surrogate parental ownership by privileged and foreign sponsors. Donors are not in real relationship with their sponsored children, but the discursive positioning is one of paternalistic imposition and distant care.

World Vision’s mission and vision for their educational sponsorship program do not evidence a collaborative methodology. Rather, the program appears to be imposed onto communities rather than with communities. Though they state that they “work with” children, families, and communities to “overcome,” the community does not have a say in how the program operates in localized contexts. The program is not research based, it is action centered; however, there is no support that this educational sponsorship program is reciprocal, or reflexive.

**World Vision’s Assessment Chart:**

<i>Collaborative</i>	<i>Action – Centered</i>	<i>Reflexive</i>	<i>Reciprocal</i>	<i>Hybrid</i>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> -	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	--	--	--

**#2: *USAID & Peace Corps’ Narrative***

While World Vision’s vision, mission, and project implementation are grounded in a tradition of Christian charitable mission discourse, the collaborative project, Learning at Taonga Market (LTM), a partnership between USAID, The United States



Agency for International Development (USAID) and Peace Corps, instead embraces secular humanitarian discourse. Learning at Taonga Market has been advertised as one methodology being used in response to the United Nations' Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) in Zambia (Sitali 3).

In 2000, the UN, of which Zambia is a member, agreed to eight resolutions to be met by the year 2015 in light of global development needs (End Poverty 2015). The two millennium goals LTM particularly hoped to assist in meeting are Goals 2 and 8. Goal 2's objective is to achieve universal primary education and Goal 8's objective is to develop a global partnership for development. Programs that are working toward meeting these goals are eligible for assistance from aid groups such as United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

According to USAID's website, this federal agency "manages U.S. foreign economic and humanitarian assistance programs around the world." USAID's sphere of influence is enormous. The agency has working relationships with 3,500 American companies, 300 U.S.-based private companies, and provides assistance in Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe and Eurasia, and the Middle East (USAID).

Their mission statement, which is posted on their website, reads as follows: Working with individuals, governments, and other organizations, USAID supports sustainable development: economic and social growth that does not exhaust local resources; that does not damage the economic, cultural, or natural environment; that permanently increases the cohesion and productive capacity of the society; and that builds local institutions that involve and empower the citizenry.

USAID focuses on five areas critical to sustainable development; however, the LTM Project fits under the umbrella of the areas of “Democracy” and “Broad-based Economic Growth.” On their mission statement’s web page, they define these areas as follows:

**Democracy:** Emerging democracies around the world have just begun consolidating the institutions of a civic society. USAID works with local and national governments and indigenous PVOs and NGOs to support free and fair elections, to teach the skills of democratic governance, and to help citizens empower themselves and become full participants in their own development.

**Broad-based Economic Growth:** A strong free-market economy is the foundation of a stable democracy. By supporting economic growth, USAID creates markets for American goods and services. USAID's programs are appropriate to local needs, resources, and skills. They are designed to generate many incomes, to introduce new technologies, and to encourage humane working conditions.

While neither of these descriptors explicitly address educational programming, they do address government infrastructures, of which educational projects are part of.

For the LTM project, USAID partners with Peace Corps, a volunteer organization out of the United States. The Peace Corps was established in 1961 under the Kennedy administration. According to the website, the organization’s mission has three stated goals (Peace Corps):

1. Helping the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women.
2. Helping promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served.
3. Helping promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.

USAID works with and funds Peace Corps' implementation of The Learning at Taonga Market project, an Interactive Radio Instruction (IRI) program being produced in some of the most rural regions of Zambia. Peace Corps and USAID are not the only players involved in The Learning at Taonga Market project. The project is supported by the Zambian Ministry of Education, under the Directorate of Open and Distance Education (DODE), and Freeplay, an organization that distributes free radios (Learning at Taonga Market: Technical Manual 26). I, however, focus on the ideologies that situate the major American aid providers for this project.

Starting in the early 1990s, community schools began springing up throughout the country and are responsible for educating a large portion of the most rural school children (Hollow 21). These schools are different than GRZ schools as they are informal village cooperatives who are not formally set up by the MOE. Community schools do not require professionally trained teachers, or brick and mortar structures, but instead use volunteer mentors who only need to have completed Grade 8 and may use any informal meeting place such as a church or thatch structure for class (Chakwe 1). Community Schools use Interactive Radio Instruction, formally named in Zambia as Learning at Taonga Market (LTM), as their primary curriculum.

The National Broadcasting Company of Zambia (ZNBC), through the sponsorship offunds from USAID and the Ministry of Eucation broadcasts 30 minute grade specific transmission at a set time daily (Learning at Taonga Market). These community schools and volunteer mentors register with the MOE and upon registration receive a wind-up/battery-powered radio donated by organizations such as the Freeplay Foundation, supplemental curriculum, and mentor training (Learning at Taonga Market). According to

a brochure titled Learning at Taonga Market: Interactive Radio Instruction published by the MOE in 2005, these thirty minute broadcasts cover Literacy and English language, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies, and Life Skills/HIV & AIDS education with a heavy emphasis on incorporating local language and local histories.

The sponsorship of this project by Peace Corps and USAID suggest that on the surface they are very interested in the collaborative nature of the partnership between foreign investors and communities. USAID's mission statement specifically calls attention to its support of projects that "involve" local members, a move that rhetorically implies a more actively engaged relationship rather than the more static term of "partner" World Vision uses. Additionally, Peace Corps works toward "meeting the needs" of "interested communities" for skilled laborers. However, these missions are oriented only to how Americans will work within the collaborative space. USAID states that they do not "support damage to economic, cultural, or natural environments" through their aid projects, but does not illuminate how 'the other' might participate in the conversation for how to reduce the risk of damaging economic, cultural, or natural environments. This mission statement notes that the agency will "build local institutions" that "involve and empower" the citizenry. Upon initial investigation, these statements appear egalitarian and collaborative, but the agency itself is the source of power. It is the agency, and the collaborating partners, initiating and sustaining the building, involvement, and empowerment of the local communities.

For the Learning at Taonga Market project, community teachers are actively involved in project implementation. The project does not run without a collaborative relationship between the organization sponsors and the community, or without the mutual

support and development by USAID, Peace Corps, and the Zambian Ministry of Education. The framework for how USAID and Peace Corps establish their relationships with the Ministry of Education, however, still smacks of postcolonial imperialist interventions.

Because LTM is a development project, it is by necessity an action-centered project. I will note, however, that Peace Corps' goals do not *necessarily* require action of their volunteers in their participation with this or any other project. Though action might be implied in the heuristic of their goals, Peace Corps discursively privileges the *provision* of the "trained" worker, not the level or the type of participation. In Goal #1, it is up to the worker to determine the level of involvement with her assigned community, and her approach to development work. Once again, agency resides in the foreign actor, not the community. Goals #2 and #3 are centered on how an American volunteer might represent her country and then, upon returning home, represent her experience of the people of the country she served. None of these three goals explicitly require action and allow for passivity and distance on the part of the volunteer participant, a structure that moves away from advocacy and into potential voyeurism and irresponsibility.

Notably, as with World Vision, there is an absence of reflexivity embedded into the mission statements of USAID and Peace Corps and by extension, the LTM project. In its mission statement, USAID does not outline the participation of its partners, but rather focuses on the broader principles of organization. None of these principles are concentrated on critical engagement or assessment on the part of the development participants.

Additionally, there is little possibility for reciprocity. The goals of Peace Corps are oriented completely toward the perspective of the volunteer. Even in Goal #3, which asks the volunteer to engage in representing other cultures, there is no language to determine how volunteers might ethically do so. Embedded in the language of USAID's mission statement is the discursive positioning of privilege. There is no space for agency, dialogue, and reaction on the part of the communities. Rather, development is occurring on and to rather than with and by. Though USAID says in the subsections of "democracy," that their projects will "help citizens empower themselves and become full participants in their own development," the tone remains paternal and does not suggest how citizens might become full participants in their development or how the relationship might be fostered in such a way that resists top-down paradigms.

As with World Vision's mission statement, the notion of hybrid project creation in both Peace Corps and USAID's mission statements is absent. The home skills and knowledge of developing communities is only nodded to, never really engaged with. The Learning at Taonga Market project (LTM) approaches a level of hybridity in that the radio programs do teach local language and the national language, English, but the intent is to use local language as a bridge into English fluency, a move that minimizes the importance of local knowledge. One aspect of the project does depart from postcolonial univocality; the voice of the radio program instruction is a Zambian voice, which shifts away from the postcolonial assertion that the English voice, or English accent is "correct." The voice Zambian children hear is a voice similar to their own, a voice legitimized by its use through an institutionalized medium.

The LTM project evidences the mission statements of these organizations by encouraging the collaboration between the Zambian Ministry of Education, Peace Corps volunteers, and community teachers; however, the project still relies on the knowledge and skills of Peace Corps volunteers to implement interactive radio instruction in community schools and train community teachers (Learning at Taonga Market: Technical Manual 26). Power remains located in the foreign teacher, a teacher who may or may not be trained in education, pedagogy, or development, or have evidenced a commitment or personal stakes in the project.

Though both USAID and Peace Corps, through their collaborative project Learning at Taonga Market, and as demonstrated in their mission statements, do operate with some elements that begin to break away from postcolonial norms that reinscribe a single African story, however, as a whole their mutual approaches still affirm a one-side relationship of intervention and knowledge building.

#### **USAID & Peace Corps Assessment Chart:**

<i>Collaborative</i>	<i>Action – Centered</i>	<i>Reflexive</i>	<i>Reciprocal</i>	<i>Hybrid</i>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	--	--	--

#### **# 3: *Room to Read's Narrative***

Room to Read is a private nonprofit organization founded by former Microsoft executive, John Wood. The organization concentrates primarily on the work of building libraries and distributing both English and local-language books to libraries in areas of high need. The organization initially began because of Wood's interest in building a

single library in Nepal as a response to the need he observed following a vacation in Nepal (Wood xx) However, once he began working on this single library and saw the effect the implementation had on that single village, he left Microsoft in order to develop an organization that rapidly grew to serving communities in Vietnam, Cambodia, India, Sri Lanka, Laos, South Africa, Bangladesh, and Zambia through library building. Wood, and his organization, however, noticed that even though school and library provision proved helpful to many communities, many people in these communities were marginalized because of their lack of training in the material experience of books or their inability to read the material in the libraries. Because of this, Room to Read began exploring the possibilities of how to approach literacy education in a localized way (Room to Read).

After a year of research and development in collaboration with the Ministry of Education in Zambia, Room to Read is currently implementing a pilot Grade 1 literacy program in conjunction with the Ministry of Education. The pilot program is operating in Chongwe, Zambia and utilizes a three-prong curricula approach to literacy in Grade 1 classrooms. Employing a methodology of phonics, aural/oral, and writing exercises in a proprietary workbook, the pilot program hopes to see an increase in fundamental literacy acquisition.

This project, however, is still in the pilot stages in Zambia and is limited to a region right outside the capital, Lusaka. Published books are written in Chi Nyanja, one of the larger language groups in the country. Because of the tremendous amount of languages present in the country, it would be extremely difficult to produce workbooks in *every* local language, so Room to Read has elected to implement their pilot programming



to a more common language group. Additionally, a different type of literacy response would be required for language learning at higher levels. So, while the program is attempting to work collaboratively in a localized project in conjunction with the NBTL approach implemented by the MOE for first graders, the project does not extend to meet the needs of adult learners and is contained to a geographical location very near to the capital.

Their stated vision statement, as demonstrated on their web site, is as follows:

Room to Read believes that World Change Starts with Educated Children. We envision world in which all children can pursue a quality education that enables them to reach their full potential and contribute to their community and the world.

Their stated mission statement, as demonstrated on their web site, is as follows:

Room to Read seeks to transform the lives of millions of children in developing countries by focusing on literacy and gender equality in education. Working in collaboration with local communities, partner organizations and governments, we develop literacy skills and a habit of reading among primary school children, and support girls to complete secondary school with the relevant life skills to succeed in school and beyond.

Room to Read's mission statement privileges sustainability and cultural relevance. In particular, they emphasize the collaborative component of their projects. They explicitly state in the mission statement that they work "in collaboration with local communities, partner organizations and governments." While the previous organizations explored here have to some extent implied the collaborative nature of their work, Room to Read transparently privileges this concept as part of their development approach. The "we" that follows that statement implies that through Room to Read's sponsorship of this program, the mutual development of literacy and reading habits occur. Room to Read is

less of a “missionary” activist here, working against a model of colonial imposition and toward equitable collaboration. Additionally, Room to Read employs national Zambians for work within the country. Every Country Director of their programs is a national citizen of the project country. Though Room to Read’s central operations are run in San Francisco, CA, the projects are highly collaborative with national government initiatives. This approach is highly unusual in educational development programs.

Room to Read also engages with gendered literacy as a component to their literacy approach. Working in alignment with Spivak’s concern about the double colonization of women, and the evidence that girls and women are significantly less likely to have access to or complete literacy education, Room to Read specifically focuses their projects on “gender equality” and “support girls to complete secondary school with the relevant life skills to succeed in school and beyond.” It is in this vein that I will take up autoethnography as another method to attend to these concerns, but with a focus on adult women, a demographic not covered by Room to Read or by any other current literacy program in Zambia.

Overall, Room to Read does seem to meet the collaborative criteria of a postcolonial feminist framework; however, one portion of the vision statement lends itself to a more complicated reading. The vision statement says that Room to Read “envision[s] a world in which all children can pursue a quality education that enables them to reach their *full* potential.” Who determines what this full potential is and how children might meet that potential? Is this the full responsibility of the sponsor to determine? Though the mission statement brings to the foreground the collaborative work of the organization with its partners, this language is absent in the vision statement.

Without the presence of the collaborating partners in the vision statement, the reader can infer that it is the organization itself that is constructing both the terms of the successful fulfillment of potential and the way that these children can “contribute to their community and the world.” In this way, then, the language of these statements goes against the otherwise collaborative and localized vision of this project.

Room to Read’s projects do encourage research as part of the production of their projects, but they are by their very nature, action-centered. The language in the mission and vision statements reflects the active nature of the projects. Using strong verbs like “pursue, enable, reach, contribute, transform, work, develop, support, and succeed,” the organization emphasizes the way in which their projects perform and act. While the participation of the on-the-ground instructors or employees is not shown here, the language of these statements indicate engagement rather than observation.

Room to Read also supports a more hybrid approach to language education. Because the Ministry of Education in Zambia supports a dual literacy approach using both local languages and English in primary school, Room to Read picked up on the vision to create a literacy program that more strongly focuses on local language learning. Local language learning and English language acquisition is part of “a quality education.” This project may once again be read as using local language to facilitate entry into the more dominant language; however, the action of dual learning lends itself to hybrid identity a movement away from the privileging of a single English narrative.

Even though Room to Read’s mission and vision statements and programming open up some spaces for interrupting the postcolonial tradition, there are still remnants of the postcolonial narrative embedded in their programmatic approach. Additionally, their

web presence affirms the conflicting impulses by indicating a heavy awareness of their American audience as their operations appeal to the importance of producing quantitative measurable responses and low-overhead. This can be read as appealing and innovative and resistant to the operational habits of gluttonous top-heavy non-profits, however, I have some concern that it can conversely also be read as prioritizing the financial over the human, a move away from an action-centered, collaborative, and reciprocal approach. However, looking over the Room to Read public website closely, they publicly post representations of children and adult workers that resist the visual story of saddened oppressed people desperately in need to charitable intervention. Rather, populations of many different ethnicities of many different geographies in many different environments are depicted. Contrary to many of the messages created by aid organizations who re-narrate, as Chimamanda Adiche says, the one narrative of Africa, a story that evokes pity, Room to Read offers pictures of children reading in many different contexts. This meta production lends itself to a reading of multi-vocality perhaps seen on the Peace Corps website, but quite absent from World Vision and USAID.

**Room to Read's Assessment Chart:**

<i>Collaborative</i>	<i>Action – Centered</i>	<i>Reflexive</i>	<i>Reciprocal</i>	<i>Hybrid</i>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> +	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> +	--	--	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

**Conclusion:**

	<i>Collaborative</i>	<i>Action – Centered</i>	<i>Reflexive</i>	<i>Reciprocal</i>	<i>Hybrid</i>
<i>World Vision</i>	--	☑	--	--	
<i>USAID &amp; Peace Corps</i>	☑	☑	--	--	--
<i>Room To Read</i>	☑+	☑+	--	--	☑

Though there are ways that the above projects have opened up spaces of resistance to repeating the postcolonial story, there remain discursive indications of postcolonial reification as reflected in the above comparison chart. While USAID, Peace Corps, and Room to Read are working toward resisting a sponsorship approach of missionary activism and support more collaborative relationships, World Vision, however, heavily relies on a postcolonial tradition that privileges charitable intervention and imposition. World Vision's global presence makes its reliance on these types of relationships all the more grave. If these types of projects continue to gain in popularity and power, the narrative of African dependence, disaster, and disease will continue to remain as present and oppressive as it was a century ago.

World Vision is also the largest culprit of continuing to represent Zambians, and other African peoples, in such a way that denies the diversity, complexity, and agency of the populations they work with. USAID and Peace Corps also fall into this trap by their discursive focus and interest on the role of the volunteer and government participant. Though they are better about embracing a collaborative model, the representations of others continue to be constructed as lacking in fundamental resources (without an

adequate representation for the skill sets that local community members bring to the relationships) and on the part of USAID, fail to meet up with the expected standards of American democracy and economic growth.

And as the above chart reflects, there is no evidence from the mission and vision statements or program overviews available view web for these organizations that the principles of participant reflexivity and reciprocity are being taken into account for development projects. For postcolonial feminists, there is much room to encourage reflexivity, reciprocity, and hybridity. Chapter 4 will unpack how a collaborative autoethnographic writing project, and specifically the Chizela Women's Writing Workshop, might begin to offer alternatives where other projects are failing to disrupt postcolonial relationships and representations. In the vein of Room to Read, I take up the call for gendered education that provides a space for women's education that both increases access to literacy skills and also provides a way to document stories while resisting a single African narrative.

## Chapter Four: Proposed Autoethnographic Project in Rural Zambia

*“Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower, and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people. But stories can also repair that broken dignity.”*  
Adiche Chimamanda

In the previous chapter, I analyzed how current educational projects are either resisting or reifying postcolonial narratives to construct a One Story of Africa through representative discourse of their sponsoring organization’s mission and vision statements as they connect to development projects. In all cases, these organizations and projects continue telling a single African story of catastrophe and dependence; however, each also demonstrates spaces that challenge this single narrative. In this chapter, I will propose the Chizela Women’s Writing Workshop, a collaborative autoethnographic project, in extending the tradition of community writing toward current educational development work occurring in Southern Africa. I demonstrate that the methodology of the collaborative autoethnographic project meets the criteria of postcolonial feminist concerns for an ethical approach to foreign intervention in education and development.

### **Autoethnography in the Service of Community Writing**

Community writing as partnership between privileged and underserved communities toward mutual development has a long tradition. As noted in chapter 2, Paulo Freire advocated for the partnership between the intellectual ally and community members working in rural and underserved environments toward mutual engagement and political transformation. This model of mutual engagement showed itself in the

extraordinary collaborative literacy learning that occurred in Nicaragua in the 1980s (Zwerling). In a politically charged environment, young people from privileged families left their homes to work in the countryside, working in the fields with families during the day and teaching reading and writing in the evenings by lantern (Zwerling 48). This relationship served not only to educate Nicaraguan peasants, but allowed the middle class students to recover a shared history and national folklore. They were able to cross socioeconomic, geographic, and generational boundaries in order to facilitate mutual education.

This project exemplifies an ideal kind of partnership that can empower multiple stakeholders. The middle-class teens involved in the project were able to bring their more academic skill sets into rural communities and facilitate literacy learning, a skill that gave community members more cultural collateral and power within existing social and political infrastructures. In exchange, community members were able to teach localized cultural knowledge that had become increasingly erased in suburban areas. Both stakeholders in the projects gained benefits by becoming both student and teacher (49). The project did not work to “bank” knowledge in either population, or insist upon a privileging of one set of knowledge over another (Freire, 1993). This mutual education occurred not “through personal aggrandizement and acquisitiveness in a consumer society, but through civic engagement, and seeing themselves as *powerful enough, knowing enough, “being” enough, to change their society* (49).

This type of community writing partnership continues in many forms. Whether through writing workshops geared for incarcerated adults, for teens in residential rehab, for primary school age children at camp, for women in a religious community, or for



domestic abuse or sexual assault survivors, all writing environments I have personally been involved in or are well acquainted with, intellectual sponsors facilitate engagement with new types of discourse, and in the doing, create spaces for personal learning, reflection, and growth. And as Joseph Harris asserts, we *never* truly write outside of community, but rather “as members of communities whose beliefs, concerns, and practices both instigate and constrain, at least in part, the sorts of things we can say. Our aims and intentions in writing are thus not “merely personal, idiosyncratic, but reflective of the communities to which we belong” (Harris 749). Writing is always influenced by community, and these types of writing workshops and partnerships make transparent the connections between writing and the community rather than limiting writing as literacy and educational tool only for use in a formal classroom.

Art Bochner sees autoethnography as a collection of personal and cultural narratives, of one way of acknowledging the community in writing, an extension of the English studies project with a particular emphasis on the development of local literature. (“Analyzing Autoethnography” 435) And as Williams wrote in 1961 in *The Long Revolution*, “Language and literature provide the means through which society’s history is narrate[d], and its ‘social character’ is produced (Rassool 16). It is through the act of composition that life stories undercut conventions of writing that foster hierarchy and division. Ellis & Bochner contend that no over-arching or generalizing analysis should be constructed from the autoethnographic work. It is by its very nature local and specific. Meaning is not proscribed and singular, but flexible and multiple (“Analyzing Analytic Autoethnography” 438). Ellis says, “I want ethnography to make a difference in the world and, where necessary to change people.” The aims of community writing and the

aims of autoethnography then align toward not a static and universal goal, but mutually supportive goals that encourage “social change, intercultural conversation, and inquiry” (Campbell, Flower, and Peck 1102). Collaborative autoethnography as literacy development project builds on this tradition of community collaboration. By engaging in a ‘contact zone,’ with multiple diverse cultural participants, a new type of productive learning emerges (Pratt 1990).

As of now, there is no evidence of other types of life-writing projects currently occurring in Zambia. I acknowledge these projects may exist and have not yet been documented via web presence, through academic journals, or through the Peace Corps networking chain. Additionally, there may be networks outside of the above mentioned, such as small publishing companies interested in collecting stories from around the world, who are engaging in this type of work; however, I have been unable to locate any in the time allotted for the completion of this research. I have, however, located evidence of fascinating life writing workshops occurring in Malawi sponsored by Voice Flame Writers International. This project engages in gendered writing projects that help to publish diverse stories and increase literacy rates in Malawi, a country neighboring Zambia that shares with it many common attributes. While these projects explicitly work toward gendered literacy acquisition and activism that encourages the production of multiple stories and the increased visibility of the national writer, these story projects are currently formatted as short-term workshops rather than longer-term on-site projects (Voice Flame Writers International).

In addition to these story workshops, other types of programming are beginning to resist the one African narrative by using multi-modal approaches to the distribution of

localized voices. One great example of this is the Radio Diaries project, a non-profit production company sponsored by National Public Radio. While this project is not specifically constructed as a development or educational tool, it is an example of the type of story-telling that works to disrupt homogenous narrated images created by privileged discourse creators.

Radio Diaries conducted a project in South Africa to document the life of one nineteen year old young woman, Thembi Ngambi, struggling with HIV. Her stories were recorded in English, Xhosa, and Zulu (<http://www.radiodiaries.org/aidsdiary/>). The Radio Diaries project gave Thembi a tape recorder and asked to document her experiences throughout a year of her life. These stories were then posted along with text on the Radio Diaries website. Though Ngubani passed away at the age of 24, her voice is preserved through web access. Rather than centering on just the medical particularities of the disease, the web journal is dedicated to the lived experience of AIDS and the impact of poverty, stigma, and gendered behaviors on a young woman living with the disease. The purpose is to explode the assumptions of what it is to be a young African woman living with the virus through many audio recordings.

The collaborative autoethnographic workshop I propose takes up the work currently being done by these writing workshops and this radio program and extends them in a way that is more directly engaged in meeting postcolonial feminist principles with regard to sponsorship, representation, and relationship. In a collaborative autoethnography project, I would wish to extend what is now being done in a visiting format to more a more sustainable long-term initiative. The autoethnographic project I propose here would not be a fly-in/fly-out writing workshop in keeping with the

“member” requirements of autoethnography, but would need to be a sustained writing course. Though Radio Diaries does not engage in educational projects, I align myself with the sentiments expressed in the quote the organization foregrounds on their web site.

A tape recorder with microphone in hand...can be used to capture the voice of a celebrity, whose answers are ever ready and flow through all the expected straits. I have yet to be astonished by one. It can be used to capture the thoughts of the non-celebrated—on the steps of a public housing project, in a frame bungalow, in a furnished apartment, in a parked car—and these 'statistics' become persons, each one unique. I am constantly astonished." —Studs Terkel

The stories of the non-celebrated, as Terkel call them, are powerful agents in creating a pool of diverse and hybrid narratives that resist the hegemonic forces creating a single dominant and oppressive image of a way of being. The work Radio Diaries does models the kind of work a writing workshop would create and perform. Their innovative use of webspace might also be appropriate for the sharing of stories in a writing workshop environment.

While life writing projects may not currently be occurring in Zambia, community writing projects that situate literacy and writing as resistance is nothing new. From Freire (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*) to Boal (*Theater of the Oppressed*) to Anzaldua (*Borderlands/La Frontera*) to Harris (“The Idea of Community”) to Moss (“Literacy in African-American churches”), writers, educators, activists, and theorists have located community writing, either with community or about community, as a space for analysis, resistance, and social change. Collaborative autoethnographic writing projects are located in the nexus of all these traditions.

## **The Collaborative Autoethnographic Workshop in Context**

I argue that any educational project that works against postcolonial narratives is inherently localized. While the sponsors of such projects may take into consideration larger contextual concerns—for example, national politics, international relationships, and global economic demands—the reading of such must occur through a localized lens, a lens informed by the community. Because of this, I propose a collaborative autoethnographic workshop in the context of the community I worked with and the relationships I developed in the Northwestern province of Zambia.

As I propose this project, I envision the adult school I worked at in Mufumbwe in 2007. Located just a mile from the boma, and the educational ministry offices of the Mufumbwe district, the adult school was independently operated by a local gentleman—for purposes of this project, we will call him Anthony—who had spent significant time in more developed regions and had returned to the village with the intent of encouraging education in the adult populations. This project was a labor of love, and at the time, was not formally funded or monitored by the Ministry of Education. At the time of my departure from the village in early 2008, Anthony<sup>4</sup> was continuing to develop more official relationships with the MOE in order to standardize his curriculum and objectives with the national educational program. Anthony solicited his financial support from Zambian national grants and foreign investors.

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<sup>4</sup> All names used here are pseudonyms and some characters are composites of the individuals I worked with during my time in Zambia. I use pseudonyms as a way to protect the privacy of those I worked with since due to geographical and communication constraints, I am not able to obtain explicit permissions.

The students at this adult school, which we will call the Nyampafuku Adult School, were primarily women who for multiple life reasons had to drop out of traditional primary school. Many were women who had left school to support families, and were returning to school with the hope of passing the formal Grade 7 evaluations. Classes ran from 1-5 pm during weekday afternoons after families had completed their domestic obligations, which included housekeeping, gardening, and tending family fields or local markets.

Anthony had trouble locating and paying qualified teachers to work in the adult school and sought me out as a potential resource. I came into the Nyampafuku Adult School as a Life Skills teacher for adults in grades 5, 6, and 7. I taught one hour every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon. Because the educational system in Zambia does not allow students to pass beyond the first few primary grades without some English proficiency, the students in my classroom had at least basic English conversational skills, though a few were quite advanced and could hold complex ideological conversations in what was their second language. The class varied in size from 10 – 40 students and had a high turnover rate, though a core of 10 students consistently attended class and created an attentive and collaborative community. The ages of the students in this class ranged from 18 to 70. My oldest student was Mr. Sapata—the one man who remained consistently committed to classes—and frequently pushed me for English instruction in addition to the Life Skills curriculum, a curriculum I was responsible for developing and implementing. With the help of my class, we created a curriculum that ranged from learning HIV/AIDS prevention tools to engaging in basic math for local market exchanges. One concern that consistently arose in these sessions was the uneasiness the students felt about writing and

reading in English. Thus, our sessions often evolved and adapted to include mini-language lessons.

It is helpful here to outline the environment of the Naympafuku Adult School that has dictated much of the direction of this research. I reflect on the relationships I began to develop in this environment, and I think of the expressed needs of this community of student writers. Mrs. Chimbala, a 40-year old mother of 5 who left primary school in Grade 3 to marry and have her first child, was one of the most active participants at Nyampafuku. After raising her children, and enrolling them in school, she determined to finish school herself, commenting that she could not truly promote education for her children unless she had an education herself. She was highly motivated to use the life and literacy skills acquired in our class to more efficiently run her small business selling kapenta, a local dried fish, at the boma market. She intended to become a more successful businesswoman, a sponsor of her children's education, and was already a tremendous leader in the course, galvanizing other women to attend class consistently even during inconvenient times. During rainy season, hot season, funerals, sporting events, or Ministry of Education-sanctioned holidays, Mrs. Chimbala attended the Tuesday and Thursday classes. Our relationship was warm and friendly and though she respectfully called me "Ba Stace," a term both of endearment and honor, she also never hesitated to push me on my own cultural norms. Why did I wear pants when I rode my bicycle rather than wearing a traditional chitenge? Why did I allow male Peace Corps volunteers to stay over in my small home rather than encouraging them to stay in the guest house? This would keep me from perpetuating rumors about the moral ambiguity of Americans. She asked challenging questions about my support of the current

American presidential administration, how I felt about Chinese/American foreign relations, and if I knew how to speak Serbian. She was actively engaged with the implications of other foreign cultures encroaching on her village and both wanted to capitalize on the ‘advancements’—mining, roads, and jobs--we could bring into the village, but remained suspicious about our political motivations.

Rich and complex identities like Mrs. Chimbala’s have often been institutionally silenced by organizations who forward the One Story of Africa. Mrs Chimbala is no shrinking violet, no despairing woman, no dependent and oppressed soul. She does acknowledge her poverty, her own drive for increased literacy, and her families’ material needs—she often mentioned how she would like to purchase shoes for all of her children—yet, she is a leader in her community, intelligent, politically motivated, and inquisitive. There are many women, many stories that emerged in this collaborative environment. During my time working at this school, I became acutely aware of the discrepancies between how village women had been represented to me by various media influences and my experiences in relation with them. These women were highly intelligent, dedicated, belligerent, joyous, family-centered, self-aware, critical, compliant, gentle, vocal, gossipy, and ultimately, incredibly diverse.

It is with this community in mind that I propose the Chizela Women’s Writing Workshop, a collaborative autoethnographic writing project. I believe, however, that the principles and the foundation of the project may be implemented in multiple developing communities and in rural areas particularly. I propose that long-term life writing (autoe) projects might be engaged in that use collaborative writing exercises to develop dual language literacy and increase the production of both local publications and broader-



reaching publications that can help multiply and diversify the number of stories written by and about African women.

As Chandra Mohanty has attended to in much of her work, it is important to resist “proof(s) of universality” in feminist discourse even in these autoe projects (63).

American feminist movement/s have had a history of viewing women as “an already constituted and coherent group with identical interests and desires” with no noticed differences between race, class, ethnicity, or any other identity community (63). It might be tempting to approach a community writing workshop like the Chizela Workshop with the goals of the sponsor neatly tied up, without ever engaging in dialogue about the needs of the community. Certainly, given my experiences from living in rural Zambia, I have notions of how this workshop might be accomplished, but in order to stay true to the spirit of the project, flexibility is essential. Of course, the sponsor does have to negotiate the tension between sources of funding that may have concrete budgetary requirements and quantitative evaluations and ethical relationships with community.

### **A Snapshot of the Chizela Women’s Writing Workshop**

With these experiences in mind, I propose a Women’s Writing Workshop that would use autoethnography as the primary method for literacy acquisition. I have named it the Chizela Women’s Writing Workshop, because it reflects the name of the village that became my home for my year serving in the Peace Corps. Located 3 km outside of the Mufumbe boma, the Chizela village represents for me rural spaces that are often outside of institutional jurisdiction and are an excellent place for localized literacy development. While I envision the attendees of such a workshop to be much like the core

group of women who attended the Nymphafuku Adult School, the workshop might also be open to other female community members seeking to engage in story-telling and higher-level English language learning. I imagine women like Martha, the 17-year old high school student who taught me how to do laundry in a bucket and to carry a jerry can full of water on my shoulders, who borrowed my American magazines and gave me lessons on Zambian teen etiquette, finding a place to grow in personal writing, both in English and Kaonde, in this workshop. I envision Ivy, the head female teacher at Chizela Basic School, with her stern respect for institutional rules and her complete lack of fear of her male superiors at the school where she taught, writing about her experiences in teacher training at a more urban location in Zambia and her subsequent transfer to teaching primary school in “the bush.” I picture furious Ebineezer, the young high school student, brilliantly fluent in both English and six other local languages, writing angrily back to the men in her life who have sexually assaulted her during her childhood and adolescence. All of these are talented women who diligently seek places for continuing educational growth, who work toward local sustainability of education at the community level, who might use writing as a way to archive their experiences in their culture, and who all counter representations made of them by foreign organizations. Engaging in autoethnographic writing practice would allow for a variety of stakeholders to grow in cultural communication, knowledge, and experiences in both reading and writing in dual languages.

In keeping with autoethnographic principles of membership and intense community engagement, the Chizela Womevn’s Writing Workshop would not be developed as a short-term project, but rather as a six-month to a multiple-year project

where the sponsors and stakeholders meet consistently (ideally, weekly) as a group to gather and share stories, engage in writing exercises, and develop plans for publication and distribution of texts. I imagine these meetings occurring in informal spaces, kinzanzas (open air kitchens), front yards, or perhaps church buildings in keeping with local cultural meeting habits. The intent of the autoethnographic writing workshop is not to “mimic” a formal, and colonial, school setting, but to expand the location of learning into the community.

The Chizela Women’s Writing Workshop would be created with the intent of local sustainability, that those who are learning in the group will eventually own the group and continue it long after myself or any other Western sponsor departed for home. As Cushman asserts, the position of the Western sponsor here is to “lend” status. As a sponsor, I would work to provide connections to material and professional assets that community women do not currently have with the hope of eventually transferring the ownership of the project into local hands. Initially, I would provide access into types of English language learning not currently accessible in the village. In exchange, I would gain additional cultural experiences, something that gives me great personal joy, access to new languages and literacy, and the privilege of writing about these experiences.

One of the key components to the Cheizela Women’s Writing Workshop is dual language learning. As Rassol asserts in *Global Issues in Language, Education and Development*, language plays an important role in self-identification and creates “binding forces” that link families, lineages, clans, and ethnic groups (33). The erasure of home languages leads to an erasure of cultural identity. Gloria Anzaldua concurs, saying, “ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity” (81). The point of this

autoethnographic writing project is not simply to *teach English*, but to encourage a shared learning of local language and a national (colonially imposed) language, acknowledging that with the acquisition of national language literacy skills, comes global currency and entry into power with dominant discourses.

The Chizela Women's Writing Workshop is positioned in alliance with Anzaldua's linguistic revolution, one that is political and localized. She does not necessarily advocate for the elimination of English, or colonial languages, but rather a privileging of multiple identities through the embracement of multiple languages and multiple discourses. This ability to embrace the complexity of multiple identities creates an altered way of being. She writes those who embrace hybridity, an identity she terms "mestiza," are "stubborn, persevering, impenetrable as stone, yet possessing a malleability that renders [us] unbreakable"(86). Working to strengthen the reading and writing in both national and local languages can help women to name their space and the position of their culture (Freire).

*Potential Exercises for the Chizela Women's Writing Workshop:*

Following are three potential exercises that could be used within the framework of autoethnographic practices and work toward dual language acquisition.

*Hybrid Poetry:*

In this exercise, the group would be challenged to collaboratively write a non-fictional poem in two languages that connects a theme across two cultures. This exercise is not only to practice writing in multiple languages, but to think about connecting themes and cultural concerns between performed identities, an inherent part of enacting multiple language. It is autoethnographic because the piece should reflect autobiographical

concerns but also makes larger cultural connections and claims. For this exercise to be executed in a dual language writing workshop the prompt would need to be simplified and direct. In individual practice, it might look like this: Compose a poem titled “I Write” that makes explores two different sides to one experience. The poem can be written in the language you are most comfortable and reflected on in your secondary language. The poem should work both separately as two pieces and together as one

*Recipe Sharing Project.*

In this project, all members would offer a recipe written in two languages. This would work as a way to introduce members of divergent cultures both to a unique and situated vocabulary and to discuss the importance of food and eating traditions as part of cultural experience. For example, the Kaonde women do not use measuring cups or spoons when preparing their meals, but rather to indicate amount, will say “a bit” or “a lot”. This exercise might be hybridized by engaging in dialogue about how recipes change and shift upon adoption. For instance, I used about a quarter of “salady,” vegetable oil, for making the native nshima as my village neighbors.

*Community Mapping Project*

In a community mapping project, partners or small groups would create maps of the area where they live (perhaps a neighborhood, a village, or a town) and then work to define the spaces that are important to them. From the creation of the map, we might open up a discussion about why these places are important to us. We might talk about the roles we have in these places. This might develop into writing exercises where we might write short nonfictional narratives about a day when we visited two or three of these locations. The intent of this project is to make transparent the multiplicity of stories

available to us in even in our day-to-day experiences and to open up a space for discussing the differences of experiences even in similar locations.

### **Return to the Principles of Autoethnography and its Transformation through Collaboration**

I return here to the principles of autoethnography in order to illustrate how an autoethnographic methodology for the Chizela Women's Writing Workshop meets the postcolonial feminist criteria for ethical engagement of the sponsor in relationships with and representations of The Other.

- *Autoethnography speaks back to assumptions created by dominant discourses about others*
- *Autoethnography complicates generalizations*
- *Autoethnography evokes empathetic rather than sympathetic responses to formerly 'unknown' cultures*

These three principles, or what autoethnography can “do,” are extended and transformed through collaborative autoethnographic writing practices. In co-autoethnographic writing practices, hierarchical positions are constantly undermined as each writer—both sponsor and community member-- voices, interprets, synthesizes, and explores their own life experiences and literacy practices. Thus, assumptions and generalizations are encountered, deliberated, and challenged in the writing space. Empathy is created through “dialogic” encounter rather than just through the consumption of static text (Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*; Jarratt “Beside

Ourselves”). Collaborative autoethnography ‘does’ the work of autoe on two levels, both in the production of single-narrative resistant texts and in the ‘contact zone’ of dialogue (Pratt “Arts of the Contact Zone”). Collaborative autoethnography puts literacy into a space of action for both the teacher and student writers as they write their life stories in relation to each other with the objectives of social activism and intercultural learning. The hope then is to create space for new conversations and new connections.

As mentioned above, this is a space for dialogue not just between a Western literacy sponsor, but between different community stakeholders. By putting women from multiple backgrounds in conversation with each other, the Western story becomes less important, less a place of focus, just one more voice in a multitude of voices. Keeping in Cushman in mind, the sponsor does provide resources, facilitate action, and lend power/status to forward mutually determined achievements; however, the focus remains on collaborative development and solidarity (Cushman 14).

### **Autoethnography in Response to Feminist Post-Colonial Criteria for Ethical Engagement**

To create space for new conversation and new connections, autoethnography must attend to the feminist postcolonial concerns brought to attention in Chapter 3. How might this methodology specifically move away from a One Story of Africa toward multi-vocal narratives and a disruption of postcolonial power dynamics? I will take the framework engaged with in the previous chapter and overlay:

*Collaboration:*

Co-autoethnography explicitly requires collaborative engagement through the resistance of a teacher/student political hierarchy. Through co-autoethnographic writing, the teacher becomes a part of the educational process, actively working on recording and analyzing her own political assumptions, how these are challenged, and how new insights result through relationship and composition. The more traditional “student” is empowered to write, whether in her home language or in a global language, and actively contributes to the construction of productive and material dialogue. In this way, then, a nontraditional composition classroom becomes a space for transborder participatory democracy (Alexander & Mohanty).

One for the sponsor in this environment to resist ‘missionary activism,’ as outlined by Cushman, in the writing process is by embracing “opacity,” a term used by Eduoard Glissant to indicate a principle of respect given to others that allows them withhold information (Stetson, 2010) . While in a collaborative autoethnographic project, the sponsor and community writers seek to understand each other, each actor should also allow each other the privilege to withhold narratives as they choose.

In order to foster a truly collaborative environment, the literacy sponsor(s) might also engage in the following questions with the writing community: Why do you wish to read and write in your local language or in English? When would reading and writing be beneficial for you? Where would you use these skills? Why might you want to write about your life and your culture? Asking these questions will help determine the focus and direction of the community writing group.



### *Action-Centered:*

While traditional ethnography, even critical ethnography, leans toward a research model, collaborative autoethnography opens up space for advocacy, alliance, and political action on the part of the researcher by inserting her as a collaborative learner and instructor. The model developed here works to engage with the enhancement of multiple literacies and can contribute to the production of texts that archive histories, challenge representations, and resist assumptions.

The hybrid life-writing nature of Chizela Women's Writing Workshop is malleable, adaptable, and local. While a Western sponsor may certainly initiate the project, it can continue in many forms in many different locations. As a sponsor and ally, the autoethnographic literacy instructor can also bring to the literacy project access to material privilege. The literacy project proposed should not be engaged in with the assumption that responsibility for meeting the material concerns and constraints of the project will remain *always* in the power of the foreign instructor.

### *Reflexivity*

One of the hallmarks of autoethnography is the prioritizing of researcher reflexivity. In a collaborative autoethnographic workshop, the literacy sponsor must continually critically reflect on representation, relationship, and process. Linda Martin-Alcoff reminds the sponsor of the importance of always interrogating the bearing of location and the context of what we say. This mode of inquiry and accountability, both on the part of the sponsor and the community members, should be one of respect, ethical reciprocity, and the knowledge that we will never completely *know* the other. We know what they wish us to know and we know how we receive what they wish us to know.

Though both writing actors in collaborative autoethnography will work toward reflexivity, the principle of reflexivity is tremendously important for those in the role of sponsor due to the innate privilege embodied in the ‘development worker’. The literacy sponsor must remain deeply committed not just to literacy instruction, but to her own writing. In her autoethnographic writing it is important to transparently write not just about her experiences of working with an underserved population, but her own shifting subject position, and how that position has been constructed and affects her perceptions as sponsor and as social agent.

### *Reciprocity*

In a coautoethnographic writing project, the traditional student/subject can speak back to representations made by the other, not just through “imagined” dialogue like Jarratt has suggested, but through material dialogue. As noted earlier, autoethnographies written by previously silenced groups “allow for the production of new knowledge by a uniquely situated researcher, and offer small-scale knowledge that can inform specific problems and specific situations” (Wall 149) In this way, then, the sponsor and community writers together become part of the educational process, actively working on recording and analyzing their own political assumptions, how these are challenged, and how new insights result through relationship and composition. The more traditional “student” is empowered to write, whether in her home language or in a global language, and actively contribute to the construction of productive and material dialogue.

### *Hybridity*

Another key component to the collaborative autoethnographic writing project is the considerations for multiple literacy development. While the sponsor and the

community writer are both engaging in writing projects, it is not simply a matter of producing texts where the sponsor writes a narrative in one language and community writers write a different narrative in another language. Rather, the project is more than a sum of its parts and may produce an infinite number of identities, readings, and performances. The project is also not limited to textual literacy, but may also incorporate alternative ways of archiving and distributing stories for multiple audiences. This culminating pushback to a single narrative, a One Story of Africa, might occur through oral (and documented) story-telling, through collaboratively written narratives (in dual languages or in one language), multi-lingual and multi-cultural performances, small group conversation that examine cultural assumptions about ‘the other,’ or hybrid poetics.

### **Material Production of the Collaborative Autoethnographic Workshop**

A collaborative autoethnographic workshop not only engages in the development of a feminist postcolonial project, but produces texts that push against single narratives. These texts might take diverse forms. They might look like an academic autoethnography modeled after Ruth Behar’s text “Translated Woman,” where Behar engages narrating the story of a woman living in rural Mexico. Unlike other ethnographic texts, Behar transparently engages in the process of constructing Esperanza’s narratives and how she chooses to represent Esperanza’s story and Esperanza herself. She also conflates the professional and personal, providing a reflexive analysis of how her identities were challenged through this relationship. In an academic autoethnography, local texts used in the workshop might be embedded into the narrative,

and would counter the outsider only perspective. They might also look like community narratives, locally published, distributed, and consumed. Or they might look like some combination of both.

The culmination of such a project might also not be strictly textually based. The writing workshop might be broken up into multiple terms that culminates in community events rather than “term papers” or a long collaborative written and printed work. In such an event, women would have the opportunity to share their written stories in a performance venue, display any visual materials, and/or perform dances and songs that are composed about lives, families, and experiences. The genres displayed at this kind of event might also include community maps, posters, recipes, or artistic representations of local mythologies. The point of this production is to create an environment that engages in the principles of autoethnography without being completely textually dependent.

By adhering to the above postcolonial feminist principles, autoethnography becomes a way for a sponsor to ethnically engage in representation, and relationship in a space of literacy development.

### **Challenges to Workshop Implementation**

While I have worked to demonstrate that autoethnography can attend to the ethical concerns of postcolonial feminists in creating and implementing an educational development project, there remain potential limitations to the project. There are obvious potential material challenges due to the high cost of purchasing and transporting necessary project materials to extremely rural areas (such as pens, paper, glue, tape,

poster board, etc.). Such material acquisition would have to be funded through an organization committed to the terms of this research.

Additionally, it might be difficult to determine what types of texts are produced in this workshop since there are multiple audiences involved. Perhaps one solution to this is to write in the workshop for a local audience and then follow up by editing and producing work for outside mass or academic consumption. The sponsor would need to proceed with caution in this arena so as not to just take complete ownership of this writing, but find ways to continue to exercise the group voice while remaining transparent about her own subject position.

While autoethnography can help to build better cross-cultural and cross-boundary communication and relationships, it is by no means the panacea for all the complicated issues of representation and relationship. Critics of autoethnography complains that the methodology can fall into self indulgence, excessive internal focus, isolation from others, an overemphasis of narration, excessive reliance on personal memory, negligence of ethical standards, inappropriate application of the term ‘auto,’ and sloppy scholarship (Chang, see *Autoethnography as Method*, Krivak see *Expressions of Ethnography*.) Those entering into autoethnographic projects should always be aware of these potential pitfalls and work toward continual critical reflection and the ethical balance between internal excavation and external analysis.

Sponsors can, however, work against much of these potential pitfalls through reflexivity and accountability to the group. When reciprocity, or as Cushman terms ‘interdependency,’ are focal points of the workshop, the sponsor is less able to devolve into isolation and negligence. In addition, a strong emphasis on sponsor reflexivity helps

to move away from these potential traps. Though there are certainly potential challenges to implementing the Chizela Women's Writing Workshop, I believe autoethnography begins to move sponsors toward ethical alliances in educational development.

In the following concluding chapter, I will demonstrate through analysis of my own personal life-writing texts, written during my experience as a volunteer, how sponsors can sometimes fall into deeply embedded postcolonial traps of a perpetuating a one African narrative. Though this can be a challenging, even embarrassing exercise on the part of the activist, it is a vital application of the reflexive process that can make transparent how postcolonial narratives are reinscribed through personal writing. I will also illustrate how these writings can be transformed through the application of an autoethnographic method. The reflexive analysis of this type of narrative creation should not stop at just critical reflection, but can be used to actively construct the potential for change. I will reflect on how autoethnography has shaped my perspective on how I would *now* engage in the role of sponsor and suggest spaces for continuing research.

## Chapter Five: Personal Autoethnographic Reflection and Conclusion

*“We’ve been taught that silence will save us, but it won’t...when we speak we are afraid our words will not be welcomed but when we are silent, we are still afraid. So it is better to speak” - Audre Lorde*

For this project, I have critically engaged with postcolonial feminism and the implications this theoretical framework has for literacy programs in rural Zambia. I have proposed that autoethnography opens up a space for more democratic working relationships between foreign sponsors and Zambian writing workshops. I would now, however, like to turn inward and explore some of the life writing I engaged with while working with the Peace Corps. Because autoethnography heavily privileges writer reflexivity, I hope to open up my own life writings for a postcolonial analysis using the themes of sponsorship, relationship, and representation to parse apart how sometimes postcolonial narratives have become so deeply embedded into practice and normalized that even the most well-intentioned sponsor may not recognize her oppressive positioning without tremendous effort and critical personal reflection. I write this also as a way to recognize my own implication in the construction of a single African narrative. I have spent much time in this thesis critiquing projects and suggesting a type of project that might resist postcolonial oppression and I will now note spaces in my own life where I have fallen into these traps.

I selected to use journal entries from the first 10 weeks of my time in Zambia. I opted to use these entries because they represent a time when I was extremely focused on

‘difference’ and how to I might find a fit into a new culture. It is impossible to accurately represent all of the writing I did during my year in Zambia, but the first few months of journal entries nicely express my written attempts to process all of my new experiences. It is interesting to note that later on in my journal entries, I begin to stop synthesizing and analyzing my experience and rather begin reflecting more on my daily relationships, my work, and the complexities of my position as a Peace Corps volunteer. I might personally extrapolate from these findings that the experiences of missionary activists or fly-in/fly-out writing projects do much of what I did in the first several months. My writing was about assessing the other, illuminating difference, and reducing the experience to a tangible and manageable narrative. Little did I realize at the time, however, that in doing so, I was recreating a very old, very limiting story of Zambia.

While living in the country, I wrote in multiple life-writing genres. I wrote for a public blog, which I had access to an average of twice a month when I visited more populated and developed cities, I wrote letters daily to my friends and family back home, I wrote letters daily to my friends in Zambia, I exchanged text messages with Peace Corps volunteers whenever I had “talk time” (an amount of credits purchased on a cell phone) and adequate service from the “microwave” (cell tower), and I wrote “bush notes” to community members and friends.<sup>5</sup> I have elected to use journals for this analysis,

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<sup>5</sup> “Bush notes” are hand-written notes passed from hand-to-hand to the intended receiver. This is an informal exchange of communication, used often in lieu of more formal and institutionalized mail service. Rather, if I needed to get a note to a neighboring village, I might hand it to someone going that direction, who would hand it to someone going to that village, who would hand it to the receiver. There might be any number of exchanges involved in this process and some Peace Corps workers engaged in competitions to see who might get a bush note to go the furthest. I would often drop notes out of the



however, because the original intention for this writing was a private audience. Blogs, letters, text messages, and bush notes are written with a particular audience in mind and as such are constructed in ways that might couch, hide, or shy away from representations that could more easily be interpreted as boring, offensive, or not politically-correct. These genres also recognize that situations are sometimes constructed to play to the sympathy and interest of a particular audience. I, however, used journal entries as a way to preserve my experience and to attempt to honestly reflect in the immediacy of the moment my reflections. Here, I will offer up excerpts of the journal writing I engaged in during my initial training period and will offer up a postcolonial reflection following the entries:

**Journal Excerpts:<sup>6</sup>**

*January 21, 2007 (Day of departure from America)*

“Knowing that I am leaving comfort for two years really makes me unsettled.”

*January 23, 2007 (Day of arrival into Africa. Written from a 4-star hotel in Johannesburg)*

“It’s hard to believe we are officially in *AFRICA*. It’s beautiful here—about 70 degrees or so. I can’t really appreciate the beauty, though, because I am so worried about snakes. I kept looking for them outside with thirty of us (volunteers) on the hotel property!”

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bus window on my way into the provincial capital as I passed through my friend Dave’s village knowing that even if the bus didn’t stop, the note would more than likely reach him at “Ba Dave at Kayuma.”

<sup>6</sup> These snippets are taken from my personal journal written in Zambia during 2007.

*January 24, 2007 (Day of arrival into Zambia)*

“Finally ‘in country! I got my first taste of working with the African children today. Just a tiny taste as these beautiful kiddos took my hand and I butchered their names.”

“1<sup>st</sup> night in Zambia and I can’t sleep. So as not to bother my new roommate, I am writing by light of my handy-dandy flashlight. It’s very hot. I’m dehydrated. Swollen. I saw an enormous slug and a giant bug. Hoping we actually get some decent education about which creepy crawlies we should be concerned with. Everything feels completely unreal.”

“This place feels old. We found out today that some of the homes we will inherit during training are vacant because of deaths in the village.”

*January 26, 2007 (First day visiting my assigned province, the Northwestern province with a group of volunteers)*

“This experience has been difficult because I continue to ask myself what I’m doing out here in the bush with the snakes and the bugs. I am completely impressed with these volunteers who show me it is possible to live here in spite of the pit latrine and the hours of cooking on a brazier.

*January 27, 10:00 p.m. (Day 2 of group outing)*

“I think it is far easier to concern myself with the social complexities of Peace Corps than to worry about the other things—the filth, the disease, the poverty, the overwhelming stench, the awful economic stratification—all these amazingly trying aspects of our position here in this place take a back burner to nosiness about volunteers and the drama

of volunteer relationships. But it hard to ignore that I am surrounded by extreme poverty, AIDS, and death.”

*January 29th (Day 3 of group outing)*

“The old time volunteers scared us half to death last night with stories of flying coffins, snakes with human heads, witch doctors, naked baskets, and ju-ju<sup>7</sup>. I nearly felt certain I would look outside my tent flap this morning and see a giant snake with a man’s head peering out at me on my way to the wretched wretched pit latrine.”

“I think the time here will teach me to be brave, strong, and independent. And not to be married to a time table. “

*January 30<sup>th</sup> (Day 4 of group outing and return to Chongwe, the training center)*

“I experienced a very sad moment today when a street child under the age of seven begged for food from us while we were outside eating schwarma at a restaurant in Ndola. I felt so saddened that I could not give him anything. And so he went into the road and peed into a plastic baggie, which Jeff, our volunteer coordinator for this trip, tells me he’ll later drink to stave off hunger pains. This hurts. But still, I feel distant as if this has nothing to do with me.”

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<sup>7</sup> “ju-ju” or black magic still plays a very important role in rural Zambian communities. It is, however, a complicated spiritual belief system that cannot be reduced to “scary stories.”

*January 31 (Day of assignment to homestay where I would remain for training for the next several weeks)*

“Today I ate breakfast with a chicken at my feet.”

“We went to a ‘model’ school today for a field trip and learned more about the *best of the best* in Zambian schooling. I have no words to compare it to what I know in the United States. They have posters on every inch of wall, but little else. No supplies at all. It is, however, sparkling clean—a feat in itself in Zambia.”

“I have noticed the sickness here. I saw a young girl with a boil coming out of her head. I think it might have been some kind of tumor. Today, I saw a woman covered in burns and skin lesions. I shook her hand.”

*February 2*

“I am having a hard time eating the local food, nshima. And I’m having a hard time getting used to being dirty. So gross. I’m still petrified of snakes, but I have only seen one—a very small greenish white one that looked more like a worm.”<sup>8</sup>

“Out of money and toilet paper. Ugh. I ate peanut butter with a spoon out of the jar because there’s nothing left to eat here in the house. My family delivered 3 cubes of suspicious looking beef and a pile of nshima to eat. I hate this.”

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<sup>8</sup> For all of my terror of snakes evidenced here, this was one of two snakes I saw during my entire year in Zambia.

*February 4*

“Went into Lusaka (the capital) yesterday and felt so loose and free! I never quite knew how spoiled I am/was. I had fried chicken—that tasted like chicken and not like shoe leather—and chips and ice cream that tasted heavenly. I was able to check my email—yay!—and spend time with another volunteer who is getting medically separated with back trouble.

“Walking back into Chongwe (the village where we stayed as trainees) is certainly an adventure. I don’t know if a person can ever get accustomed to the jeers, stares, and laughter of strangers. Have new empathy for celebrities, especially since I feel guilty about my dreamlike home.”

“This place feels timeless.”

*February 16*

“We had our first language test today and Ba Golden, my Kaonde instructor gave me a village name, “Lusakelo,” which means “Joy,” I like it, but I’m not quite sure I fit the name right now—I am emotionally, physically, and mentally exhausted.

We had our first HIV/AIDS presentation at a local high school today. It went ok, but it could have gotten better as I was not prepared for the intense questions we got from the students—like: does dry sex have more of a chance for giving someone HIV than lubricated sex? It was all then very real for me that these *people* have to deal with the very real possibility that they will contract AIDS. This culture does not support much in the way of HIV prevention since there is rampant and expected infidelity.

I showed my photos to a group of teenagers and I had a hard time describing my old life. Words like “apartment” and “condo” are meaningless. As I wind down from the frantic pace of training, I am starting to think more and more about what all this *means*. I am still very much me, but I’m without a context. I miss home daily. I miss the me at home daily. I wonder how I can do this for two long years....I don’t want to leave early, but I also don’t know that I am tough enough for this. A good part of me thinks I’m a moron for leaving the comfort of the United States.”<sup>9</sup>

*February 22*

“Saw my first real Zambian education conundrum today. It’s a basic school with horrible attendance, two unpaid teachers, and a ton of new money from World Vision. They have all this money and no action plan and the place is just dying away.

“I don’t think I will ever get used to the pervasive smell of urine.”

*February 23*

“ Sang hymns with Ba Wickson, the father of my compound, tonight under the stars and laughed at drunken Ba Mary, his sister, who kept telling me that ‘tomorrow we will dance!’ She kind of scares me.”

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<sup>9</sup> This is a good time to reflect that I did *not* actually make it for two years. I was involved in a traffic accident at the end of 2007 that forced my early termination with the Peace Corps.

*March 24*

“Last night we had a dance party and I danced—I really did. Terribly, yes, but I did it.”

*March 27 (First day visiting my new home in Mufumbwe)*

“I saw my new home today. The family who have the compound, the Katotas, are very close to my house. My house is tiny, tiny, tiny. Probably a total of 10 ft x 10 ft with two rooms divided by a wall. The roof slopes so that by the back wall it is probably only about 5’6” tall. But I really like Mufumbwe. It is lovely. And I met a man named Noah who is the choir director at the Apostolic church. I am going to go sit in on choir practice on Saturday!”

### **Reflections on “Writing Africa”**

As these journals highlight, my experiences as a volunteer are unedited reactions—unintended for public consumption-- but they often reiterate a normalized Western perspective of Africa as “The White Man’s Grave.”<sup>10</sup> Though at the time I was unfamiliar with this term, I frequently assert how I am observing disease, poverty, lack, and catastrophe. Because this is what I *expect* to see as an aid worker, it *is* what I see and then what I narrate. Even in my first journal entry, before I have seen Zambia, or even South Africa, I expect to be uncomfortable.

In the places not shown here, I am full of compliments for the noble sacrifices taken on by fellow volunteers—nearly all white and middle-class—who left their

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<sup>10</sup> This term was frequently used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by English colonists to depict the African continent.

privilege to become uncomfortable, hungry, and challenged. The idea of Africa as a single dangerous space of disease, violence, and poverty, was so steeped in how I expected to experience Africa that my earliest journal entries do nothing to really differentiate between the 4-star hotel the volunteers stayed at in Johannesburg, South Africa, from the guest house we would stay in for the first few days of our training from the hut I would live in for the duration of my training. Much like Sydney Poitier, I identified “Africa” so strongly with snakes that I write of sitting out on the perfectly manicured lawn of the expatriate hotel in utter terror of seeing one. Taken out of the world of middle-class suburbia, corporate business, and the academy, I was only able to see difference, and that, a terrifying difference. Over and over, I reiterate my fears. Certainly they are fears of the unfamiliar, but they so clearly reflect fears expressed by Westerners since early colonial times. The moment when I rise in the morning terrified by mysterious black magic sadly reflects so many of the gothic tales emerging out of colonial tales of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. While the mystical and spiritual aspect of life is certainly a major component of the experience of living in Zambia, I am terrified by the *stories*, and stories owned and told by Westerners. It would take months for me to become more aware of the complexities of these stories, of how they represent cultural changes, excuse shameful behaviors, and explain uncertain forces like HIV.

Of my entry into Zambia, and the first Land Rover, ride into Lusaka, the capital, I write about women wrapped in traditional clothing, “chitenges,” carrying water jugs on their heads, men riding bicycles loaded with firewood or livestock, of children poorly clothed and running through dusty fields. I write about “my first taste of working with African children,” these “beautiful kids who shake my hand with giant smiles while I



butcher their names.” My intention in writing was to personally explore my own shock at experiencing a culture so exotic and so foreign to my own. Of my experiencing moving into the home where I would stay for training, I write about eating breakfast with a chicken at my feet, of crying when I entered into a mud hovel without windows, of my disgust with cockroaches and the rats. The tone of these journals varies between excitement of the adventure of braving savage land and terror of being consumed by it. The tone and content of these journal entries begin to shift dramatically begin preparing for my new home in Mufumbwe. After living through the initial discomfort of changes in my living conditions, I become much more focused on the relationships I experience in the village and documented all the emotional fluctuations I went through in negotiating the challenges of actually living as an American woman in this community. This shift begins to occur before transferring into the Mufumbwe community as I begin to actually experience the culture and relationships through singing and dancing and attending choir practices. It is in these moments that I begin to actually *experience* relationship in the community rather than relying on a preconstructed narrative dictated by expectations I had constructed through media representations in the United States.

The intention here is not to criticize the experience of a young woman who has left a certain position of American privilege and exchanged it for a strange and unsettling lifestyle, but rather to call attention to the ways we as writers construct or re-construct our expectations. This is, of course, messy and complicated work. In these journal entries I am self aware enough to realize the difficulty in negotiating all the complexities of my subject position as white female aid worker. I defer this complicated emotional space by focusing on what is familiar—the social interactions between Peace Corps volunteers—

and what I *think* I know—the story of African catastrophe. It is not until much later in these journals that I really begin engaging with the complexities of this terrain.

While the journal writing narrated here are clearly within the genre of life-writing, the act of reflection makes this concluding chapter and exercise in autoethnography. The difference between these two genres becomes stark in practice as one seeks to process lived experience, and the other seeks to situate and read that experience. I believe that if I were to return to Zambia and re-engage in journal writing after the time spent researching for this thesis, my journal entries would indicate a greater awareness of my positioning in this developing country and a greater inclination for more complicated representations.

At the conclusion of this project, I would like to extend an invitation to other compositionists, researchers, and writing instructors who are either currently involved with international writing programs or interested in becoming involved in the work of transnational literacy development and advocacy to begin a personal investigation of their own into autoethnography as an ethical methodology for writing workshops. I recognize the complexity of having created this proposal and analysis relying on textual sources and memory, and to properly continue with this project, I would want to return to Mufumbwe, develop my Kaonde language skills to a higher proficiency level so that I would be able to engage in more complicated conversations with more stakeholders in the community. I want to go beyond research and speculation and produce the Chizela Women's Writing Workshop, working through the complexities of the implementation, and dialoguing with others on how we might continually undermine postcolonial traditions. I want to become an activist in the Cushman tradition, an activist who can take

the knowledge of both theory and the experience of living in Zambia, toward being a contributor of dismantling a single African narrative.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Dedicated To: Mrs. Chimbala, Ivy, Abigail, Martha, Ebinezer & The Young Women of Mwinilunga Camp GLOW May your stories be heard everywhere...*

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