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**'...SHE IS ALSO PLAYING; SHE IS ALSO WEARING THE MASK THAT I AM WEARING...' INVESTIGATING THE GENDERED DYNAMICS OF IMPLEMENTING A FORUM THEATRE PROJECT FOR YOUNG WOMEN IN MANENBERG'**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SOCIAL SCIENCE**

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**COMPULSORY DECLARATION**

**This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.**

Signed by candidate

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**Date:** 08/06/07

## **ABSTRACT:**

In the last thirty years, most post-colonial African states have adopted alternative approaches to development as a means to target the 'poor', who are left out of mainstream development discourse and practice. At the forefront of these ways of engaging the 'poor' has been the use of participatory theatre methodologies. A number of these techniques referred to as *Theatre for development*, *Participatory Educational Theatre* or *People's Theatre* have been inspired in part either in theory or praxis by Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* or Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*. The subsequent development of *Forum Theatre* as a methodology within *Theatre of the oppressed* has not only had impacted on alternative approaches to development in Brazil where it originated, but also in over seventy five countries around the world. The language of consciousness, oppression and development is pervasive in the praxis of most groups (largely theatre groups attached to civil society initiatives) implementing forum theatre in Africa. However, there has been little feminist research done to assess the applicability of the methodology whilst working with a heterogeneous group where the notion of oppression may not be shared and where the political issues border on the personal. This thesis examines the utilization of forum theatre techniques to explore the processes of gendering women within a workshop consisting of twenty-three young women in Manenberg, South Africa. It examines the opportunities that these techniques provide the group in uncovering, understanding and questioning the practices, norms and patterns that inform the construction of femininity. This thesis draws on theories of community theatre praxis in South Africa, gender and development discourse as well as research on contemporary 'rites of passage' practices in Manenberg. As a qualitative study embedded in feminist epistemology and feminist activism, this research utilises a range of methods, including participant observation, appreciative inquiry and second hand ethnography. These methods are used to critically analyse the opportunities and gaps that emerge when using forum theatre with this particular group. My positionality as a researcher and activist is engaged in this thesis as a critical site for reflection and analysis. This research establishes that forum theatre through specific activities provide the space for the exploration, analysis and comprehension of the gendered experiences of the young women in Manenberg. However there are methodological shortcomings, which are pointed out as areas for future research.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS:**

<b>AGI</b>	<b>African Gender Institute</b>
<b>APT</b>	<b>Amani Peoples Theatre</b>
<b>CTO</b>	<b>Centre for theatre of the oppressed</b>
<b>FGM</b>	<b>Female genital mutilation</b>
<b>GAD</b>	<b>Gender and development</b>
<b>HIVOS</b>	<b>Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries</b>
<b>HIV/AIDS</b>	<b>Human Immuno Deficiency Virus/ Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome</b>
<b>KEFEADO</b>	<b>Kenya Female Advisory Organization</b>
<b>NGO</b>	<b>Non governmental organization</b>
<b>TO</b>	<b>Theatre of the oppressed</b>
<b>TFD</b>	<b>Theatre for development</b>
<b>MUR</b>	<b>Manenberg Urban renewal</b>
<b>NP</b>	<b>National Party</b>
<b>UCT</b>	<b>University of Cape Town</b>
<b>WID</b>	<b>Women in development</b>
<b>WAD</b>	<b>Women and development</b>

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## INTRODUCTION

The development of the ways in which we view the world, our societies and the roles of women and men within various cultural settings are framed by a history constructed by men in privileged positions of authority and influence (Dankevy, 1998: 5). The impact of these conceptual practices has been the systematic creation of patriarchal epistemologies that frame patriarchal knowledge that are imbued with masculinist assumptions and worldviews that uphold and perpetuate men's dominance and women's subordination (Mama, 1997:34). Dankevy adds that,

When these ways of knowing are discursively applied, through research, policy development, and direct action, issues relevant to women and the contributions of women in different contexts and socio-economic positions, have often been obscured, ignored, and even discounted (Dankevy, 1998: 5).

Feminist epistemology and methodology therefore arise from a critique of each field's biases and distortions in the study of women (Fonow & Cook, 1991: 98). Narayan adds that:

Feminist epistemology is a particular manifestation of the general insight that the nature of women's experiences as individuals and as social beings, our contributions to work, culture and knowledge...have been systematically ignored or misrepresented by mainstream discourses in different areas (Narayan, 1989: 256)

Given this history, it follows that feminist scholarship is not only conducted for the purpose of producing knowledge for knowledge's sake but is geared at producing knowledge for action (Reinharz, 1992:175). Some of the earliest proponents of this position are among others psychologist Unger who argued that feminist research is inherently linked to action (Unger, 1992 cited in Reinharz, 1992: 175). She asserted that the purpose of feminist research must be to create new relationships, better laws and improved institutions. Many feminists concur with this position, some taking hard line stances such as Lather who asserted that research cannot be referred to as feminist if it is not linked to action (Lather, 1991. cited in Reinharz, 1992:175). However, differentiations have emerged in the academy as to whether the work that feminists do, can be qualified as research due its applied nature or whether research can only be termed as such when it serves the key purpose of producing knowledge, its applicability is another matter (Reinharz, 1992: 177). This distinction emerges from the artificial separation between theory (located in academe) and praxis (art created outside of universities) (Gqola, 2001:12). Gqola points towards an enriching tendency in much African based theory where theory and analysis are often anchored in activist or practice oriented working environments and life experiences (Gqola, 2001: 11). She continues that many of the ways in which black women imagine feminisms and post

coloniality are through creative media not traditionally subsumed under the terrain of theory building (Gqola, 2001: 11). Fonow and Cook concur when they state that feminist approaches to research are often characterised by an emphasis on creativity, spontaneity and improvisation in the selection of both the topic and method (Fonow & Cook, 1991: 100). This includes the tendency to use already given situations both as the focus of investigation and as a means of collecting data.

This thesis continues within this tradition by examining a feminist activist theatre-based project *Rite of Being* that was piloted with twenty-three young women in Manenberg by The Mothertongue Project. Mothertongue is a Cape Town based collective of women artists who explore keys to the empowerment of women and develop practical processes of social transformation through theatre (see [www.mothertongue.co.za](http://www.mothertongue.co.za)). *Rite of Being* was situated in a historically unique environment. Manenberg is an area that was created by the former apartheid government and predominantly inhabited by a people named mixed race. This project sought to explode the known meaning of 'rites of passage' by examining the emerging processes of gendering women in Manenberg. Some of these practices revolved around the sexual appropriation of the female body, such as rape and incest and shall be dealt with in more detail in Chapter One. We sought to highlight the link between knowledge and power by providing individuals and communities with the opportunity of discovering information, which could lead to making informed choices around 'rites of passage'. The project was designed to provide a space for women and girls to articulate personal stories about their 'rites of passage' i.e. key moments or milestones that have served to shape, enrich or invade them.

Forum theatre (explored in detail in Chapter Three) was selected as a method to be used in this project because,

In forum, the audience not only comments on the action, it intervenes directly in the action, taking the protagonists part and trying to bring the play to a different end, it is no longer a passive receiver, it is a gathering of 'spect-actors' (active spectators) who bring their own experience and suggestions to the question, 'what is to be done?' (Boal, 1995: xviii).

Community members were being asked to engage with highly sensitive issues. We anticipated that the plays would provide a sufficient 'mask' that would allow for discussions around bodily integrity and sexual appropriation of the female body.

For this reason, this thesis analyses the opportunities that forum theatre provided in our engagement with this specific group of young women from Manenberg. I will focus on the workshop process as site in which this exploration would be best facilitated. I

will examine how the techniques applied during the workshop process facilitated discussion and an analysis of the processes of gendering women in Manenberg. Our (Mothers tongue) experiences of implementing this project are integral to ongoing knowledge production, self-reflexivity, learning and growth. Therefore, an analysis of the choices we made whilst implementing the project and the impact of the said choices on the organization will also be examined. My own engagement with this project as an initiator, manager and subsequently as a researcher is woven through the entire thesis.

This thesis is structured around five chapters. Chapter One explores theories and debates around three thematic areas that intersect within this thesis: community theatre, gender and development and 'rites of passage' practices in Manenberg. I begin by broadly exploring some of the political events that have shaped dialogue around what I refer to as 'community theatre' in South Africa. This is an important area to examine given the dominance of genres such as protest theatre and theatre in general in political discourse during the apartheid era. I examine the re - location of theatre as a whole and community theatre specifically in post - apartheid South Africa. Implicit in this, is an assessment of the import given to social justice issues addressed by theatre practitioners. This review reveals an overwhelming silence on issues specific to women in both content and analysis of development oriented theatre practices. The malestream nature of theatre is a feature of both the apartheid and post-apartheid era. This examination provides an easy transition into the spaces where gender as a social construction is taken seriously. This is done by situating gender and development discourses, sketching over three decades of approaches to activism and developmental policy that have impacted on feminist's engagements in Africa and in the international arena. This sub-section underscores the politics of 'bringing gender' to the table. The dynamics on international and national platforms are analysed as critical sites that African feminists have had to negotiate. Some of these dynamics involve homogenised ideas around 'the poor' and how 'they' should be accessed thereby oversimplifying highly contextual and layered experiences. This sets the pace for a brief history of Manenberg that also situates my previous Honours research around gendering processes for young women in Manenberg. This examination provides a broad understanding of the environment and dynamics that Mothers tongue would navigate in its engagement in Manenberg through *Rite of Being*. Chapter Two provides an overview of my research framework, citing methodological choices and data useful to the analysis and conclusions reached in this thesis. It also highlights ethical considerations taken into account during the research journey. Given

that *Rite of Being* did not occur in a vacuum, Chapter Three is dedicated to understanding The Mother tongue Project. I trace the history and development of the organization that names herself and her work as feminist in nature. The dynamics of feminist organizing on a practical and social level are explored. This chapter also sketches administrative, aesthetic and organizational dynamics within the organization prior to the design and implementation of *Rite of Being* as well as tracing my trajectory into Mother tongue. Chapter Four responds directly to my key research questions. I provide a brief look at the preparatory processes that Mother tongue undertook prior to implementing the theatre workshop that is instrumental to the analysis in this thesis. This brief is critical to ensuring that the workshop is not viewed as a one off event conducted in isolation but as an activity that was structured within larger processes geared towards developing solid relationships and an understanding of Manenberg. Through key moments selected from the workshop process, I analyse the opportunities that forum theatre provides for engaging with the gendered experiences of these women, some of the challenges and inherent weaknesses of the method, lessons learnt from the process as a practitioner, researcher and the organization. The research findings show that forum theatre through specific activities provides the space for the exploration, analysis and comprehension of the gendered experiences of this group of young women in Manenberg. However, there are methodological shortcomings, which are pointed out as areas for future research. This conclusion is offered in Chapter Five.

## CHAPTER ONE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter examines theories and debates in three thematic areas, which will contextualise key issues that my research engages with. The first thematic area sketches the trajectory of 'community theatre' in South Africa between 1970 and immediately after 1994. By examining the development of genres such as protest theatre, my goal is to elucidate the role that arts and drama in particular played in facilitating communities and hence individuals engagement with the State. In examining this particular role of drama, I would like to establish the dominant discourses within 'community - oriented theatre' of this period. Central to this is my interest in ascertaining the importance given to social justice matters that affected people gendered as women. The shift in the role of theatre within the political dispensation post 1994, the subsequent re - prioritisation at a policy level of theatre's engagement with political discourse hence in its relation to the state will be essential to locating evolving 'community theatre' practices. The reflections and theories of Freire will be reviewed given the influence that his theories have had on 'Theatre for Development' work in Africa. His influence on the approach that Mothertongue adopted within *Rite of Being* also warrants their examination. Note must be made that this is a broad overview of the field. I do not claim to have covered the whole terrain of what can be referred as 'community theatre' initiatives in South Africa. This overview is to get a sense of what drove 'community theatre' initiatives and whether they took gender seriously and if so, how.

The second thematic area looks at prevailing discourses within the interconnected areas of Gender and Development from the early 1970's to date, over three decades of theory building and activism. I do not purport to cover this vast terrain in this section. My interest lies in reflections around what it means to take gender seriously as an activist in an ever-changing national and global arena. These concerns connect to the review on 'community theatre', in terms of locating the spaces and methodologies that facilitate 'bringing gender' to the table. Whether this facilitative role has been successful will be the subject of analysis. This section will also address a number of theoretical questions that are important to understanding the context within which we (Mothertongue) found ourselves, as we evolved into an organization that implemented 'development' projects. Such questions include overarching concerns questioning North/South development relations and the micro politics of running an organization in the South, which is financially responsible to donors located in the North. The ideological and theoretical underpinnings of the nexus between feminist activism and research are central to engaging with the gender and development

debate. They also lay the foundation to understanding Mothertongue's involvement in Manenberg.

The third thematic area will offer a brief historical background of Manenberg. I am interested in establishing the factors that influence the construction of femininity for young women. I use puberty rites of passage as a paradigm for analysing this. This section draws substantially on previous research that I conducted at the Honours level. My Honours dissertation questioned whether the experiences of the young women that I documented could be referred to as mechanisms, strategies or ritualised activities to mark puberty transitions. My findings from this research are useful to the background study on Manenberg and inform Mothertongue's intervention in the area. These three themes intersect constantly throughout this dissertation.

#### **COMMUNITY THEATRE IN SOUTH AFRICA:**

This section provides a broad summary of the development of community oriented theatre practices in South Africa. I pay attention to protest theatre as a genre that was prominent as a tool used to engage the State at the height of apartheid. I am interested in establishing the prevailing social justice discourses at the time and how these were transformed post 1994 with a shift in the political dispensation. Central to this is the focus given to gender issues within the broad framework of social justice concerns. There are questions to be asked about the centrality of gender equity in the overall arena of 'community theatre' creation. The apparent sidelining both structurally and financially of theatre post 1994 is critical to locating the evolution of 'community' oriented theatre practices and a redefined relationship with Government. The impact of these shifts will be crucial to positioning the work of feminist theatre activists and will be central to my examination below.

Theatre or cultural groups have played a crucial role within the African context by providing a space of subversion that lay beyond the scrutiny of the state but which was accessible to the masses. Both pre and postcolonial states have interchangeably used culture, as tool for domination or mobilisation.

It is impossible to rule a people economically and politically if they are not controlled culturally...a people deprived of their own traditions and customs become rootless, enfeebled and devoid of identity and thereby the ability to assert themselves against foreign influence (Bjorkman, 1989: 48).

The separation of art particularly theatre from politics is an illusive notion especially when one examines different forms of theatre that exist in South Africa. It is generally taken for granted that the creator of theatre selects their material from life and from

their society. Thus, one impact of apartheid was to create a relationship between community development and the liberation of the oppressed. It became an accepted view that any discussion about South Africa was embedded, intertwined and influenced by political and cultural theory. The concept of community development was strategically employed by the liberation movement as an effective and productive means of empowering the oppressed in South Africa (AMAC, 2004: 33). Political consciousness through the arts was identified as a powerful influence for the mobilisation of communities (AMAC, 2004:33). The strategy was to place greater value on culture in order to enable communities to define, express and discover ways to sustain themselves within a system that promoted institutionalised discrimination.

Community arts activities emerged partly as a response to the lack of venues for indigenous theatre and other arts projects (AMAC, 2004: 34). They were also equally informed by the shifting political climate and socio-political movements such as the black consciousness movement that had a significant role in promoting culture and arts as a political tool for systemic change (AMAC, 2004: 35). Black consciousness emphasized the educational function of cultural and artistic activity and utilised the political resources of art, theatre, music, dance and culture in general (AMAC, 2004: 34). Community arts productions not only became a source of empowerment for community artists but also raised the impact of community struggles by targeting people who were ridiculed for their submission to apartheid (AMAC, 2004: 36). One of the ways that protest arts survived effectively in South Africa was through theatre. Theatre emerged from the unions, the black consciousness movement and the works of Athol Fugard, John Kani and James Mathews, predominantly male writers and actors. Mda, a leading black South African playwright and community activist draws attention to the mainstream nature of theatre in South Africa when he asserts:

The South African context is much richer and varied than has been represented on stage. The dominant trend in types of theatre has been based on a one-dimensional and prevaricated depiction of the South African reality. The playwright wrote about the men who went to jail and examined their sufferings, their resistance, those who laboured for white South Africa but he forgot to tell the story of those who did not follow him to jail. The South Africa of this theatre was basically an urban male one (Mda, 1996:196).

Nonetheless, there were the rare gems *Have you seen Zandile* by Gcina Mhlophe (1988), an autobiography of a girl growing up in rural South Africa, *You strike a woman you strike a rock* that examined the role of women in the liberation struggle and *Imfuduso* which explored forced removals at Crossroads squatter camp in Cape Town. Women played a major role in creating these plays or were wholly created (written, performed and directed) by women (Mda, 1996: 196). When women were

able to take on managerial positions of authority, they frequently demonstrated an interest in nurturing new writing and new styles of theatrical practice (Aston, 1995:30). *Imfuduso* for example was of special significance in that it was performed by the Crossroads women themselves and depicted their own struggle of resisting removals (Mda, 1996: 196). However, by the late 1980's, theatre of resistance had become the dominant genre. It became a powerful weapon, which was promoted by the mass-based political movement that was active in the country at the time. Post 1994, it was argued that there was no longer a common enemy; apartheid had been dealt a sharp blow with the rise of a majority 'black' government. Who was the struggle against once political democracy had been won? The changes in the political dispensation caught theatre practitioners off guard. Theatre, it is argued served its purpose when the people did not have other channels of expressing themselves (Mda, 1996: 207). In mainstream theatre houses, funding fell through with funders arguing that the arts would have to take a back seat to more pressing issues of housing and education.

The emergence of Theatre for Development (TFD) in South Africa was a post 1994 occurrence, unlike other neighbouring African countries where it was already widespread by the 1970's. Like 'Community Theatre', 'Theatre for Development' has been used to describe related but not always identical practices (Kruger, 1999: 205). On the one hand it refers to the use of theatre techniques where actors present a script for an audience to communicate development policy of national or international agencies (Kruger, 1999: 205). On the other it includes performances devised by locals as well as visitors, which are intended to facilitate analysis of long term causes and develop the social agency as well as dramatic skills of performers (Kruger, 1999: 205). Kerr argues that this opposition is often summarized as that between a "domesticating top down" and a "participatory bottom up" approach (Kerr, 1995 cited in Kruger, 1999: 205). This draws on Freire's theory on 'banking education' in which the teacher/expert reinforces the passivity of the student/recipient in the guise of giving information. On the other hand, problem posing education, which Freire advocates for (better known as conscientization) has the teacher/catalyst and students explore together the contradiction in the ideology of education that reproduces hierarchies hence expose their own participation in it is a problem before they can act to change it (Freire, 1972: 45-49). The influence of the seminal work of Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* on TFD practices in Africa cannot be dismissed. Written at a time of great political repression in Brazil, it resonated with many 'underground' movements in post-colonial Africa who found themselves saddled with dictatorships and military regimes. Theatre provided a cover within which re -

education of the people occurred, inspired in part by Freire's reflections on building consciousness. Notable, were initiatives by Ngugi wa Thiong'o in Kenya and later Ngugi wa Mirii in Zimbabwe. These initiatives had a number of effects on the communities where they were implemented. I will highlight two. One was the institution of strong TFD practice. Fleishman states that the entrenchment of TFD as a practice and as an academic strand within the university system in Zimbabwe can be accounted for by Mirii's work (Fleishman, 2006. Interview. Cape Town). In Kenya, the establishment of the Kamiriithu Community Education and cultural centre by Ngugi wa Thiong'o was responsible for the introduction of adult literacy courses for the villagers in addition to introducing theatre as a medium of education. Two plays were devised by the community in the local language, which attests to the impact of this particular approach on community development (Bjorkman, 1989: 54 -60).

Given my engagement<sup>1</sup> with TFD in Kenya, which was informed by the theories of both Freire and Boal, I shall examine some of the pedagogical influences of Freire on TFD praxis in South Africa. This examination is also critical to locating Mothertongue's work with *Rite of Being*, which embraced the core principles of Freire and Boal who I shall examine in Chapter Three. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* according to Freire is a pedagogy, which must be forged with and not for the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity (Freire, 1972: 30). This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes, objects of reflection by the oppressed. It is from this reflection that their engagement in the struggle for their liberation will arise (Freire, 1972:30). In this instance TFD is seen as organizing the characteristics of indigenous African performances. Theatre practitioners, who are called catalysts in this process, do not create theatre for the people, but with the people. Catalysts go through the process of information gathering in the target communities, information analysis, story improvisation, rehearsals, community performances, community discussions and follow-up action. Community members are involved throughout (Mda, 1996: 209). People are therefore able to identify their problems within the context of a particular social order and theatre provides the means to codify that social reality (Mda, 1996: 209).

The emergence of NGO's as an institutional structure for addressing poverty as well as issues such as 'rural development' and 'gender equality' has seen TFD evolve to serve as a medium for transmitting development messages, a process of development, a 'tool' for development and a 'tool' for training (Ahmed. 2002: 209).

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<sup>1</sup> I shall go into more detail about this in Chapter Three.

The understanding is that, poverty reduction and promotion of sustainable development is dependent upon human and material capacity building of the poor and their socio-economic and cultural empowerment through a process of generating human, social, economic and cultural capital (Ahmed, 2002: 210). This ties in to Freire's belief that only through their (the oppressed) critical discovery that both they and their oppressors are manifestations of dehumanisation and that they are 'hosts' of the oppressor can they contribute to the midwifery of their liberating pedagogy (Freire, 1972: 30). The great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed according to Freire is to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well (Freire, 1972: 26). This critical discovery should emerge through the process of conscientization, which involves active participation of people in transforming themselves by engaging in a dialogue through which they identify their problems, reflect on why the problems exist and take action to solve the problems (Mda, 1996:208).

Nonetheless;

How can the oppressed as divided, unauthentic beings participate in developing the pedagogy of their liberation? The oppressors, who oppress, exploit and rape by virtue of their power cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves (Freire, 1972: 26).

The tensions that Freire raises here translate into the practical dilemmas that challenge the very delivery of TFD initiatives. These initiatives tend to revert to traditional systems of knowledge dissemination that delineate the actor as knower and the participant as learner. Kruger points out that development workers in Southern Africa are usually urbanised, specialised employees of national and international agencies (Kruger, 1999: 205). In some cases locally trained experts identifying with the technical solutions of modernization regard the recalcitrance of rural clients as mere backwardness (Kruger, 1999: 205). The dependence of many of these initiatives on external funding becomes a bottleneck to their transformation intentions. When International NGO's deal with powerful (local) NGO's they are generous and respectful, however when the same donor dictates the terms of partnership with small organizations, in order to sustain themselves smaller NGO's find themselves serving pseudo-mercenaries (Ahmed, 2002: 210). While acknowledging Freire's maxim that only the power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both, there are multiple factors at play (Freire, 1972: 26). It is clear that in the transition from Apartheid, theatre makers in the generic sense found themselves in a difficult place. The dislocation of funding for mainstream theatre and the subsequent co-option of community oriented theatre practices within emerging civil society organizations also meant a repositioning of resources and ways of working. This metamorphosis contributed to a focus on certain issues especially in

terms of community based work. 'Development' meant targeting 'the poor', 'the illiterate' and 'health and nutrition', areas that (as we shall see later in the section on Gender and Development) were laid squarely at the feet of women. They were seen as the most affected and were positioned as key actors in reducing the rising statistics thus improving the nation's growth prospects. However, I am yet to find community theatre initiatives in post 1994 South Africa, that have engaged in a gender analysis of who the 'rural poor' were, who spoke and who engaged in the development of these collaborative change agendas aimed at conscientization.

Communities are often naively seen as harmonious homogenous entities, without conflicting needs and interests but this is never the case. Yet, quite often the most powerful members of a community will shape the objectives and the form that participation will take so that it serves their own needs rather than those of the community as a whole (Goebel, 1998:284). Even if project staff become aware of hierarchies within communities it is very difficult if not impossible to overcome these forces through participatory methodologies alone (Moser, 1993: 498). Moser continues "... the dominant voices will dominate" (Moser, 1993: 498). More often the marginalized voices are those of women and the impact of lack of participation is detrimental to them. Until recently, participatory approaches have not taken gender differences into account and have sometimes exacerbated gender inequalities. Mayoux argues that while some grassroots movements have been successful, most efforts to incorporate women into the participatory process have failed (Mayoux, 1998:181). She asserts that merely increasing the number of women involved in participatory projects does not alter the need for transforming unequal gender relations (Mayoux, 1998:181). Women as individuals have been targeted with little thought given to power structures beyond the local community. While bringing about change at the local level is certainly valuable for those within the community, the possibilities for wide - scale change are inherently limited under such an approach, as it does not challenge the forces, which bring about women's subordination.

The failure to tackle or engage in an analysis of the power structures that would account for participation by women cuts across to mainstream theatre practices, which has a bearing on and influences community theatre practices. Examining them concurrently would be important to establishing a legacy that may have been inherited from the former. Fleishman (2006), Flockemann (1999) and De Wet's (1997) arguments below on trends that emerged post 1994 in mainstream theatre practice speak to a history within this sphere that affected *who* worked, what stories were told

and how they were told. This history, I am arguing cannot be dismissed as an influence on its sister – ‘community theatre’ and needs to be examined concurrently.

Fleishman states:

I think for a period we had what we could call a series of post-apartheid plays in the sense that they occurred post -1994 but were still locked into the paradigm of apartheid. They might still be speaking back in the sense of post-colonial, newly liberated voices having the opportunity to talk to the cannon but they were still tied to the notion of apartheid. There were also a whole spate of plays that were individualized, in the sense that they were about personal stories and identity issues. So you got a whole lot of one person shows which were about the history of an Indian family in [Kwa Zulu] Natal for example or issues around women, gay issues those kinds of things where people suddenly said I have a story to tell, my story is important. I can emerge from under the umbrella of post apartheid theatre if you like to speak about my own personal story which tends to be more complex and ambiguous than the black - white division of protest theatre (Fleishman, 2006. Interview. Cape Town).

Fleishman indicates that the shift to the personal narrative in mainstream theatre post 1994 focussed on reclaiming stories that were hitherto on the periphery. If post 1994 South African theatre is seen as reflective of the personal, which was previously considered to be more in the private (female) domain or politically incorrect what does this mean to theatre companies that take gender seriously? Flockemann argues that if the emphasis on personal stories indicates a focus on relationships between individuals within communities rather than oppositional relationships between communities thus suggesting a discourse of difference rather than of opposition, then this has implications for the politics of gender (Flockemann, 1999: 43).

Dominant theatrical discourse reproduces the subject-object construction of the female subject. The hegemonic control of cultural institutions often means that one social group has the power to represent another group, with the result that these representations serve their own interests rather than those of the group represented (Marshment, 1994:126). The hegemony of patriarchy has given men the power to represent women, the effects of which are blatantly obvious in the “ugly images of women offering up distorted bodies for whatever fantasy passes in the name of male art” (Lorde, 1996: 5). The control of the production of representations is the power to decide who is represented, how and for whom (De Wet, 1997: 53). Consequently many people who exist beyond the parameters of mainstream ideology are under-represented, if they are represented at all (De Wet, 1997:54). Women’s position in theatre as subjects, actors, playwrights and directors has been governed by perceived roles performed by women and particularly black women. Women are relegated to the private domain in South African theatre and culture, while men interact in the public,

political sphere (De Wet, 1997: 43). The female subjects' dependence on her relationship to the male for meaning is reinforced through theatrical representation. The woman when she is not entirely absent is often constructed in theatrical representations "as an object of desire rather than the subject of action" (Clement, 1994:58). The representation of women in theatre and women's issues is a mirror of the import given to women's concerns in the wider society. Feminism continues to be perceived as an alien, bourgeois concept that detracts from the real i.e. race and class struggle (Flockemann, 1999:50). Women's issues are seen as being distinguishable from feminist issues (Flockemann, 1999:51). Theatre, which addresses women's issues, is constructed as 'other' to gender-neutral identity mainstream theatre (De Wet, 1997:64).

This section offered an examination of the development of community oriented theatre practices in South Africa during apartheid and their evolution post 1994. I examined the emergence of TFD and the inherent dynamics, which included an exploration of emerging NGO culture and its relation to TFD. The legacy and trends in mainstream theatre were also seen as key to understanding ongoing trends within 'Community Theatre' practices. A number of key issues have been raised that are important to continuing the discussion within this dissertation. Theatre appears to occupy a peripheral position in post apartheid South Africa, with minimal funding and its disconnection from the State. The 'de-politicisation' of theatre by the State has resulted in theatre or cultural groups looking to non-traditional spaces within which their political and social justice messages can be heard. This realm ends up being the development sector, where funding is accessible and social justice issues are prioritised with an emphasis on people driven processes. With this relocation, theatre practitioners sometimes referred to as development practitioners find themselves negotiating complex funding dynamics and concomitant power politics that define development work in the third world. However, there is a continued inattention to gender in both mainstream and 'community oriented theatre'. Flockemann (1999), De Wet (1997) and Marshment (1994) not only point to continued gender biasness in mainstream theatre practices but also to the continued 'othering' of feminism and hence anything that focuses on women centred issues as being too personal. Gender analysts single out the inability to deal effectively with power relations as one of the principal limitations of participatory methodologies. Arguing that in its attempt to take into account 'indigenous' knowledge, participatory methodologies have often neglected the power dynamics within communities (Goebel, 1998: 280).

In tracing the trajectory of gender and development and hence a history of feminist activism (in the next section), it will emerge that the notion of homogeneity when addressing gender issues or third world women is not that simple. There exist competing interests, varied social and cultural frameworks, which inform how women experience social injustices or 'oppression' for that matter. So while the notion of the 'oppressed African woman' for example can be used to mobilise resources and rally communities towards addressing shared concerns such as gender-based violence, a closer look at contexts will always reveal a new set of competing interests. The idea of the oppressor is not embodied in one space, place or body but in multiple spaces. The politics of participation in terms of whose voices are heard and how they are heard are key debates that pre-occupy the development enterprise where community theatre initiatives have been located in the last decade in South Africa. Parpart (forthcoming), Goebel (1998) and Mayoux (1998), point to a glaring gap in participatory methods with the adoption of a gender-neutral approach when 'doing development'. The question of where feminist theatre groups such as *Mothertongue* would find camaraderie will be explored as we look at the shifting trends within the development arena.

#### **GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT: TRACING A HISTORY**

This section addresses development from a gender perspective by examining various ways in which gender has been added on or integrated into mainstream development discourses over the years. Implicit in this review is the activism that has run concurrent to this inclusion whether by Northern feminists or feminists from the Third world and in this instance Africa. My aim is to elucidate the dynamics that are negotiated when 'doing development' and the increased complexity when you add gender onto the agenda, a concept that is in itself contextual and which is interpreted and re-interpreted daily. It also highlights new approaches to activism, which has emerged to challenge these factors. Lazreg argues that ideas and theories of development belong to a system of relations between individuals and groups representing forces that position themselves for a struggle over their relevance, legitimacy and/or practical applications (Lazreg, 2002: 123). This means, whoever engages in the field of development from the perspective of gender must also critically engage their own interest as part of the forces that sustain and reproduce it (Lazreg, 2002:123).

Prior to the emergence of postmodernist feminism the debate among international organizations over women (and subsequently gender by implication) by largely western feminists, questioned the rationality of development practices that ignored a

significant part if not the majority of the population involved in agricultural production (Tinker, 1990: 30). This led to the emergence of Women in Development (WID). WID is popularly associated with a wide range of activities concerning women in the development domain, which donor agencies, governments and NGOs have become involved in since the 1970s. WID was coined in the early 1970s by a Washington-based network of female development professionals (Tinker, 1990:30). On the basis of their own experiences in overseas missions they began to challenge trickle down theories of development, arguing that modernization was impacting differently on men and women. Instead of improving women's rights and status, the development process appeared to be contributing to a deterioration of their position (Tinker, 1990:31). The second major influence on WID was the emerging body of research on women in developing countries and the work of the Danish economist, Esther Boserup, was most influential. From the perspective of the WID movement, the importance of Boserup's *Women's Role in Economic Development* (1970) was that it challenged the assumptions of the welfare approach and highlighted women's importance to the agricultural economy. Sub-Saharan Africa was characterized as the great global area of female farming systems in which women, using traditional hoe technology, assumed a substantial responsibility for food production (Razavi & Miller, 1995: 11). Moreover, Boserup posited a positive correlation between the role women played in agricultural production and their status vis-à-vis men (Razavi & Miller, 1995: 11). Boserup's critique of colonial and post-colonial agricultural policies was that through their productivity-enhancing interventions and dominant Western notions about what constituted appropriate female tasks, they had facilitated men's monopoly over new technologies and cash crops and undermined women's traditional roles in agriculture, thereby heralding the demise of the female farming systems (Razavi & Miller, 1995:11). This, according to Boserup, was creating a dichotomy in the African countryside where men were associated with the modern, cash-cropping sector and women with traditional, subsistence agriculture. Relegated to the subsistence sector, women lost income, status and power relative to men. More importantly, their essential contribution to agricultural production became invisible.

One reason why Boserup's work was taken up so enthusiastically by WID advocates was that it legitimized efforts to influence development policy with a combined argument for justice and efficiency (Tinker, 1990: 30). If, as Boserup suggested, women had in the past enjoyed a position of relative equality with men in agricultural production, then it was both appropriate and feasible for development assistance directed towards women to remove inequalities (Jaquette, 1990: 61). Furthermore, by

suggesting that in the recent past women were not only equal in status to men, but also equally productive, Boserup challenged the conventional wisdom that women were less productive and therefore not entitled to a share of scarce development resources (Jaquette, 1990:61). Finally, the argument that African women had recently been equal to African men meant that the claim that women should have more equal access to resources could not be dismissed as a Western or feminist import (Jaquette, 1990: 59). WID advocates emphasis on women's productive roles meant that women's subordination (and by implication, overcoming that subordination) was seen within an economic framework. By explaining the difference in status and power between men and women in terms of their relative economic contributions, the origin of women's subordination was linked to their exclusion from the market place (Jaquette, 1990: 59). It was therefore argued that if women were brought into the productive sphere more fully, not only would they make a positive contribution to development, but they would also be able to improve their status vis-à-vis men (Jaquette, 1990: 60).

Despite criticisms of Boserup's research and the way in which WID advocates have taken it up, efficiency arguments are still central to the women and development discourse. While bureaucratic resistance to gender redistributive policies may have necessitated efficiency-based arguments by WID advocates, the strategy has been problematic. As Goetz points out, demonstrating the efficiency dividends of investing in women, meant that WID advocates shifted the emphasis away from women's needs and interests in development, to calculating what development needs from women. (Goetz, 1994a: 30). In other words women as a social group are targeted by planners as a means through which prioritised development goals can be realized, which may or may not be in the direct interest of women (Razavi & Miller, 1995: 9). By the late 1960s and early 1970s the development debate was giving recognition to the need for explicit pro-poor strategies in response to the supposed failure of the growth orthodoxy. These shifts in mainstream development thinking provided WID advocates with an opportunity to show how women could serve development. The emphasis on poor women and by implication poor men provided an opening for making the feminist agenda less threatening to male bureaucrats and programme implementers (Buvinic, 1983:26). Similarly, the focus on female-headed households as the poorest of the poor did not raise intra-household redistributive questions. In general, women's poverty was not sufficiently linked to the dynamics of male-female relations, thereby circumventing the need to raise intra-household gender redistributive issues (Buvinic, 1983:26). Another feature of WID advocacy was that it was selective in what it

adopted from the dominant development paradigm, focusing for the most part on the productive work of poor women (productive employment), and placing less emphasis on other items on the basic needs agenda that related to welfare issues. In turning to development issues attention was paid to women's productive labour, rather than their social welfare and reproductive concerns (Razavi & Miller, 1995: 9). While the latter concerns remained central to the women's movement in many northern countries, in developing countries WID gave primacy to women's productive roles and integration into the economy as a means of improving their status (Razavi & Miller, 1995: 9).

A further outcome of this approach has been a tendency to make exaggerated and unfounded claims about women's usefulness to development. The cure for Africa's food crisis, child welfare, environmental degradation, and the failure of structural adjustment policies are all sought in women (more recently, in gender) (Razavi & Miller, 1995: 10). While this has given women a higher profile in policy discourse, the danger is that women are now expected to compensate for public provisions, which for a variety of reasons, among them stringent fiscal policies and mismanagement of resources may not be forthcoming. As Kandiyoti (1988) and Goetz (1994a) have pointed out, this can mean an intensification of women's workloads as the onus shifts to them to extend their unpaid work as feeders, healers, and teachers of children to include the provision of basic services to the community. By the late 1970s, some of those working in the field of development were questioning the adequacy of focusing on women in isolation, which seemed to be a dominant feature of the WID approach. The work that was under way within various social science disciplines suggested the importance of power, conflict and gender relations in understanding women's subordination (Razavi & Miller, 1995: 11). Viewed from this perspective, the shift from WID to GAD can be interpreted as a way of disposing of women and equity, two issues presumably most likely to meet a wall of resistance from policy makers primarily interested in talking economics (Lazreg, 2002:125). By neglecting the concrete relations between men and women, the framework failed to raise questions about how change is brought about in men and women's roles in production and in the division of responsibilities between them (Lazreg, 2002:125). By refusing to ask questions about why resources are so unevenly distributed between the genders in the first place, the issue of power lop-sidedness is effectively brushed aside (Razavi & Miller, 1995: 11).

Feminist engagement with development has required the embrace of simplifications in order to make strategic alliances and some inroads in the intensely political arena of

policy-making (IDS 35(4), 2004: 8). A key concern remains what the term gender equity means to different stakeholders. For some taking on a commitment to this goal may mean no more than the adoption of an equal opportunities policy. For others it means targeting women as beneficiaries in development interventions (El Bushra, 2000: 55). Where 'gender' comes to be represented in the guise of approaches, tools, frameworks and mechanisms these instruments become a substitute for deep changes in objectives and outcomes (IDS 35(4), 2005:4). Consequently, in seeking to present the understanding of women/gender as requiring the acquisition of specialized knowledge, a latent resistance grew among male development practitioners in international organizations that made the need for gender experts an even greater necessity (Lazreg, 2002:131). The professionalisation of gender has resulted in 'recipes' and 'technical fixes' some of which present themselves in the form of 'bite sized messages' for training and lobbying purposes which leads to complex issues of justice and equality being reduced to slogans: *'Two-thirds of the world's work is done by women' (UN 1985) is a typical example* which El Bushra argues is a statistical average, abstracted from the different contexts in which development practice takes place (El Bushra, 2000: 57). She continues that,

Used carelessly, such slogans can be highly misleading. Women's work is grindingly hard in some contexts. For example, in south-east Asia women provide up to 90 per cent of labour for rice cultivation (FAO 1999); but in others their scope for production is limited, either because of limitations placed on their opportunities outside the home, or because the economic environment is only marginally productive. For women in such contexts, the problem may not be overwork, so much as having too little opportunity for work that would ensure their economic needs could be met (El Bushra, 2000:57).

The relationship between the global picture and specific contexts is extremely complex. In this regard taking on a 'gender agenda' also has implications for the internal running of development organisations as well as for the development interventions they undertake (El Bushra, 2000: 57). Gender and development researchers have questioned an apparent consensus around the objectives of gender equality and social transformation, which exists between very different types of development organizations. They have found that this common professional language cloaks a wide range of ideological standpoints (El Bushra, 2000: 57). Radical messages about gender equity have been translated into policies with more conservative rationales and goals; an obvious example is the widespread use of the term 'empowerment' by feminist activists and multilateral aids agencies alike (El Bushra, 2000: 57).

El Bushra raises a number of critical issues. She draws us back to the basics when she questions what gender means for the different constituencies claiming to work around this issue. She also points to a question that many African feminists continue to raise and this is the de-politicisation of feminist agendas. When gender agendas are taken up by international institutions, which has been important in terms of raising the profile of women's concerns the counter effect has been the calibration of extremely complex issues and societies into vast statistics and slogans designed to merely respond to competing interests on the global stage.

Smith reinforces this point when she states that

Development theory has produced a whole discourse, which carries its own language, schools, professionals and institutions. The discourse imprisons those located within it into a tightly regulated perception of reality and a tightly regulated set of relations defined by the international marketplace and foreign aid. Any view that regards the formation of subjects on their own terms is regarded as dangerous not so much because it threatens large blocs of power but because it sets up confrontations with the everyday privileges that, in many cases, justify the labour of the development workers and her sense of power (Smith, 1997: 229).

The transition from WID, WAD to GAD highlights what Third world women have had to take on. Win makes a hilarious but serious commentary when she says being an educated African feminist working as a policy advocate becomes difficult when the only African woman presented as having a 'legitimate voice' is a grassroots woman who is perpetually poor, powerless and pregnant (Win, 2005: 3). The notion of an educated and empowered third world woman is one that many in the West and locally cannot reconcile themselves to. They are seen as exceptions to the rule and not representative of the African woman. Smith, founder of Caribbean women's theatre collective Sistren, speaks to this when she says

The fact that someone is by birth 'grassroots' does not necessarily make them more understanding of the causes of poverty or what will change them. It does not necessarily make them more effective at their jobs (Smith, 1997: 257).

Unfortunately, it is through these lopsided lenses that third world women's initiatives continue to be viewed by funding partners. Smith asserts that funding agencies fetishize grassroots women, confusing class and sex origins with class and gender consciousness (Smith, 1997: 257). She points out that on the one hand funders claim to be setting up self-reliant agencies but on the other require accountability and reporting processes that can only be done by people who have university level qualifications and experience (Smith, 1997: 233) Smith argues from her experience

with Sistren<sup>2</sup> that most aid agencies were primarily interested in funding short-term projects that would produce quick and measurable results (Smith, 1997: 233).

How effectively can constituents be involved in the input relevant to evaluating achievements within such a short space of time? Moving from project to project took time away from developing long-term strategies for the growth and consolidation of the organization. Often small institutions defer from attending to organizational problems and we witnessed this when creative workshops for personal development, group recreational activities and sensitive forms of conflict resolution were luxuries we could hardly consider in the rush to establish one small project after another (Smith, 1997: 233).

Despite these complexities, Sistren as a feminist theatre organization highlights the importance of indigenous initiatives that respond to the unique environment they find themselves in. By Smith's admission, Sistren provided an organizational space and ideology in which women gained the strength to question their experience (Smith, 1997: 218). It placed them in situations that made very obvious the contradiction between what was actually happening and the ideal image of women projected in the society (Smith, 1997: 218). This resonates with El Bushra's assertion that:

'Gender' should be seen not as a politically correct ideology, but as an integral element in a wider search for a deep understanding of human behaviour, which concerns itself with physical and emotional needs, perceptions, motivations, relationships and structures. Concepts such as 'identity', 'agency' and 'power' describe how human beings struggle to carve out acceptable lives for themselves in the constraints imposed by their historical positions, their social roles, and their personal attributes (El Bushra, 2000: 57).

By paying more attention to the 'private' areas of women's lives, to issues such as sexuality and reproductive rights, Sistren brought a more qualitative personal element to the political analysis of the women's movement (Smith, 1997: 219). Sistren emphasized cultural production and the representation of women's experience in the arts and media as an important site of struggle. It linked art and education with politics, offering its work in drama, life history and other forms as a space to arouse and nurture rebel consciousness (Smith, 1997: 219).

I draw on the Sistren experience because it stands out as an initiative the bore semblance to *Mothertongue* despite the time and contextual differences. It was also a collective that straddled three spheres that are central to the analysis in this dissertation: feminist activism, development and theatre. Smith affirms the link between the arts and education and the arts as a site for struggle that I touched on whilst addressing the politicised nature of theatre in the apartheid era in South Africa. However, she introduces personal narratives of women into this political context

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<sup>2</sup> A Jamaican women's art collective established in the 70's which I shall speak about in chapter three.

stating that this is important to the political analysis of women's experience and cultural production in general. The emphasis on the personal narratives of women by Smith speaks to Mothertongue's belief that important issues such as sexuality that are either taboo or only spoken in certain spaces need to be articulated in the main and seen as critical to understanding the political experiences of women. MacFadden argues that for the majority of black women the connection between power and pleasure is not often recognised and remains a largely un-embraced and undefended territory (MacFadden, 2003: 50). Our entry into Manenberg was therefore shaped by these ideological standpoints. In sketching a brief historical background in Manenberg below I focus on the practices that inform the construction of femininity in Manenberg; an area central to this research and to the project we were implementing.

### **MANENBERG: A BRIEF HISTORY.**

This sub-section sketches a brief history of Manenberg to provide an understanding of the context Mothertongue worked in. I examine the position of women in Manenberg by looking at factors that inform the socialisation of girls. This background gives an insight into the area and its complexities. It offers a backdrop within which to engage with Mothertongue's intervention in Manenberg through *Rite of Being*.

In South Africa, resistance to the state has been associated with attempts by the state to reconstitute society in order to guarantee its survival (Goldin, 1987: xxiv). Successive governments tried to develop a client group who, although are not assimilated into the dominant class owe their allegiance to that class. The development of the 'Coloured'<sup>3</sup> was part of such a process. Throughout the nineteenth century a system of white dominance and black subordination was maintained. By the 1890's the social separation of races became the generally accepted way of maintaining traditional social relations for Cape Town's dominant class (James & Simons, 1989: 12). From the outset this sense of ethnic hierarchy was expressed in discrimination against Bantu-speaking people. Within the first two decades of colonial rule there existed a complex racial hierarchy in which people later designated as 'Coloured' occupied an intermediate position (James & Simons, 1989 15). Goldin attributes this shift in terminology to the changes within the colonial administration and ruling class. He argues that it also simultaneously reflected a reorientation of allegiances and ideas within the subordinate society (Goldin, 1987: 13).

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<sup>3</sup> The term Coloured is used in quotation marks owing to the contested nature of this identity. Some people do not wish to be referred to as Coloured while others embrace this term.

As part of its plan to remove points of contact within the races, the nationalist party adopted the Group Areas legislation. Pinnock argues that this legislation was put in place as a control measure and was designed to reshape cities in the new image of racial capitalism (Pinnock, 1989: 151). He continues to assert that in South Africa as a whole, African and 'Coloured' urbanisation was seen as a threat to the status quo, yet it helped carry the National Party to power in 1948 (Pinnock, 1989: 151). In the 1930's Cape Town was still a third world city at the foot of Africa. However, discussions on the reconstruction and redevelopment of Cape Town as a city of repute had been going on from 1935 with the South African railways plan to reconstruct Duncan Dock (Pinnock, 1989: 151). The reconstruction would undoubtedly affect the urban settlements of District Six, the Malay quarters and the Docks. These were areas that were inhabited by 'Coloureds', 'poor Whites', and Africans. Pinnock argues that what had been lacking was a government with the necessary political will to implement these strategies and the National Party possessed both (Pinnock, 1989: 156). The nationalist party's reconstruction plans must not only be seen as purely local racist strategies but also in keeping with international race and first world planning ideologies that were rife at the time (Pinnock, 1989: 157).

The Group Areas were designed in the style of the English garden city, which its proponents described as "a ring of satellite towns served by a rapid transport network" (Pinnock, 1989: 157). A London architect was engaged and with the completion of the first set of houses in Pinelands, five other garden city suburbs were constructed and their success led to the authorization to create more of these settlements (Pinnock, 1989: 157).

The 1947 foreshore plans of the city council included a regional diagram for defined communities, which contained ring roads and radials with neat self-contained townships in between each with its enclosing belt. It projected clusters of inward looking, mono-class satellites spreading out across the Cape Flats and connected to the inner city by fast highways (Pinnock, 1989: 157).

In 1950, the Group Areas Act was passed and it made cluster development compulsory by legislating for race specific townships surrounded by an empty buffer strip (Pinnock, 1989: 157 in James & Simons, 1989). The 1954-5 handbook of the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) stipulated that:

African locations should be separated from areas occupied by members of any other groups by buffer strips 200 yards in width, unless such external boundaries are main roads, in which case the buffer strips must be 500 yards wide if the boundary is a national road and 300 yards wide if it is a provincial road. Rows of trees may be planted in buffer zones but the land may not be developed (SAIRR, 1955: 84).

These buffer zones, Pinnock reminds us were not designed as parks for recreation but were ideal for army maneuvers in times of trouble (Pinnock, 1989: 159). A 1973 map of Cape Town shows the extent to which the mountain suburbs were separated from the black residents of the Cape Flats by a wide stretch of empty land and a freeway (Pinnock, 1989: 159).

One of the features of the ghetto satellites, which sprang up, was an isolation that was not unplanned. For those who could not afford motorised transport, the distant township was to become a trap. They were imprisoned by their poverty in environments, which were both isolated and hostile to the only form of transport they had – walking (Pinnock, 1989: 159).

The overall goal was to enclose people in hostile environments at all times, and to keep them there in times of social unrest (Pinnock, 1989: 159).

By 1965, 300,000 'Coloured' people had been resettled in state housing schemes on the Cape Flats (James & Simons, 1989: 163). The housing provided by the state was designed to cater for the 'urbanised' African and 'Coloured' family, which was based on a nuclear family model. In actual fact, this type of housing catered and continues to cater for large 'Coloured' and African extended families on the Cape Flats. Sometimes families from same household or old area were re-housed in different townships, sometimes far apart (James & Simons, 1989: 167). Manenberg as a 'Coloured' township was established between 1966 and 1970 (SA Department of Tourism, 2004). By 1975 the area consisted of about seven corner shops and two liquor outlets. There were inadequate commercial facilities or community services. From as early as 1979, the Cape Times (21/11/79) reports prominent members of the Muslim community calling on the government to organize and help finance a 'home guard' movement in the townships to curb gang terror on the Cape Flats. They argued that they had been forced into the Cape Flats and as payers of rates the municipality had an obligation to maintain safety and security. These reports are filled with nostalgia for safer days in the District Six neighborhoods. The area has since become overcrowded and living conditions problematic with high incidences of crime, gangsterism and social disturbances (Legett, 2004: 2). The overcrowding is brought about due to high rentals in Cape Town that make it impossible for adult children to leave the family home (Legett, 2004a: 2). Many people erect 'Wendy houses'<sup>4</sup> in their backyards to accommodate new members, but the situation has become untenable in many instances. Due to this crisis of space, children seek refuge in the streets as recreation spots.

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<sup>4</sup> These are wooden structures that either form extensions of the main household or are separate entities on their own.

In the early nineties, newspaper headlines were filled with sensational captions such as *'Women wage war on Manenberg Gangsters'* and *'Manenberg moms declare war on gangs'*. The emergence of American styled male gangs with territories, symbols and codes cannot be disconnected from historical, economic and social factors in the country. A survey undertaken by the Institute for Security studies (ISS) revealed that:

Gangs [male] still have a hold on the Manenberg community. Many believe the police take protection money from gangsters, and most doubt the police's ability to protect witnesses in a murder trial. Public knowledge about drugs is high, especially among the youth, which suggests open drug markets that can only exist when enforcement is lax (Leggett, 2004b:1).

The survey also unveiled the fact that Manenberg defies much of the traditional reasoning about high crime areas. Unlike inner city areas for example, most people here own their homes and the population is stable, fairly elderly and religious, which is not what one would expect in an area known for gangs and drugs (Leggett, 2004b:1). Salo indicates that gangs are an expression of social cohesion in peripheral communities and are an integral aspect of both the cultural and economic reproduction of personhood in a township community (Salo, 2005:1).

Pinnock, writing on gangs in the Western Cape, argues that:

One of the reasons why the youth easily identify with street gangs is that the associations fulfil the need for a rite of passage from childhood to adolescence and adulthood. He argues that the traditional society provided support and a sense of direction to young people graduating to adulthood. Youth were made to feel accepted and important in the society, goals were set which motivated and challenged them to strive for social acceptance. If they failed, the community intervened to restore harmony. In the urban context, however, the importance of ritual has been submerged in the struggle for survival and young people devise their own rites of passage. They create structures and rituals that work for them, carve their names into the ghetto walls, arm themselves with fearsome weapons and demand at gun-point what they cannot win with individual respect (Pinnock, 1997: 15).

Young women in Manenberg have borne the brunt of these avenues of transition. The high incidences of gang rapes, teenage pregnancies, drug use and abuse amongst young women are intrinsically linked to the discourse of manhood and gang formation in the Cape Flats.

Vetten, also writing on gangs in the Western Cape, points out that unless featured in magazine articles, the voices and experiences of women gang members is absent from writing on gangs (Vetten, 2000: 43). She goes on to assert that some researchers may highlight gender or women but this is typically confined to discussing the relationship between masculinity and gangs or in reference to women in their

more traditional roles (Vetten, 2000: 43). Gender is scarcely accounted for in the rites of passage programmes described by Pinnock. All gang members quoted are male, and just over a page of a chapter on traditional rites of passage is given to female experiences (Vetten, 2000:50). She alerts us to a much deeper problem when she says the lack of respect for female gang members emanates not only from male gang members but also from researchers (Vetten, 2000:40). She argues that South African writing on gangs assumes that explanations for male gang membership and activity are adequate explanations for women's behaviour (Vetten, 2000:50). Based on my previous research, it is my position that owing to the predominance of violent and highly visible male gangs, the young women have become invisible even in their attempts at rebellion (Okech, 2005:18). Whilst conducting my Honours research, I asked about female gangs and one respondent indicated quite reluctantly that they existed. "In every male gang there are women". The invisibilisation of young girls in Manenberg even those who rebel and form gangs is in my opinion an indication of the deeper silencing of young girls in this community. It also indicates a greater lack of appreciation of the factors that lead these young girls to be part of these groups. A gang, as Pinnock previously noted, confers power on its members to exercise over others and gives members the perception that they are now 'grown up' and can move up to their new status. Passing the initiation ceremony is only the beginning of the process. By successfully completing tasks within the gang the new member becomes established and moves from lower status in the gang to a higher status. Each movement up in status is another step in the 'rite of passage' into adulthood.

In addition to gang's, Salo's ethnographic research into embedded puberty rites practices for girls in Manenberg offers useful insight into the activities that fill the vacuum created by the lack of institutionalised and communally celebrated transition practices. Salo speaks at length on the notion of good and respectable *ordentlike* mothers. Salo posits that great respect is laid on the institution of motherhood and the respectability of a mother. Mothers police the sexuality of their daughters and it is their preference that their daughters grow up to be respectable [like them] and have 'good marriages' which means marriage before pregnancy (Salo, 2004: 162). However, despite these notions of respectability the rate of teenage pregnancy in Manenberg is relatively high. Salo argues that the occurrence of high rates of teenage pregnancy must also be viewed within the context of equally high mortality rates. She continues that in a context where lives are lost in substantially high numbers on a daily basis a premium is ironically placed on life. Meaning the need to regenerate and sustain a 'nation' (Salo, September 2005. Interview. Cape Town). Salo's exploration of the

concept of 'good' girls and 'bad' girls reflects values that are linked to this society's expectations of what it means to be a good woman. These values manifest themselves through tight controls on sexuality and sexual awareness of girls (Salo, 2004: 168). In her study, Salo highlights the fact that teenage (pubescent) girls who get pregnant before marriage and most likely after dropping out of school are however accepted into the fold and rise in status because they have taken responsibility by "lying in the bed they made". They are also perceived as 'good' since they knew little about birth control and sexual safety measures to have used them (Salo, 2004: 172). 'Bad' girls on the other hand are what in the era of HIV/AIDS would be viewed as careful or responsible teens that take responsibility for their life. However, owing to the notions of 'good' girls and *ordentlike* mothers, "these girls are seen as irresponsible, immature and sexually promiscuous" (Salo, 2004: 171), attitudes that reinforce the notion that women should remain passive actors in sexual matters and that as teenagers they should know little about the changes that are going on within their bodies.

Manenberg is not a conventional community. Its complexity is rooted in its history and that of South Africa. The people of Manenberg may have a shared history and share a geographical space all factors used to define a nation. However, this commonality emerges from a history of conflict, the forced creation of a race and an area to enhance separation. The history of struggle in this community results from disenfranchisement and is embedded in national political discourse, which I sketched briefly in the community theatre section. The approach to the struggle both national and communal was to focus on the master narrative, the 'oppressor' that was apartheid. This approach is not different to any other political struggles worldwide. The focus is rarely on the 'sub issues', which tend to be critical to the master narrative. Gender as one such 'sub-issue' is silenced at a macro level as well as at a micro level with reference to the initiation into masculinity and territorial warfare, which dominate the space. The legacy that young women in Manenberg inherit is a culture of violence and a culture where their voices compete unequally in ongoing discourses. Even today the focus is not on the experiences of women in marginalized communities but on identity, the positioning of the 'Coloured' community within the current political dispensation and the dominance of male gangs. Yet, both Salo (2004) and Vetten (2000) point to the impact of these practices on young women within Manenberg. Salo (2004), Vetten (2000) and Pinnock (1997), indicate that in the absence of communally inscribed and celebrated practices to mark transition, other practices will emerge. They foreground the exploded notion of 'rites of passage' within contexts such as this

one, fully understanding that the people involved in these activities may not necessarily name them as markers of transition. In exploding this framework, it is clear that the intersections between race, class and gender informed by socio-political factors are critical to any analysis and knowledge dissemination particularly one that foregrounds women.

In this chapter, I have analyzed the key themes that are relevant to situating my research. I began by examining the history of community theatre in South Africa focusing on protest theatre as a dominant genre that was used in the 1980's as a tool for political mobilization. I traced the emergence of theatre for development post 1994 and the concomitant relegation of the theatre to the periphery of political discourse. This results in community oriented theatre being co-opted within the civil society sector; a sector that emerges as a central framework for service delivery in tandem with the influx of development money in the country. The development of TFD warrants the exploration of the theories of Freire whose reflections on conscientisation have influenced community development efforts in Africa. These influences are important because while they may not have been predominant or named as key influences on South African theatre praxis they have been crucial to shaping my way of working which I carried into my engagement with *Mothertongue*. Parpart (forthcoming), Mayoux (1998) and Goebel (1998) all note the relative absence of a gendered analysis in the development debate. They argue that this trend appears to dominate participatory approaches to development that assume homogeneity amongst the so-called poor or oppressed (who often happen to be women) targeted by such initiatives. The trajectory of gender and development from a theoretical and activist perspective highlighted dominant approaches to development practices that are positioned as taking gender seriously. This involved an analysis of the North – South divide in relation to prevailing development paradigms, which perceive development as occurring only in the former, a position rooted in colonial attitudes towards knowledge generation, dissemination and cooperation. This is uncovered by analyzing the relationships between funding agencies and their partners in the global South, in addition to the experiences of African feminists working in this field at different levels over the last three decades. This would have no grounding without exploring the context within which we (*Mothertongue*) were working, Manenberg. I have offered in this chapter a brief history of the area, the socio-political and historical dynamics that are bound to influence any engagement with this community. This was explored through the works of Vetten (2000), Salo (2004) and my Honours research

(2005). Through this analysis I appreciate that most of these experiences are not hailed as 'public' stories. My participation with the young women in a project opened up the possibility of accessing "knowledge from below". Knowledge, which Mies argues, forces the researcher to notice what was previously taken for granted (Mies, 1983 cited in Fonow & Cook, 1991:6). Methodologically this implies a search for research techniques, which take account for, and record everyday processes and which reduce isolation between research participants (Fonow & Cook, 1991: 6). This involves non-traditional approaches to qualitative research and informs my choice of research methods which will be addressed in Chapter Two.

## CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH FOCUS AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter examines the methods utilised to gather data relevant to the creation of this dissertation. It highlights some of the methodological challenges faced and addresses my positionality as a researcher. This research process is not only reflective and informative for both praxis and the academy it also serves as a source of reflection and self-discovery. The project *Rite of Being* whose exploration forms the basis of this dissertation has lived in me for the past two years. In translating my work into academic research I have faced both ideological and personal dilemmas. Self-reflexivity, a principle insisted upon by feminist researchers, is important but difficult. It is a fairly brutal process that involves putting yourself and your work under microscopic scrutiny for the purposes of learning and knowledge production, very important and noble goals but which nonetheless involve paradigmatic, linguistic and descriptive shifts. Feminists in their work, whether in activism or academia have consistently sought to blur the divide between what is considered activism (located in the 'real' world) and knowledge production (located in the academy). These two realms are guided by different rules but which ultimately inform one another. This becomes very difficult when you straddle both arenas and your activist hat drives your identity as a researcher. There are strategic choices to be made when working around this particular intersection (activism and research) because information that may be useful to further debate in activist circles may not be particularly useful in an academic context and this is only one challenge. This thesis for example is not only about our experience as an organization in implementing this project but also about the beneficiaries who are the twenty three young women from Manenberg. I doubt that this eloquent and well-theorised piece of literature will make meaning to those I write about. With my target 'audience' (in terms of this dissertation) in mind I have made strategic choices given the vast amount of information both literal and virtual that could be explored within the context of this project. In choosing to base my analysis on the experiences of the young women during the workshop, I must mention that, that is only a tip of the iceberg<sup>5</sup>.

In being selective, I highlight aspects of the work that would respond directly to the questions I seek to explore in this research. Nevertheless, such an exercise calls for levels of detachment and depersonalisation, yet the work that I engage in tends to be

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<sup>5</sup> This was a two year process influenced by a range of dynamics most of which I spoke about in Chapter One

personal since it is motivated by ideology. Mothertongue's engagement in Manenberg and my position as a Project Manager was not motivated by academic research. 'Rites of Passage' as I highlighted in the previous chapter was the framework within which we explored practices and occurrences that emerge in the absence of ritualised activities that celebrate transition particularly that from puberty to adulthood. Our interest was to examine how existing practices (often created by young people) that are often coercive and harmful could be transformed into practices that affirmed young women and their womanhood. The research<sup>6</sup> informed the intervention that we employed within the *Rite of Being* project. We chose to use forum theatre as a method that would engage Manenberg community members in a discussion around the experiences of young women particularly around puberty. The emphasis of the project was on knowledge discovery and informed choices around womanhood. Through drama we engaged a group of twenty-three young women<sup>7</sup> from and around Manenberg as well as the community on their choices around early motherhood, drug use and abuse as well as early sexual encounters. This thesis analyses whether the forum theatre exercises employed in the workshop offered the space for discussion, analysis and comprehension of their experiences of being gendered as women. The data used in this research covers a diverse terrain of literature, memory and processes that have taken place over the last two years. The very nature<sup>8</sup> of this research process points to my need to adopt a variety of methods in order to gather information and sufficiently analyse emerging issues.

#### **PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION:**

Russel argues that participant observation involves getting close to people and making them feel comfortable enough with your presence so that you can observe and record information about their lives (Russel, 1994: 136). The strength of participant observation he continues is that you as a researcher become the instrument for both data collection and analysis through your own experience (Russel, 1994:145). Russel observes that:

Participant observation makes it possible to collect different kinds of data as well as reduces the problem of reactivity i.e. people changing their behaviour when they know they are being studied. It also gives you an intuitive understanding of what is going on in a culture and allows you to speak with confidence about the meaning of data. It helps you understand the meaning of your observations (Russel, 1994: 141).

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<sup>6</sup> Some of which was documented as my honours thesis and will be used in later chapters.

<sup>7</sup> The processes that we undertook in our initial entry into Manenberg and the selection process for the young women shall be examined in greater detail in chapter four.

<sup>8</sup> The research process was intertwined with project implementation, which spanned two years.

I have served multiple roles within this project. I was a trainer, administrator, occasional facilitator in the outreach programmes and problem solver. As a trainer I was responsible for designing and actualising the training programme. This training programme was informed by my engagement<sup>9</sup> with TFD oriented work in Kenya, work that was also influenced by Boalian forum theatre principles. My engagement was also rooted in a gendered approach to processes. This was informed by my development history in Kenya as well as my recent engagement with theories and principles surrounding feminist activist research at the AGI. However, I was a novice in South Africa but owing to the roles mentioned above and the nature of the work<sup>10</sup>, I had the opportunity to observe, interact and engage with these young women during project activities and unofficially. I have been to some of their homes, dropped and picked them up from home. I have interacted with them informally while driving to venues and rode on buses together hence seen them engage socially. My memories from these interactions were documented in a journal I kept at the beginning of this project and form a key resource for my reflections in this research. I recognise the subjective nature of these interactions and that they cannot be taken as reflective of a holistic picture but rather hint at ongoing processes.

#### **APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY:**

Appreciative Inquiry is an approach to organisational analysis and learning that is uniquely intended for discovering, understanding, and fostering innovations in social organisational arrangements and processes (Cooperride & Srivastva, 1987:161).

In this instance, a survey of organizational and project documentation will be useful in assessing the successes, opportunities and challenges that have arisen on an organizational front and in relation to the project. I emphasize the role of the organization because the project was not implemented in a vacuum and on going processes of restructuring and re-discovery impacted on the work. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will draw substantively on the reflections and writings of Mothertongue's co-founder Sara Matchett. As co-founder she has a better grasp of the motivation behind ideas and ethos that were adopted by Mothertongue and eventually became organizational culture. Her reflections in relation to the *Rite of Being* process are also important given the complementary roles we both played.

I also draw on project reports compiled over the two years of the project's life. External consultants compiled some of these reports and their reflections on the processes and material were central to the analysis. In addition to reports, we also

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<sup>9</sup> I shall speak about this in detail in Chapter three.

<sup>10</sup> Theatre oriented, involving communication and widespread interaction

documented the project on film. The video material is useful to reconstructing events with a different distance. There has also been a significant time gap and in reviewing the material directly relevant to analysing the *Rite of Being* workshop, I have been able to see some aspects of the work in a new light. These documents contribute to framing the analysis and conclusions I draw on the gendered dynamics of using forum theatre in Manenberg.

## SECOND HAND ETHNOGRAPHY:

Porter refers to the hierarchical model of research that sees the project applier as administrator and coordinator and therefore rarely being able to participate in field work (Porter, 1994: 75). She also speaks about the challenges of being unable to recruit qualified individuals to carry out research tasks given the little money allocated within project budgets to this activity (Porter, 1994: 75). I identify with these concerns as an activist researcher. With *Rite of Being*, strategic choices were made about who would constitute the team that would collect the initial data<sup>11</sup>. This data was subsequently analysed and used to compile an organizational report (which is a source of information for this dissertation). These choices were informed by financial, time and language constraints as well as the need to establish project ownership. It was imperative that the young women be part of the process of uncovering and generating information about the issues that we would be addressing in the project. It was important to us that they engage their community in a conversation at the initial stages about what in essence constituted their experiences. My primary sources of information on Manenberg as a project manager were the young women's interpretation of the community. Porter captures this process of interpretation succinctly when she says that it is only through understanding how they saw and heard the community could she interpret their data (Porter, 1994:75). This is because Porter could not do her own ethnography and had to rely on her research assistants to fulfil this task. During her field visits, time was spent 'training' the research assistants by asking questions and trying to get them to see the things she was seeing (Porter, 1994:75). During the initial data collection process in Manenberg that spanned two weeks and preceded the theatre workshops, we<sup>12</sup> met with the group in between to get their feedback on what they saw and heard. I shall speak about this process in greater detail later on, but the point I am making is that we were constantly engaged in interpreting and reinterpreting information given to us. This is what Porter refers to

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<sup>11</sup> I shall speak about this at length in the Chapter four. But this was information relevant to establishing the state of affairs around the project concerns.

<sup>12</sup> You will notice the use of we and I interchangeably in this dissertation. This indicates that I was not the only one from Mother tongue engaged in the project activities. We denotes my colleagues and I at Mother tongue. In the instances where I use 'I' it is in reference to my experience or engagement.

above as second hand ethnography. She also points out that she eventually discovered that she was studying her own ethnographers and even with the ideal ethnographers the same process would have occurred. The researcher, she asserts, "is dependent on the eyes, ears, social experiences and their interpretation of it" (Porter, 1994:75).

#### **RESEARCH ETHICS:**

In keeping with academic research ethics, all the names of the project participants have been changed for purposes of confidentiality. There are obvious ethical questions around being embedded within a project and removing yourself to theorize about it. Feminist activists acknowledge that the action orientation of feminist research involves personal and practical dilemmas (Fonow & Cook, 1991: 8). Finch raises the question of ethics in feminist research when she questions the amount of control feminists are able to exert over the research process (Fonow & Cook, 1991:8). Since they are often not in a position to control how the data will be used, feminists must take extra precautions not to betray the trust so freely given (Fonow & Cook, 1991:8). However, feminist research principles are also rooted in the belief that the research process is not removed from the life and reality of the researcher with focus being placed on the researched. The acknowledgement and subsequent application of research and the methods that assist it as being part of a social process has led to the development of collaborative and action research. These processes embrace the possibility of sharing power, resources, knowledge and skills between the researchers and researched. Most of the methods I have used reflect this position.

#### **RESEARCHING THE 'OTHER': ENGAGING MY POSITIONALITY.**

Scott in his analysis of power relations between the oppressor and oppressed reveals information useful to understanding research 'subjects' especially when they are in visible positions of discontent (Scott, 1987:20). Scott advises that there is need to pay close attention to political acts that are disguised as offstage for this may help to map a realm of dissent (Scott, 1987:20). He goes on to argue that the safest and most public form of political discourse is that which takes as its basis the flattering self-image of the elites (Scott, 1987:24). He dichotomises these power relationships into the 'hidden' and the 'public transcript'.

The 'public transcript' is the 'self portrait' of the elite, as they would have themselves seen. Given the usual power of dominant elites to compel performances from others, the discourse of the public transcript is a decidedly lopsided discussion...it is a highly partisan and partial narrative. It is designed to be impressive, to affirm and naturalize the power of dominant elites and to conceal or euphemise the dirty linen of their rule (Scott, 1987:18)

Scott continues:

The second and sharply contrasting form of political discourse is that of the 'hidden transcript' itself. Here, offstage, where subordinates may gather outside the intimidating gaze of power, a sharply dissonant political culture is possible... In relative safety of their quarters [they] can speak the words of anger, revenge, self assertion that they must normally choke back when in the presence of the [elites] (Scott, 1987: 18).

The 'hidden transcript' he argues is the privileged site for non-hegemonic, contrapuntal, dissident, subversive discourse (Scott, 1987:25). He asserts that accessing or interpreting these texts, which after all are designed to be evasive, is not a straightforward matter. However, by ignoring them, we are reduced to an understanding of historical subordination that rests either on those rare moments of open rebellion or on the hidden transcript itself, which is not just evasive but often altogether inaccessible (Scott, 1987:19).

Nonetheless, Scott points out that there is a third realm that plays out in public view.

There is a politics of disguise and anonymity that takes place in public view but is designed to have a double meaning or to shield the identity of the actors. Rumour, gossip, jokes, songs and euphemisms fit this description. A partly sanitized, ambiguous and coded version of the 'hidden transcript' is always present in the public discourse of subordinate groups (Scott, 1987:19).

Scott raises a number of critical issues that relate to the question of the positionality because these 'identities' determine how you are 'read' by the community you are working in and what you are able to access as a result. Mbilinyi asserts that the distinction between who is privileged and who is disadvantaged, between oppressor and oppressed changes depending on where we 'stand' and how we position ourselves in an 'active' sense (Mbilinyi, 1994: 50).

Espousing feminist principles of research, which insist that the experiences and the 'identities' of the researcher are critical to understanding their engagement with the research process, is a step in engaging a researchers position (Fonow & Cook, 1991:2). This approach stands in direct contradiction to traditional research methods, which advocate for the 'rational', 'objective' researcher whose goal is to coerce and retrieve information from the 'subject' and give nothing away concerning their own experiences. In keeping with the feminist tradition, I will examine my positionality in relation to Manenberg and connect that to the three realms that Scott speaks about.

My entry into Manenberg is couched in various perceptions of power over the people I engaged with in the research context as well as within the project. Some of these perceptions are also coloured by my own notions of the power I thought I wielded. I

am a fairly young woman, non South African, could popularly be referred to as Black<sup>13</sup>, a term that I detest, I prefer to be called African, Kenyan or a Luo<sup>14</sup>. I do not speak any of the local languages specifically Afrikaans which is important in this context. Given the history of South Africa, none of these 'identities' place me in a position of power particularly in Manenberg. My 'blackness' may 'buy' me some power. This is due to the current association in South Africa of black people as being economically and politically in control due to the majority black government and Black Economic Empowerment <sup>15</sup>(BEE) policies. I could either be considered an indirect beneficiary of the current government despite the fact that I am a foreigner or my citizenship could be used against me and I could be lumped under the broad xenophobic banner of those who are taking away opportunities from locals. The fact that South Africa was fairly removed from experiencing other parts of the African continent due to apartheid has also resulted in contorted ideas about how the rest of Africa looks. The perception that anything north of the Limpopo River is characterized by war, strife and poverty is surprisingly common. It is also not challenged by the predominant 'images of Africa' in mainstream South African media.

Yet, despite the fact that these 'identities' could potentially place me in a position of powerlessness, I come into this environment wielding resources. The resources may not be mine but I am responsible for how they are disbursed within this project. I am responsible for both the mundane and important; what food is eaten in the workshops, transport reimbursements and training. There are power dynamics playing out here at various levels, which as a researcher and a project manager I was aware of. In fact on a number of occasions I could hardly miss it<sup>16</sup>. I also realized that I could not be extremely hypersensitive about every action, every subtext. However, I kept in mind the public form of political discourse, which appeared to praise me, the project, Mother tongue but yet beneath that, were probably layers of resentment and anger informed by a variety of historical, political, social and cultural factors. These were not

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<sup>13</sup> Often, in a context such as Manenberg, the term is clearly used to denote people who are darker skinned or seen as being of African descent e.g. Xhosa etc. This is of course a contradiction in terms given that 'Coloured's' are also Africans. I detest the use of the term because I am more than the colour of my skin even though I fully appreciate the political meaning of the term black in relation to the Black consciousness movement.

<sup>14</sup> One of the forty-two ethnic groups in Kenya

<sup>15</sup> This is rooted in ongoing political, social and cultural debates amongst Coloured people who view the current Government as being biased in its practical implementation of BEE. Based on anecdotal evidence, Black is seen to refer to 'Africans'. 'Coloured' people feel that their disenfranchisement continues for they are not considered black enough.

<sup>16</sup> An incident that occurred during one of the outreach performances has stayed with me. I was in the company of a white German woman who was an intern with Mother tongue during a meeting at the Shawco centre in Manenberg. The representative of centre introduced me to his colleague who greeted the German quite enthusiastically and walked off. This was despite the fact that his colleague was looking at me while he made the introduction; I could not have been that invisible.

a figment of my imagination for some of these insights emerged during organizational processes conducted on our behalf by people who happened to be 'Coloured'.

The notion of the third realm is also an important one to consider. I identify with the various forms that this discourse manifests itself in. I recall many instances during the two-year journey where jocular references were made of "these black people", jocular imitations of the click sounds associated with IsiXhosa as well as mispronunciation of Xhosa names with clicks despite working with these individuals for two years. This partly sanitized form of discourse as Scott refers to it was perhaps one of the few ways in which I could access the 'hidden transcript', which would be vital to comprehending the area and the people with whom I was working. This brings me to the question of language, which is important to decoding the three realms that Scott identifies.

#### **LANGUAGE OF THE DOMINANT:**

In her study of contemporary language-use differences between women and men, Lakoff emphasizes that

... The history of male dominance has meant that women increasingly use men's language.... In a face to face encounter the tone, grammar and dialect of the dominant male is likely to prevail not to mention that as in other asymmetrical power relations, the dominant is typically the one who initiates the conversation, controls its direction and terminates it (Lakoff, cited in Scott, 1987:30).

The fact of subordination can be read in the use of linguistic forms shaped so as to reflect and anticipate the response of the dominant. For example the use of the "tag question formation, an isn't it so?" which indicates a request for reassurance and approval before continuing (Scott, 1987:30). Lakoff argues that this is a dominant form of female expression especially in areas where they are disempowered (Lakoff, cited in Scott, 1987: 30).

Scott also points to terms of address and the use of the second person pronouns e.g. *tu* and *vous* in French (Scott, 1987:31). Current uses of *tu* and *vous* have since been appropriated to reflect reciprocity unlike in former times where *tu* was used in reference to servants and people of lower classes while *vous* was a signifier of respect. Today *vous* is used to refer to someone you are not familiar with. The use of terms such as *boy* by the 'bases' during the apartheid regime come to mind, a term used to refer to older men, often men of colour who were considered subordinate. My attention is drawn to this particular study owing to the language and expressions I have encountered while analysing research related documents. For example, the

reference to men 'using' girls to mean sexual intercourse is common in daily parlance in Manenberg. I am not certain whether this is as a result of direct translation from Afrikaans to English or whether the term 'use' to refer to sexual liaisons emerges from the connection that people make to the sexual act especially when it occurs between 'minors' (teenagers). I am also interested in how expressions and terms of address are used in this context and whether it could allow access to the hidden transcript. This interest has been sparked by the question of the personal pronouns, which I am aware exists within Afrikaans with *Jy* and *u*. I am also interested in terms of address who is called *Titi*<sup>17</sup> and who is called *Mama*, how much of this has got to do with age or skin colour? I am however handicapped to assess this owing to my language deficiency. It is impossible for me to 're - hear' or reconstruct conversations for this purpose. I am also drawn to the language of dominant, given the silence of young girls' voices in Manenberg. Our interest in working with young women only was informed by this very question. Who initiates dialogue in Manenberg and can the subaltern<sup>18</sup> speak in the presence of the dominant? My position has always been that it is not possible until such a time that a relative power base has been established by the subaltern especially in a context where the voices of these women are thwarted except in traditional areas such as child bearing and house keeping. Yet, even in saying that, I am not refuting the agency and most importantly the power that women hold within these 'traditional' positions. Scott asserts that we would get the wrong impression if we visualise actors perpetually wearing fake smiles... to do this is to miss the agency of the actor in appropriating the performance for his own ends (Scott, 1987: 34). He asserts that it is not just a question of masking ones feelings and producing the correct speech acts and gestures in their place. Rather it is often a question of controlling what would be a natural impulse to rage, insult, anger and the violence that such feelings prompt (Scott, 1987: 37).

This brings me to the question of ownership. This entire project and information generated within it has involved collaborative dialogue and an acknowledgement that this project cannot exist without the stories and experiences of these young women. We consistently indicated the purposes of any interviews and sought consent<sup>19</sup> for the information shared in the workshop to be used for the purposes of ongoing organizational reflection and documentation. In that sense these young women and Mother tongue jointly own the project and information generated within it. However, I cannot in all honesty claim that this thesis would resonate with any of the young

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<sup>17</sup> Slang Afrikaans for sister and a term that the young women used to refer to me.

<sup>18</sup> To borrow Gayatri Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?* in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory* (1994).

<sup>19</sup> This is captured in the video footage and taped interviews.

women who were beneficiaries of the project because it is set at a different level. Their contribution is acknowledged at all levels, but I would not produce twenty six copies of this thesis and distribute it to the group saying – what do you think about this? What are your comments? This dilemma reflects the challenge of intersecting theory and praxis despite their complementary nature.

In this chapter, I examined a range of methodological approaches that I deemed useful to my research process. I have also hinted at the shifting organizational dynamics, which influenced project implementation and are an indicator of growth. Building on the theoretical framework, this section has dealt with the dynamics of straddling both academia and research with the complexities of translating activist research into academic research being specifically addressed. I have examined the 'dialogue' between the researcher and the researched, recognizing the power relations, sub texts and sanitized public text as important sites for data collection and analysis. I have also mentioned Mother tongue as the organizational container that held this project. This next chapter shall deal specifically with Mother tongue as an organizational structure that espouses feminist theatre principles as well as a feminist activist agenda. It shall pick up on the tensions of operating across the different fields that were dealt with in Chapter One.

## CHAPTER THREE: AN EXAMINATION OF ASPECTS OF MOTHERTONGUE'S WORK

This chapter locates the work of Mothertongue, a feminist theatre company in Cape Town, South Africa. It examines aspects of the organization's work between 2000 and 2004, prior to *Rite of Being*<sup>20</sup>. I draw on the reflections of Sara Matchett, co-founder of Mothertongue to understand the impetus and ethos behind the initial organizational structure that has since evolved post 2004. Smith's<sup>21</sup> analysis of Sistren provides an understanding of the nature of feminist organizations particularly theatre collectives. This is useful in drawing correlations on the tensions that arise when working in contexts that are polarised by race and class politics such as the Caribbean and South Africa. I study aspects of one production *Uhambo Pieces of a dream*<sup>22</sup>, which creates the framework for engaging with the organizations theatrical and aesthetic work. This sets the tone for examining *Rite of Being*, an activist project that adopted a different style of working in the wider scheme of Mothertongue's previous work. I examine my trajectory into 'development work' and subsequent engagement with Mothertongue through *Rite of Being*.

Mothertongue is a collective of ten women artists who explore keys to the empowerment of women and develop practical processes for social transformation through the arts. The focus is on allowing participants to discover and recover their own resources for transformation. Many terms have been used to describe Mothertongue's work, from 'avant-garde', 'magic realism', 'social theatre', '70's styled African American protest theatre' to feminist theatre. While all of the women who are part of the collective are firmly rooted in the belief that there is a need for a space where women's stories are told and validated, only three are self identified feminists. Demands have been made in both formal and informal spaces by male theatre practitioners and journalists to 'explain' why we are an all women group, given the gender equity gains in South Africa. We have been labelled discriminatory for choosing to work with women only and as a result termed 'feminist'; feminist here being a draw back to the idea of a feminist as a bra-burning woman who hates men.

Pereira argues that the dominant view of feminism was that it was 'un-African' and 'alien'. It is clear, however, that the epithet of 'alien' is quite selectively applied in the domain of knowledge production, practice and politics. The generalised acceptance (until relatively recently) of other 'alien' phenomena, such as 'modernisation', raises the question of what lies behind the widespread resistance to feminism. Changes in the dominant perceptions of

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<sup>20</sup> The project that this thesis is based on

<sup>21</sup> Founder of Sistren, a women's theatre collective in the Caribbean in the 1970's

<sup>22</sup> Largely because I was part of it and it was one of the first large scale productions that the organization undertook.

feminism are slow to come about, even amongst activists clearly working to further gender equity. Yet such change is evident in the greater tendency to talk either in terms of African feminism or to use terms such as womanism (Pereira, 2002:9).

The debate around feminisms and the trajectory of various feminisms does not fall within the scope of this chapter. There exists no definitive definition of feminism, as feminist agendas are diverse and extensive (Lewis, 2003: 1). Fundamental to this section is not whether there exists a distinct brand of African feminism but whether the work that we do can be described as feminist theatre in nature. However, the ideological differences around feminisms also move to the definitions of feminist theatre. Often, the challenge of defining feminist theatre leads to the essentialist view that any piece of theatre about women is feminist. Quite the contrary, Goodman for example loosely defines feminist theatre as one, which works in some way to present positive images of women, or to improve the status of women in the theatre (even if written by men or produced by mixed gender companies (Goodman, 1993:68). There is by no means a single comprehensive definition of feminist theatre and it is certainly inaccurate to define all theatre in which women assume positions of agency as directors or protagonists within the dramas as feminist (De Wet, 1997: 64). Feminist theatre tradition no longer accepts the concept of a theatrical tradition, which either excludes women or renders them lost (Aston, 1995:34). By analogy bringing the lost tradition of women's theatre history into view is an important political step of feminist theatre to change the future history of the stage (Aston, 1995: 34). This shall be explored in detail when I delve into Mothertongue's organizing and theatrical engagement.

Mothertongue as a theatre company was founded in 2000. While in the process of writing funding proposals to support the production *What the Water Gave me* (2000), written by co-founder Rehane Abrahams, Matchett and Abrahams needed to name an organization that would manage the prospective finances. It was within this process that Mothertongue as a name for the organization that would carry the production administratively and future work emerged. The name came out of Abraham's sentiments that had she access to her mother's tongue in the form of stories when she was younger, her life might have turned out differently (Matchett, 2005a: 99). Despite the apparent spontaneous nature behind the formation of the organization, the motivation behind transforming her stories into a theatrical production was much more solid. *What the Water Gave Me*, which forms part of a trilogy, was a recreation of stories around Abrahams' history as a young 'Coloured' Muslim woman growing up

in an intensely politicised family, suffering child abuse at the hands of a teacher and her journey towards tracing her ancestry. The production was premised on Abraham's conviction that by re-telling her story she could begin the process of healing. By healing I refer to the fact that acknowledging the occurrence of trauma in one's life is the first step in healing. Matchett recalls that, "after a very successful and rewarding run of *What the Water Gave Me* (2000), we were met with the choice to either continue and grow the organisation or abandon it and carry on with our individual lives. We chose the former" (Matchett, 2005a: 99), *Mothertongue* evolved from this practical and perhaps serendipitous opportunity to a collective that subsequently brought together an additional eight women over the next four years. They not only came on board with a variety of skills but also believed in the artist's role as an agent for social transformation.

The emergence and subsequent development of *Mothertongue* as a women's theatre collective bears similarity to an older Caribbean women's collective *Sistren*. Smith's analysis of the complexities of organizing in Jamaica in the 1970's and the inherent race, class and funding dynamics bear great semblance to *Mothertongue's* experiences in post apartheid South Africa. Smith states that:

*Sistren* was born in a moment of democratic opening, at a moment in history in which there was a possibility for those who are oppressed to intervene in history and transform their society. Yet by its own acknowledgement the movement was not feminist. *Sistren* provided an organizational space and ideology in which women gained the strength to question their experience. *Sistren's* approach in its early days differed from that of the organized women's movement in two main ways. First, it paid more attention to the 'private' areas of women's lives, to issues such as sexuality and reproductive rights. It brought a more qualitative personal element to the political analysis of the women's movement. *Sistren* emphasized cultural production and the representation of women's experience in the arts and media as an important site of struggle. It linked art and education with politics, offering its work in drama, life history and other forms as a space to arouse and nurture rebel consciousness (Smith, 1997:219).

Without oversimplifying the complex socio-political history of Jamaica, Smith captures it succinctly when she states that the central contradiction of Caribbean culture is that its activities have been created to satisfy the needs of other societies (Smith, 1997: 219).

This contradiction is obvious in Jamaica where the eradication of the indigenous Taino culture was almost total. In this sense, Jamaica like the rest of the Caribbean differs from many other colonized countries that have maintained more visible signs of pre-colonial traditions. As a result of this history, in Jamaica, wherever the plantation has been a dominant institution,

were to be a genuine collective then we need not reproduce in our internal structure the inequitable power relations found in the wider society. The need to develop a broadly democratic structure that emphasized equality among all members and that gave everyone a chance to participate and influence policy and action... we did not want to reproduce a structure that equated skill with authority or that divided brain from hand (Smith, 1997:236)

As Mothertongue began to take on larger scale projects the pressures increased and the need for a more efficient decision making structure became apparent. It is my observation that, members identified primarily with what they saw. This was in the form of Mothertongue productions, its ethos and aesthetic. However, they did not anticipate the work necessary in actualising a full-fledged collective that made everyone a living. Based on the recognition that people have different skills and that equality and sameness needs to be read differently, Mothertongue shifted its approach to organizing. This shift became a necessity during the process of making *Uhambo - Pieces of a Dream*, one of the first large scale productions that the organization created. It also brought to fore the hitherto unexplored tensions between the principle of membership and paid or unpaid output. Questions rose over who was willing to undertake needed work on an unpaid basis and with that, assumptions over who ensured that work was completed successfully. I will use the process of making this piece and my reflections as a participant in this process to examine the theatrical and aesthetic process of Mothertongue's work. I will also examine how dealing with traumatic issues brought up conflicts that we needed to address within ourselves or as a group. This is important in distinguishing our work as feminist oriented and not merely a workshopped production focussing on women's stories.

In 2003, during a theatre residency in Germany, the idea of *Uhambo* was conceived. Initially it was designed to be a collaborative production between a German theatre maker and Mothertongue that would revolve around numerous celebrations that were being held in the West (in this case Germany) to mark ten years of South Africa's democracy. However, this collaboration fell through owing to funding constraints and Mothertongue was subsequently commissioned by the National Arts Festival to develop a smaller scale production for the annual Grahamstown Arts Festival that explored women stories around ten years of democracy. When the *Uhambo* team consisting of Gabrielle Le Roux, Faniswa Yisa, Warona Seane, Riana Alfreds, Kali van der Merwe, Malika Ndlovu, Sara Matchett and myself began working, we developed the ongoing conceptual discussions by identifying the minibus taxi as both a literal and metaphorical container for the stories we would explore in the piece. The minibus taxi symbolised the process of journeying, which resonated with the concept

of transition to democracy that was being celebrated. The minibus taxi is also a popular means of public transport in which a range of interactions occur. There are codes of conduct from the collection of money by the passengers<sup>23</sup>, to how to stop a taxi as well as how to communicate your intended destination. They all speak to the city's culture, its people and their interactions because it differs from place to place. There are also the politics of who uses a taxi and who doesn't and what this means in terms of the level of engagement with different spaces from the very crowded taxi rank, to the taxi passengers.

A one - month period of research was conducted prior to the rehearsal process. We chose not to focus on the South African story alone but also engaged refugee women as well as women from other parts of the African continent to establish their experiences of the *New South Africa*. Oral interviews, focus group discussions and workshops were conducted at St. Anne's Home for abused, destitute and homeless mothers, Bonne Esperance Shelter for refugee women and children and with a cross section of other women. This period of collecting and collating information brought us into contact with a range of stories from women of all walks of life and ages. We engaged a total of seventy women during this phase, ranging between the ages of fifteen and fifty. Out of that, about 50% were Black, 40% 'Coloured' and 10% White (Unpublished Uhambo Report, 2004:11).

Below are some of the excerpts from the interviews and workshops:

- "As a whitey in the taxis people assume you are a foreigner and obviously there's the language barrier which restricts our conversation."
- "I was privileged to go to a private school which influenced the scope of my life, showed me wider horizons. You know, even now with all this access, so many of us live in our same little bubbles where it doesn't even dawn on you that you could be or see more, even travel abroad."
- "Since I lost my house I have no choice but to live with my daughter. Now she takes care of me like I am the child."
- "We have freedom on paper but not in real life. Economics determine our degree of independence and who gets access."
- "It is a lot easier for refugee men than women. The men get to learn the language quicker and find ways to struggle for a life here, because they engage with the people all the time, but women are confined to taking care of the children."
- "Some South Africans don't understand what a refugee is. They have never been out of their own country, never suffered in this way. They must know that 'refugee' is not just a word. They need to see us as people and realize that we did not apply for war in our countries. Today in the DRC, tomorrow Zimbabwe or here. It's a rotation actually."

(Source: Unpublished Uhambo Report, 2004: 11-12).

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<sup>23</sup> I found this fascinating because Kenyan taxis which are referred to as *matatus* all have a resident 'tout' or *gaartjie* whose task is to collect the fare. I fear being saddled with the responsibility of distributing change to other passengers when in Cape Town and often choose my seat very carefully to avoid this task. The closer you sit to the driver the more likely it is that this responsibility will fall onto you.

The excerpts above speak to a range of experiences contained in a mini-bus taxi at any given time. It is this layered diversity that we were hoping to capture in the production. It also became clear to us that this piece needed to focus on the pre-occupations of the women we encountered and not only on the dominant 'happy' celebrations around the decade of democracy. The issues that arose during the interviews and workshops centred on 'promises not delivered' by the incumbent government. It was my observation that as a newly 'independent' country there were/are massive expectations of Government<sup>24</sup>, especially in terms of delivering basic needs such as housing, particularly, to previously disadvantaged communities. As a result of the 'need', there is a level of urgency attached to demands or Government's deliverables. For example, housing is expected by those affected immediately. It was also my observation that as a result of the attitude that "government needs to deliver", many people we met during the research process were not willing to play their part in helping government along by actively playing their part in acquiring relevant skills, scholarships and seeking work. This position is obviously coloured by my own subjectivity and ideas around the meaning of action and political participation. While the research was an important component for making *Uhambo*, the cast's reflections and engagement with the theme was equally important. Below are some of reflections emerging from the cast:

- "For me democracy is all about individual expression, since a common cause no longer binds us. You stand on your own. Democracy is just a word. You have to give it meaning by putting in, but that's a huge responsibility and most people don't want to take that on, even though they want the benefits."
  - "This piece of glass symbolizes democracy for me. There's transparency, so I get to see the full picture. So do you and what you see is what you get!"
  - "Democracy is a lie we've been fed by the politicians."
- (Unpublished Uhambo Report, 2004:13).

As an outsider it was apparent to me that there were huge differences in the experience of South Africa, even within this group who had all gone to University together<sup>25</sup>. This assumption of homogeneity was based on my own experiences as a student at The University of Nairobi<sup>26</sup>, a highly politicised institution. As a student you had no choice but to become politically active despite one's political, socio - cultural or economic leaning. It is this background that also influences my analysis below of the political inclinations of my colleagues. One of the women in the group who I perceived

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<sup>24</sup> Based on its promises outlined in the Reconstruction and Development Plan

<sup>25</sup> Three of the cast members were classmates at the University of Cape Town's drama campus

<sup>26</sup> Both students and lecturers have been at the forefront of the change debate in Kenya for the last forty or so years of its existence. Its location in the capital, Nairobi also contributes to its proximity to ongoing political debates. Most political protests at the University often became violent. Its proximity to the Central Police Station has seen an uneasy relationship develop with the police and businesses in the area that have born the brunt of stone wielding students.

as apolitical argued that life was no different for her. As a 'Coloured' woman, she argued that her life was never characterised by a "lack of necessities or freedoms", which was characteristic of the life of the other two women who grew up in Soweto and Khayelitsha respectively. There was a sense of nostalgia in the stories of the cast members from Soweto and Khayelitsha. They asserted that during the apartheid era there was a reinforced sense of community in the townships. They specifically referred to 'the 80's'<sup>27</sup> when people left their doors open because of the potential and frequent police raids. The 'open door' ensured that anyone could run into any household and join in that family's activity in the event of a raid. Thus mimicking a sense of normalcy and avoiding police harassment. A common enemy created a stronger sense of oneness even amongst diverse groups. However, the militancy that was necessary in the fight against apartheid was not re - channelled with the advent of a majority Black government. Unemployment, low levels of education and exacerbated disenchantment have resulted in communities turning against themselves. Yisa captured this when she said,

When I moved out of home, I left there thinking the township was a beautiful place where your community took care of you. But that's no longer true. The community has broken down and those very same neighbours could rob or kill you (Uhambo report, 2004: 13).

Some of the cast's sentiments echoed disappointment and anger with the way things had turned out post 1994. I vividly remember one of my colleagues constantly saying, 'not all of us are Mandela, and not all of us can forgive'. It is these sentiments and the stories accompanying them that were eventually corralled into the theatrical pieces.

The second phase of making *Uhambo* involved the company of nine going into an intense four - week rehearsal period. Aston asserts that the concept of collaboration in feminist theatre means that every group member can equally be in every stage of the process that results in the devising of issue-oriented pieces (Aston, 1995:62). The collaborative style of discussion, devising, scripting and workshopping means that the dominant mode of theatrical presentation was an ensemble style that promoted the idea of a group of performers rather than a star performer (Aston, 1995:62). The important factor is that it allows women to choose how to develop their work in an environment, which they could trust to be supportive (Aston, 1995:62). Kali van der Merwe, the fine artist/designer would visit rehearsals regularly so that she could design the installations as the material was generated in rehearsals. Van der Merwe reflects on the fluidity of the process:

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<sup>27</sup> As an outsider reference to the 80's was not significant to me, but it appears to have been a particularly significant moment of South Africa's history particularly for these women.

The process of creating *Uhambo – Pieces of a Dream* was very fluid, because it was workshopped. In my briefing sessions I never knew what to expect. This was immensely challenging because when creating the set and installations one is dealing with physical objects and much of one's time is spent thinking about where you are going to get them? How you are going to put them together? And will they achieve the effect you want? Having solved all these practical problems and feeling very proud of myself, I would come to the next rehearsal only to find out I was dealing with a completely different play as the workshop process had taken its twists and turns. It taught me not to be precious about my idea; to flow, to let them come and most importantly let them go (Van der Merwe, in Matchett, 2004: 15).

Text was generated out of the material gathered in phase one. The text was emailed to the writer, Malika Ndlovu, on a daily basis. She would rework it and send it back into the rehearsal process as quickly as she could, to be reworked on the floor. Ndlovu, shares her experiences of the process:

Trust was a constant element of the process, because if you as a creator / writer or director/ facilitator of a creative process, dare to let the stories tell themselves and lead the way, while engaging with input from several diverse creative individuals as well, trust is the anchor no matter what currents are flowing. We were all navigating into the unknown really and relying on our faith in each other, the creative process and the intentions behind the production we wanted to make.... It was a dynamic process in which I felt ever ready to try something else, another angle, integrate a new theme, as we forged ahead trying to shape the content of the production, while honouring the real-life stories and issues that interviewees had shared with us (Ndlovu, in Matchett, 2004:15).

The feminist line of enquiry that is founded on the notion of theatre as multi-authored rather than adhering to the conservative principle of the single (often male) author as the controlling agent of theatrical production is of importance to Mothertongue's work. Multi-authoring is a rejection of the lone patriarchal playwright who presents a script. The process of multi-authoring is a layered one, because the stories that are presented are not only ours but also other people's stories. The stories that we brought to the process were already multi - authored. My role as a Burundian refugee woman in *Uhambo* was not only informed by interactions with women at Bonne Esperance and books I had read about the refugee experience in South Africa but also by my experience as a foreigner in South Africa during this period.

*Uhambo – Pieces of a Dream* was a two-part performance that was linked with stories. One part of the performance took place on travelling mini bus taxis while the other half was in a theatre/installation space that housed various installations with which the performers and audience engaged. The theatre/gallery space was divided into two spaces: the external garish face of democracy characterised by *Proudly South African* signage, and the reality of what was actually being experienced by

our three taxi protagonists. The audience transited through a passageway from one space into the other. There were no seats in the theatre, which had a performer standing on a pile of stones. All around her were three shrines, one for each protagonist, installations, portraits and quotes from the women who were part of the workshops and interviews. The performer in this space embodied the three taxi stories. It was in this space that the audience heard the actual stories of the characters they had interacted with in the taxis.

Station one traced the journey of a Burundian refugee woman from her country during the war to South Africa. Xenophobia and the experiences of refugee women were explored, by addressing the experiences of women in transit during conflict and bodily integrity concerns such as rape at the hands of militia or male relatives on arrival in host countries. It brought to the fore the concomitant pressures of motherhood, the struggle to survive in the midst of language and legal deficiencies that hinder refugee women's capability to access economic opportunities. South Africa's policy towards refugees through the jarring bar code projected across the performer, which read *Republic of South Africa. Temporary Permit to Prohibited Person*<sup>28</sup> was questioned. This also emerged from expectations raised by the post 1994 regime that declared South Africa open to Africans. There are assumptions attached to this openness that are re-defined in the face of the hostility that most African foreigners experience in South Africa. This story was juxtaposed with that of the homeless South African woman who has been waiting for the promises of democracy to yield fruit, specifically, the promise of a house that has not been forthcoming. Playing the two stories alongside one another in the taxi and eventually in the installation space was partly in response to remarks emerging from the workshops held at Bonne Esperance shelter for refugee women and children. The women at the Shelter made appeals to South African women for their solidarity in combating xenophobia. Positioning these stories together also highlighted the factors that contribute to xenophobia. A poor South African woman, whose Government has not lived up to her expectations cannot be expected to embrace foreigners who appear to manage better in her country because some of them may have skills that she does not possess due to her history.

Drawing on the taxi *gaartjie* who was a woman, the third station explored the intersecting issues of sexual orientation, sexual violation and power relations in male dominated professions. A taxi *gaartjie* is a predominantly male occupation and the actor embodying this role spoke about the need to be 'tough' to avoid harassment and

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<sup>28</sup> Prior to 2000, this bar code appeared on all refugees' permits.

abuse in her industry. She alludes to the fact that democracy opened up spaces for women to take up a range of job opportunities. In this station, the audience also engages with the story of a woman who is gang raped due to her sexual orientation as a lesbian. This story emerged from a survivor who sat for one of the portraits that formed part of the installation space. She had to move to a safe house in Cape Town from Johannesburg due to threats on her life. It is within this context that the *gaartjie* stresses the need to be tough and embody male characteristics in order to avoid being the target of male attacks<sup>29</sup>. This speaks to survival tactics that Black lesbians have had to adopt in order to survive in sexually intolerant environments.

Another aspect of *Uhambo* involved the role of the audience in completing and participating in a variety of activities during the performance. The discussion between spectators and performers is viewed as an integral part of the [feminist] theatrical event rather than as an afterpiece (Aston, 1995:63). Techniques of persuasion were built in, that were designed to get a feminist message across. The processes of theatrical communication sometimes involved the audience feeding their experiences on a particular issue into a performance context (Aston, 1995:63). In *Uhambo*, the audience travelled and engaged both physically and viscerally with the stories during and after the performance. They were asked to post a letter in the homeless woman's house, to transform the words 'prohibited person' at the refugee woman's station and to re-piece the body<sup>30</sup> of the *gaartjie*. The spectators at this point became social actors as they engaged with the material and with each other.

*Uhambo* heralded a new way of working for Mothertongue, in terms of the choices we made in how we wanted our spectators to engage with our work. De Wet states that feminist intervention in understanding theatre as a sign system has also opened up the possibilities of analysing the female performer as the author of a potentially subversive theatrical site (De Wet, 1997:66). By highlighting the social performance of gender through theatrical representation, the status of the oppressive gender roles and power relations of patriarchy as a natural order can be challenged and the transgression of gender norms encouraged (De Wet, 1997:66). By enabling the audience to complete the drama through ritual enactments, performed together with the performers, they were able to transform the status of victim to woman doing, woman living, woman transforming her own life (Matchett, 2005b:12). The physical

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<sup>29</sup> A sentiment that was later re-echoed by the young women in Manenberg.

<sup>30</sup> The lesbian 'gaartjie's' story was performed with a video of the *gaartjie's* lips projected onto the performer who slowly tore up an A1 sheet of paper as she told the story of how she had been raped. At some point she turned the paper round to reveal a faint photocopy of a naked woman's torso.

engagement with the ritual created a space for a shared experience in which individuals considered and shifted their personal narratives within a collective environment, thus birthing a new story comprising individual narratives (Matchett, 2005b: 13). Jones states that, "ritual fulfils an emotional or physical need which results in a shared experience – a coming together" (Jones, 1996: 249). This coming together is precisely what informs the new narrative. By engaging with the rituals, the audience brought their personal experiences to bear on what they did (Matchett, 2005b: 13). In evolving towards a much more communal and participatory way of working hence blurring the notions of what it means to make a conventional piece of theatre, we were not only challenging theatrical norms but also redefining what it meant to engage with women centred issues from a feminist perspective in theatre. Challenging these norms also meant destabilising traditional definitions of what professional theatre constitutes.

The delineation between community and professional theatre is rooted in the formers non-conformity to western theatre norms and traditions that are typically defined by the proscenium arch stage and Western oriented training for actors. Here the role of actors in relation to their audience is clearly defined. It is performed in a space where actors hold power over their audience (Matchett, 2005b: 14). Traditional western theatre buildings are built to enhance the power of the actor. 'Community theatre', on the other hand, does not necessarily rely on theatre buildings and often encourages active physical audience engagement. The power relationships between actors and audience are therefore more fluid and interchangeable (Matchett, 2005b: 14). In reality the choices that Mothertongue has made in its theatre productions have challenged this delineation. All of Mothertongue's productions have been community oriented in nature except that they were performed in traditional theatre spaces, which were subverted for the duration of the performance. In *What the Water gave me* (2000), for example the performance ended with the audience on stage, an area traditionally viewed as the actor's domain. With *Uhambo* (2004) the theatrical spaces were either deconstructed such as the theatre into a gallery and the mini bus taxi converted into a performance space.

The making and performing of *Uhambo* highlighted the challenges of transforming highly political stories into a theatrical production for mass consumption, especially in a context where there was little structure for debriefing. By this I mean there was no post performance discussion session or separate workshops run alongside the performance. As a result, some of the actors took on other (the women we

interviewed) people's scars and also relived their own traumas. It highlighted the need for safety nets within the creative process that could provide outlets for emotions and tensions that arise from dealing with traumatic issues. The concerns explored within *Uhambo*, were about bringing the gendered experiences to issues such as 'homelessness', migration, conflict and sexuality to the fore. It was also forcing the audience into an uncomfortable space (the confined taxi, for example) where they had to engage with the very raw journey that the women (embodied by the characters) faced on a day-to-day basis. The issues were not new, it was how we were telling them and from whose perspective that was different. We wanted to turn these experiences from broad statistics into individualised stories that audience members had to engage with. The making of *Uhambo* also emphasized the fact that the process and the production were not separate and that they were not merely designed for theatrical purposes. The goal was not the product but that through the process those involved would begin their own level of transforming or reassessing some of their beliefs and practices. I believe that the political positions of the cast were challenged and vocalised within the process, a process that few South Africans working across race dare to engage in. I believe that we emerged from this process not just having made a play but having questioned our beliefs.

Despite *Uhambo's* alternative route to engaging with the audience, it still falls out of the realm of 'development'. Transformation may have been achieved through the range of random individuals who attended the performances at various venues. It was not a consistent journey over a long period with a particular group as was the case with *Rite of Being*. So the journey into *Rite of Being* marked a shift in approach at various levels. When we embarked on *Rite of Being* as a project that could be specifically tagged as a TFD project many within the collective questioned whether this was our core strength. *Rite of Being* was designed as a series of workshops and interactive performances that would creatively explore the female body as a site for 'rites of passage' that mark and characterize growth as well as shape women. In so doing, we sought to address the role of rites of passage, either formal or informal, in the gender socialisation of girls and women in Manenberg. The project sought to highlight the link between knowledge and power by providing individuals and communities with the opportunity of discovering information, which could lead to making informed choices around rites of passage. Mothertongue's work with women is informed by the desire to create a space where women are no longer defined in terms of the social spaces we already occupy; a space where we can define our own centre in our own terms without the consent of the patriarchal status quo (Matchett,

2004: 15). While the venture into what is termed as 'community theatre' may have been seen as going against the grain, the process had already begun with *Uhambo. Rite of Being* was an opportunity to create a consistent space that was not centred on a theatrical performance. It was an opportunity for Mother tongue to engage consistently with a group of young women in discussions around issues that while being personal were informed by gender norms and social structures that legitimised gender disparities and sexual appropriation. The impetus for engaging with TFD or 'community oriented theatre' was largely due to my relocation to Cape Town, when I was accepted into the graduate programme at the African Gender Institute (AGI). My interest and experience with TFD initiatives in Kenya were seen as an asset. My need to continue this type of engagement in Cape Town was fulfilled by an existing gap within the organization to develop this work. Thus my location in Cape Town facilitated the development of this work within Mother tongue.

My engagement with development work is embedded primarily within two civil society organizations; Kenya Female Advisory Organization (KEFEADO) and Amani Peoples theatre (APT). Both of these organizations are based in Kenya and work towards social transformation. KEFEADO is primarily a gender concern and all of its programmes aim to increase gender parity. Founded in 1994, a large percentage of the organizations work that they are largely associated is within the formal education sector. KEFEADO has developed partnerships with schools in Nyanza province, having worked in both Busia and Migori. These are districts that are described as amongst the poorest in Kenya despite the fertile soils, good rain cover, and the presence of Lake Victoria, resources, which could improve economic viability. Their record on girls' education is equally weak, with both of these districts having the highest numbers of girls' dropping out of school before completing primary school. Both of these districts are border towns, with Busia bordering Uganda on the West of Nyanza and Migori bordering Tanzania towards the south of Nyanza. This is a factor that also contributes to the high drop out rates given the potential for cross-border trade, sexual exploitation of young girls due to the truck driver phenomenon<sup>31</sup> and the concomitant HIV/AIDS pandemic.

I go into relative detail about KEFEADO because this was the organization where I 'cut my teeth' into the Kenyan civil society movement and project management. It is also the organization that inspired my interest in gender issues especially with their

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<sup>31</sup> In Kenya and in South Africa there has been a lot of activism engaging long distance truck drivers around safer sexual behaviour as well as exploring young women's co-option into transactional sex in towns used as pit stops for truck drivers' pit stops.

focus on the very practical issues of enrolment and retention of girls in school. I was inspired by the work and my desire to be part of the change process was born here. Their projects<sup>32</sup> adopted a three-pronged approach to the question of enrolment, retention and completion of formal education by girls. The work involved the inclusion of pedagogical issues such as the structure, environment and ideology of the school as well as content of education, levels of achievement and teacher commitment. The project also assessed institutional dynamics by looking at the availability and costs of schooling; distance of schools from home; the existence or absence of: girls' schools, women teachers, and incentives such as scholarships, books, appropriate physical structures such as buildings, drinking water facilities, toilets and understaffed schools as critical factors undermining girls' education. The third component of the project involved an analysis of girls' socialization, parental attitudes, early marriages, opportunity cost arguments tied to working for a wage, access to resources within the home, child headed households as a result of HIV/AIDS and cultural practices such as female and male circumcision. Change was therefore envisaged on a broad level and involved working with multiple stakeholders who in this case were parents, teachers, schools boards, local community leadership structures and the learners. Given the role that non - governmental organizations play in service delivery in Kenya, many of these under-resourced schools adopted the strategies developed within the project. Beginning with the very simple act of having gender-disaggregated data of students enrolled within the school and tracking this information from grade one to completion. The lack of these basic statistics in schools had hindered their ability to track enrolment rates for girls and therefore rendered them unable to account for high dropout rates for girls. These statistics were also used to develop systems that would assist the schools track students who dropped out and why. A further step was to find ways in collaboration with all the stakeholders to mitigate the situation. Without belabouring the point my engagement with a large scale project of this nature alerted me to the potential for transformation in thinking (becoming aware of socio-cultural and economic factors that impact on young girls enrolment and retention in schools) and in doing (developing adequate facilities from basis statistics at administrative level to allocating resources towards toilets, suitable desks, gender sensitive teaching material and approaches to teaching, among others).

It is also through my work with KEFEADO that I came into contact with APT. It was while attending a workshop APT conducted on conflict transformation and peace building that I experienced the use of participatory theatre techniques in issue

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<sup>32</sup> Two such projects were implemented, a one-year pilot in Busia district and a 5year project in Migori district.

analysis. I had previously attended a similar workshop conducted by a different organization whose approach consisted largely of lectures and group discussions. The APT experience awoke me to the potential of participatory and experiential learning, particularly when working with adults who are conditioned that play is for children. In 1998, when I joined The University of Nairobi to pursue my undergraduate degree, I spent some time at APT, learning about their work and attending a variety of induction trainings they conducted. APT's work has been categorized as: theatre for development, forum theatre, participatory theatre, but the organization chooses to refer to their work as 'People's Theatre'. APT was founded in 1992 as a response to the post 1992 violence that rocked Kenya after the re-introduction of multi-party politics. Started by a group of university students who mostly congregated at their Catholic parishes for youth activities, they felt there was a need to find ways to inspire youth towards a creative means of conflict transformation and theatre was the avenue. This vision was also partly influenced by their membership of the Free Travelling Theatre<sup>33</sup> and their engagement with Boalian and Freirian thinking on social transformation and education. It is at APT that I came into contact with Boal's and Freire's philosophies which years later informed the work I developed at Mothertongue. I will at this point, briefly examine some of the key principles of Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed methodology under which forum theatre as a specific method falls.

The development of Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) by Boal was inspired by among other things the pedagogical theories of Freire. Nonetheless, in order to understand Boal, I will briefly examine some of the other influences on Boal. I will focus on two major theatre theoreticians whose works also respond to the relationship between the spectator and actor, a central focus in forum theatre<sup>34</sup>. One of the first theoreticians is Aristotle. Boal begins by challenging the distinction that Aristotle creates between art and politics, as two distinct disciplines. As will be seen later on, TO is premised on the notion of the two as mutually reinforcing. Boal interprets Aristotle's spectator actor relationship as a poetics in which the spectator delegates power to the dramatic character so that the latter may act and think for him (Boal, 1979: 47). This is the repressive function of Greek tragedy. Boal asserts:

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<sup>33</sup> Most theatre or drama programmes in Public Universities were located within the literature departments. FTT is an initiative of the literature departments and is present in all public universities. Students develop theatrical productions based on the high school examination 'set books'. These productions then travel to various schools around the country. For example, *Romeo and Juliet* was a set book. However, all English literature books were subsequently replaced with African literature from 1993. In my time *Things fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe was one of the literature in English set books. The FTT principle applies to both English and Kiswahili literature.

<sup>34</sup> This methodology is one of the core issues being examined within this thesis.

The coercive system of tragedy can be used before or after the revolution but never during it. Only in more stable societies, ethically defined can offer a scale of values, which would make it possible for the system to function. During a 'cultural revolution' in which all values are being formed or questioned the system cannot be applied (Boal, 1979:46).

Boal identified with German theatre maker's Brecht's positioning of the spectator. Boal surmises:

Brecht proposes a poetics in which the spectator delegates power to the character who then acts in his place but the spectator reserves the right to think for himself, often in opposition to the character which was an awakening of critical consciousness. But the *Poetics of the Oppressed* focuses on the action itself; the spectator delegates no power to the character (or actor) either to act or think in his place; on the contrary he himself assumes the protagonic role, changes the dramatic action, tries out solutions, discusses plans for change, in short trains himself for real action. In this case perhaps theatre is not revolutionary in itself but is surely a rehearsal for the revolution (Boal, 1979:122).

In what Boal describes as a series of experiments designed to ensure that theatre was considered as a language, *Poetics of the oppressed* was born (Boal, 1979:121). Boal engaged in a literacy programme in Peru to show in practice how theatre can be placed in the service of the oppressed, "so that they can express themselves and so that by using this new language they can also discover new concepts" (Boal, 1979:121). Thus re-emphasizing Freire's supposition that in order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit but as a limiting situation, which they can transform (Freire, 1972: 31). "The main objective of *Poetics of the Oppressed* is to change the people – 'spectators' from passive beings in the theatrical phenomenon – into subjects, actors and transformers of the dramatic action" (Boal, 1979:122). The insistence that the oppressed engage in reflection on their concrete situation is not a call to armchair revolution (Boal, 1979:122). On the contrary reflection – true reflection leads to action (Freire, 1972:48).

TO has two fundamental linked principles: it aims to help the spect - actor transform himself into a protagonist of the dramatic action and rehearse alternatives for his situation so that he may then be able to; extrapolate into his real life the actions he has rehearsed in the practice of theatre (Boal, 1979: 119).

The liberated spectator as a whole person launches into action. It does not matter that the action is fictional; what matters is that it is action! (Boal, 1979: 122) Boal believes that truly revolutionary theatrical groups should transfer to the people the means of

production in the theatre so that the people themselves may utilise them (Boal, 1979:122).

In forum, the audience not only comments on the action, it intervenes directly in the action, taking the protagonists part and trying to bring the play to a different end, it is no longer a passive receiver, it is a gathering of 'spect-actors' (active spectators) who bring their own experience and suggestions to the question, 'what is to be done?' (Boal, 1995: xviii).

"Forum was [is] never about a simplification into right and wrong, never in absolute terms of black and white – one right and wrong" (Boal, 1995: xix).

What a roomful of people believes is not necessarily the same as what the next room will believe. Looking at the problem is in itself therapeutic, it is a step toward doing something about it. A therapy, which continually throws light on problems, a variety of different shades of light, is by definition more dynamic than one, which seeks (and stops at) a solution (Boal, 1995: xx).

During my four years at the University of Nairobi, I became a trainer with APT, conducting workshops within their projects in Kenya and in the East Africa region that employed aspects of forum theatre. The style of working between these two organizations (KEFEADO and APT) is quite different but the issues were fairly similar. I brought a gendered lens to the work at APT (developed through my engagement with KEFEADO), which was hitherto non-existent given their gender-neutral approach to work. Over the years, I cultivated collaborations between the two organizations on a variety of short - term projects. It is as a result of my work at APT that I was invited to a three - week exchange programme in 2003 in Germany for organizations from Africa that applied theatre in conflict transformation. It is in the context of this workshop that my knowledge about and subsequent involvement with *Mothertongue* was initiated. Matchett of *Mothertongue*, six other Africans from Zambia, South Africa, Malawi and I were part of this process that occurred under the auspices of Sabisa. Sabisa is a German organization that was initially formed to foster student exchange between South Africa and Germany. Its mandate has since changed. The programme involved collaborative workshops that we gave and participated in, in various parts of Berlin and East Germany.

The emergence of *Rite of Being* as a project and my subsequent involvement with *Mothertongue* began at the end of this four week encounter, when a day was set aside to 'dream up a project' with other participants in the group. When we began to map out ideas for this project, my interest leaned towards the sexual appropriation of the female body and this was informed by two processes I had just been part of in Kenya. I had come out of a one - week campaign with KEFEADO. This campaign

formed part of the larger annual international Global Campaign for Education that KEFEADO ran. The activities involved meetings with stakeholders in peri-urban Kisumu, Kisii and Nyando, all districts within Nyanza province. All of the reports that emerged from the districts raised incest as an issue central to hindering young girls retention within the formal education system. I was surprised at the level of openness with which young girls articulated the matter. Despite incest being pervasive in Kenya, it is closely guarded by families who often opt to deal with it internally through a variety of customary rituals. I read this openness as an indicator of the urgency for intervention that was being communicated.

The connection with 'rites of passage' as a framework was subsequently informed by a national conference on HIV/AIDS and culture held in Kisumu and co-organized by KEFEADO. Discussions within this conference affirmed the role that 'rites of passage' frameworks in traditional societies played in 'protecting' young girls' sexuality. It was argued that these institutions provided a space for dialogue around sex and sexuality. These structures were augmented by tight family networks and in this instance the role that older women in the family such as aunts and grandmothers played in facilitating these discussions was highlighted. Shifting lifestyles informed by urbanization and globalisation meant that these structures dissipated and the forums for these discussions were not adequately re - inscribed into the primary family unit, thus leaving a gap. However, it was pointed out that reviving these institutions would involve their transformation into gender responsive structures that did not reinforce stereotypes and biases that were inherent in them. It was also pointed out that this would involve transforming these institutions into gender responsive structures that could provide a framework to analyse and address issues such as incest as well as the socio-cultural factors that fuelled HIV/AIDS pandemic in Kenya.

These were my pre - occupations and the background I emerged from as I engaged in discussions around this potential project. It therefore came naturally to me that in speaking about a framework to locate debates and the reality of sexual appropriation of the female body, that 'rites of passage' could provide the framework to hold these issues. Taking cognisance that this would involve a transformation of what this framework would mean given the fact traditional 'rites of passage' are laden with gender stereotypes, enforce subordination of women and in actual fact threaten their bodily integrity. I was interested in whether there were structures that could be unearthed or developed in the communities we worked with so that these discussions continued long after we left. Given my location in Kenya, the project was envisaged as

a partnership between KEFEADO and Mothertongue. The influence of KEFEADO's<sup>35</sup> way of working, its existing activist work in Mt. Elgon around female genital mutilation (FGM), made it an easy choice in terms of an overarching theme. We were also searching for funds and it was important that we align our interests with those of potential funders<sup>36</sup>. Given that this was un-chartered territory for Mothertongue, my subsequent relocation to Cape Town meant that I played a significant role in designing the project's implementation plan. I came to the process with a particular understanding of what organising meant, given my work with rural communities in Kenya. These would of course be challenged whilst working in a totally new context such as Manenberg.

In this chapter, I have traced the history of Mothertongue, as an organization that emerged from a very specific set of circumstances and has continued to evolve both out of necessity, competing interests of members and a need to survive. The organic nature of this evolution has meant that some of the organization's strategic choices have been made on the basis of exploration and that a constant process of learning, re - visioning and restructuring continues. Important to this section has been the question of the ethos and style that Mothertongue has adopted in its approach to its work and organizing. Being rooted in feminist principles of activism and theatre making has resulted in an organization that seeks to communicate across two distinct disciplines and fields, which already have set principles. We are navigating an area that many theoreticians including Smith (1997), identify as one that requires more reflection. It is equally important to carry forward three major influences that led to the dialogue and actualisation of *Rite of Being*. Our experiences post *Uhambo* and the interest generated by the piece, influenced the organization to taking activism outside the 'theatre space'. This alternative presented itself in form of our engagement with community development, which was largely influenced by my experience and interest in continuing this type of engagement in South Africa. As I have previously mentioned my relocation to Cape Town to take up my graduate studies at the AGI provided this opportunity. In doing this Mothertongue was moving towards a less generic idea of transformation that was characterised by its theatre productions but towards a more specific target group through whom we would develop a consistent relationship that could be tracked. Given this backdrop, it is only natural that this specific set of circumstances played a role in our engagement at a project level in Manenberg.

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<sup>35</sup> It was older and proven so to speak.

<sup>36</sup> A range of institutions whose project priorities indicate that they take women's issues seriously, such as Ford Foundation, UNIFEM, HIVOS, DFID, British Council, Rockefeller foundation and NOVIB amongst others. We sent out proposals or held meetings with representatives from these institutions

## **CHAPTER FOUR: THE MANENBERG PROCESS.**

This chapter provides an analysis of key moments selected from the theatre workshop, which acts as a key site within *Rite of Being* through which I will respond to my research questions. This analytical process is designed to address my principal research question, which firstly seeks to assess the opportunities that forum theatre techniques offered a feminist activist interest in exploring the processes of being gendered as a woman in Manenberg. Secondly, I intend to examine the nexus between the feminist researcher and the feminist activist. Where do the two meet and what are their points of tension? My exploration of these two questions will be done through insights into my experiences during the theatre workshop. This goal intersects with a reflection on the impact of the workshop on Mothertongue as an institution that was piloting, a project dealing with fairly well known issues but under a radical paradigm – ‘rites of passage’. What did it mean for us (organization) and me to live this project under the many hats I wore as an administrator, facilitator, researcher and myself.

Before I address these questions, I will provide a brief overview of the activities that took place prior to the workshop. This backdrop is essential to seeing the dialogue that we initiated within the workshop as part of larger conversations that were carefully planned to lay the foundation for *Rite of Being* in Manenberg. These activities involved a baseline survey where we drew on the skills of young women from Manenberg and other parts of Cape Town. I will provide a brief summary of the recruitment, data collection and findings from this activity. The material that informs this chapter includes project reports compiled over the two years of the project’s life as well as personal observations and records. In addition to reports, we also documented the project on film. The video material has been useful to reconstruct events with a different distance. In reviewing the material directly relevant to analysing the *Rite of Being* process, I have been able to see some aspects of the work in a new light. These documents contribute to framing the analysis and conclusions I draw in this thesis.

### **GROUNDWORK FOR MANENBERG:**

The baseline survey was conducted between 25<sup>th</sup> April and 7<sup>th</sup> May 2005. This survey was designed to provide a general assessment of Manenberg, its people, problems facing youth and problems specific to young women. We also wanted to establish what the community understood as ‘rites of passage’ practices for young women. This activity also provided an opportunity to introduce Mothertongue as an organization

that could engage with these issues. In the same breath we wanted to establish the community's attitude towards development projects in general and get a sense of their willingness to participate and support such an initiative. Questions around the viability of theatre as a methodology for social transformation were raised, to assess whether the approach would be received in community forums or viewed as alien. We also used this opportunity to find out about other service delivery institutions in the area and to establish the community's engagement with these services and institutions.

Through a series of consultative meetings with partner organizations<sup>37</sup>, we identified eight young women and two community workers who became part of the data collection team. The team was selected for their diverse backgrounds and range of experiences particularly in relation to the issues the project would be looking at. There was a 'Coloured'<sup>38</sup> woman from Retreat who had been involved in Project Phakama an international arts based organization that Mothertongue has had a working relationship with. She is also involved in community development work through a local NGO in Mowbray. There were two other 'Coloured' girls from Gympie Street in Woodstock, both of whom had previously lived in Manenberg. They were involved with Azaad Youth Services, a Muslim oriented project for youth development in Woodstock. There were three Xhosa women from Khayelitsha who were also identified through Project Phakama. The last two were 'Coloured' women from Manenberg. One was completing her final year of high school while the other had dropped out of school. We were interested in their lived experiences especially since they had a strong connection to the issues this project would be tackling. We thought it would be important for the two social workers to assist in the data collection process given their knowledge of the area and the people. They have also been involved in many community projects in the area over the years. They were known and commanded respect in the area. We saw their role as that of guiding the young women and coordinating the process of data collection from Manenberg. Owing to their status in the community they gathered information from respondents who were likely to provide much more detailed information to them rather than the younger research assistants. All of the women were between the ages of twenty to twenty five, while the social workers were thirty and fifty five years old respectively. It was

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<sup>37</sup> Some of the organizations we consulted were chosen for their location in Manenberg and their interest in gender issues. Others were organizations that Mothertongue had a working relationship with and who were engaged in processes that recognised theatre as a tool for social transformation.

<sup>38</sup> I use quotation marks around Coloured owing to the contested nature of this term. This has its roots in its history as the creation of the apartheid regime to classify people of mixed race for purposes of the government's divide and rule policies.

important for us to work with young women from the beginning to develop their ability to dialogue with their community on issues that were pertinent to them.

Prior to the baseline study, we conducted a one-day workshop to familiarize the data collectors with the core objectives of the project and with the data collection tool, which was a questionnaire that we had developed, as a guide. We spent time unpacking the terminology of 'rites of passage' to ensure that we all had a similar understanding of the concept. Through the use of image theatre and brainstorming the participants were asked to reflect on the images that came to mind when the term 'rites of passage' was mentioned. They were in turn requested to present these images to group. These images were examined and various interpretations offered. The group developed a working definition of a 'rite of passage', as a mark of change. Emphasis was laid on puberty, which was our focus. Puberty was understood as a period during which change in a young girl is recognized through menstruation. This biological mark resulted in new responsibilities and status shifts. The participants were clear that societal expectations for girls and boys differ and these were emphasized at this point. According to the participants, women are confined to traditional roles with the responsibility of being a 'good wife', 'a good homemaker' and a 'good woman'. The participants stated that confusion continually arises for young girls during puberty especially when they lack role models, consistent guidance and positive advice. They argued that it is the confusion and contradictory messages that leads to the high rates of teenage pregnancy, high incidences of drug abuse and the establishment of gangs that provide structures to initiate them into their new position in life.

The group also raised the question of rape. Four of the girls in the group are survivors of rape. This experience contributed in great measure to what they referred to as having "grown up before their time". Being a rape survivor meant that they had to take responsibility for their lives and themselves before womanhood, particularly in the absence of formal support structures in the home and in school. This was the case with all of them. None of their parents, especially their mothers believed they had been raped. This lack of acknowledgement impacted greatly on their relations with their mothers and hence on the meaning of the family. Their experience of rape resulted in increased socio-economic responsibilities when they chose to leave home, which was the site of abuse. Suzy<sup>39</sup> from Manenberg stated that the societal pressure on men to prove themselves and their sexual prowess resulted in rape. She also argued that some of these boys are initiates into gangs that have membership rituals,

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<sup>39</sup> One of young participants from Manenberg

which include rape. I was surprised at the level of openness in a room of young women that we hardly knew but who spoke freely about incidences that had deeply scarred them. It spoke to me about the importance of such spaces, where those who had gone through similar experiences could speak without judgment, without being told to keep quiet because other people would know about it, an experience that they were all too familiar with.

The second phase of the workshop involved unpacking the questionnaire, which included questions around the experiences of young women during puberty, organizations working around women's issues in the area and the community's position on what needed to be done about what they identified as problems facing young women. Four of the young women in the group had administered questionnaires before, so were therefore working from a partial position of knowledge. The questionnaire consisted of twenty-five open - ended questions, which were designed to respond to the activity's objectives. The young women using a semi-structured interview process engaged the respondents on these issues. The team also utilized in-depth interviews with willing respondents. These interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. The team was also provided with note pads in addition to the questionnaires and were requested to record information that they saw as crucial to the subject. They were also provided with cheap cameras to capture their perceptions of Manenberg. We were referring to incidences and stories that they thought would be interesting for the project.

Manenberg is divided into six zones and the team succeeded in interviewing a random sample from five zones. Since some of the research assistants live in Manenberg, some interviews were conducted in the evenings during social gatherings. Due to fears of ongoing gang fights, zone six was not reached. The group managed to interview young women and men from fifteen years of age, women and men between twenty to fifty five years of age, community opinion leaders such as heads of area coordinating groups, community development initiatives, church leaders as well as members of gangs and former gang members (both male and female). The two-week data collection exercise also involved a team meeting at the end of each week to assess their progress. Most of the group members experienced challenges, which were largely associated with language and what they interpreted as racial politics. The Xhosa girls in the group felt that it would be better if they went out on their own. They argued that when accompanied by one of their 'Coloured' colleagues

it was easy for the respondents to revert to Afrikaans<sup>40</sup> and ignore them totally. The question of exclusion and inclusion, informed by race was a challenge that we encountered throughout the two years that we implemented *Rite of Being*. It was therefore suggested that the two community workers accompany them at a distance to ensure their security but would not get involved in the interview process. Other team members who were Afrikaans speakers found it relatively easier to navigate Manenberg and gathered more than the required information. They were often inundated with respondents' life stories. It was their observation that people wanted to talk about what was affecting them and these interviews provided that opportunity. Community members also pointed out that this was the first time people had actually come round to speak to them about what they considered the intimate yet important question of puberty for young women in Manenberg. The second week of data collection occurred without incident. The women from Khayelitsha who had expressed reservations during the first debriefing session, indicated that the arrangements made to remedy the situation had worked.

The information that was collected from the eighty questionnaires, were analysed by a data analyst and myself. These findings were subsequently compiled into a report that was distributed to a number of organizations and was also shared with community members during a stakeholder's validation meeting. The findings were also explored in my Honours level research dissertation as noted in Chapter One. Emerging from the questionnaire was the overall profile of Manenberg as well as an analysis of the life of young men and women, which highlighted a complex environment. I will now summarize some of the key issues raised in the baseline survey. The family as a primary site for socialization and influence on children was emphasized in all of the questionnaires. The importance of the nuclear family is even more apparent in urban settings that have been distanced from extended family networks owing to economic migration. Locating Salo's (2004, 2005) arguments that are discussed in Chapter One on the role of mothers in policing young women's sexuality and reinforcing notions of respectability, it becomes clear that a breakdown in the family unit and in particular relationships with mothers leaves a tangible vacuum. It was pointed out that, the presence of strong family and social networks acted as a buffer against pressures associated with puberty. The role of mothers (women) as central to the socialization of their children, particularly their daughters during puberty was highlighted. However community members argued that this framework was absent, therefore young girls looked 'outside' for guidance and definition.

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<sup>40</sup> This is the language predominantly spoken by 'Coloured' people in the Western Cape.

The question of sexual abuse and violation in the home was also identified during the survey as a major factor that influenced young women's development. Most respondents felt that the presence of abuse in the home was factor that motivated factor young women to move out of the parental home in search of a 'better' life, a better relationship and a better man. Motherhood acts as a platform for mobility. It allows young women to officially leave the parental home owing to their new status. It provides a temporary escape from deprivation, congestion and poverty and allows them to start a new life on their own terms. I argue that it is temporary because most of these young women still live in the home or in the Wendy houses<sup>41</sup> at the back of their parent's homes. However, it still represents a new start.

The power of sexual violence to ascribe fear and concomitantly designate where, when and how women should be, impacts on their visibility and defines what it means to be a woman under such circumstances. Discussions with various female respondents revealed a complex pattern of traditions and morality that ensure the continuous control of women's sexuality. The sexual division of labour was pointed to as a strategy to maintain a relationship of dependency, where girls are trained at an early age to provide care for their siblings in the home while young men are encouraged to earn a wage to support the family. Most of the young girls, who were encountered during the survey, were teenage mothers who stayed at home after dropping out of school and took care of their children and siblings. These patterns reinforce the traditional gender roles of man as breadwinner and woman as nurturer, which contributes to developing their aspirations in a way that is perceived as recognizing their destiny.

The baseline survey indicated that there was a need to create spaces where young women could be meaningfully engaged and "kept away from the street". Community members recognised the need for a women only initiative, even though it was challenged as being discriminatory for not including boys who were also at high risk. However, as an organization that addresses women centred issues, we felt that if the project targeted young women's' concerns then it was important that the core group be people that their peers could relate to. It emerged from the survey that we were the first women's' organization who had designed a project to respond to young girls' issues in this community through drama. Most community members felt that drama would be a useful tool because young people would remember and identify with what they saw rather than what they were told. *Rite of Being* was welcomed by community

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<sup>41</sup> Wooden structures that either form extensions of the main household or are separate entities on their own.

that informs my analysis in this thesis. Some of these moments arise from a series of exercises ensuing in an evolving narrative rather than one particular event. Others are more specific and relate to a particular activity. So the use of the word 'moment' to delineate the sites of analysis must be read with this in mind. These moments have been strategically selected to highlight key points in the workshop that are useful in analysing the gendered dynamics of applying forum theatre with this group of young women in this community. In essence, they provide a site from which my research questions can be explicated. I must point out at this stage that while the end product may have been a forum theatre play in terms of its principles, the workshop included a range of methods that did not only draw from Boal. What we had was a hybrid workshop that infused a range of techniques informed by the facilitators' backgrounds in drama and gender and development work. These were harnessed in response to emerging situations within the workshop setting. The moments that I have selected are therefore reflective of this hybridism. It is also important to note that these moments are extracted from larger processes. While every effort has been made to provide sufficient context for each of them, I must advise that they are read as part of an ongoing dialogue between various actors in the project. While the details do not present precisely what happened to the extent to which it is possible, I have tried to remain true to the substance of our work and capture the spirit of the interactions that the descriptions depict. "All interpreters have interests that shape their interpretive activity, overtly or otherwise" (Cochrane, 1999:100), as such even my choice of moments is an interpretive process thus my account is inherently partial.

#### **ENGAGING GENDER:**

This section will provide insight into the participants' understanding of gender. By selecting this particular set of activities I hope to provide a slightly nuanced understanding of the participants' lives and what negotiating the gendering processes of being a woman would mean to them on a day-to-day basis. The activities conducted on this day were central to the broader project goals. We wanted to engage the twenty three young women in an analysis of gender as a social construction. This would facilitate the comprehension of the power relations that inform how women and men interact and how these interactions are choreographed by various norms, values and practices inscribed by society. By providing this framework we hoped that the young women could draw correlations to their own experiences and identify the processes that informed how femininity was constructed in Manenberg. The construction of femininity and the processes of becoming woman were central to the project, which was geared at uncovering contemporary 'rites of

passage<sup>42</sup>. At a research level, the choice of this moment is geared towards uncovering how the exercises facilitated the exploration and comprehension of what I refer to as 'rites of passage practices' in Manenberg. As you will notice from the workshop programme and activities designed for the first day of the workshop, we spent a significant amount of time building a sense of cohesion and trust within the group. The activities that I will describe below were facilitated on the second day of the workshop. The exploration of gender as a concept was central to the workshop and was introduced at this point.

We encouraged the participants to work with their bodies through a Boal exercise that involves creating machines. We divided the participants into smaller groups. They were then required to identify a machine such as a lawn mower, a tractor or a blender. Their task was to represent the chosen machine using their bodies. For the machine to function there was need for coordination and connectivity. This would involve precision of action and sound that would also facilitate the identification of the object in question. Each member of the group had to respond and fit into the others action. Beginning with an existing machine allowed the group to get immersed in being an object. This was done without inhibition and we slowly introduced the love<sup>43</sup> machine and the hate machine to build up to the gender machine. With this addition, we also expected the whole group to work together. They were now required to develop a spontaneous movement and sound to correspond to what they saw in front of them. For each concept, a volunteer would begin an action and a sound. The rest of the group would then be expected to fit into this action one at a time until the whole group had created their machine of love, hate and gender. Recreating an existing machine is definitely a much easier task than recreating an imagined machine that represents a feeling, an emotion. Needless to say the machine of love was disjointed. The group found it difficult to develop connectivity and even though the actions and sounds were required to be continuous many gave up midway. The machine of hate was louder and even more disjointed. The gender machine on the other hand re -represented many gender stereotypes.

One of the main aims of the machine exercise beyond turning the body into a creative tool is that it alerts us to the lack of connectivity particularly when we address day-to-day issues. The fairly seamless movement of an inanimate object cannot be recreated

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<sup>42</sup> Practices, events, rituals that marked significant moments in these young women's lives, which facilitated a transitioning from one stage in life to the next.

<sup>43</sup> The use of love and hate as concepts was merely to find emotions that people could easily relate to, emotions that drive our interactions with people especially during puberty. This of course is based on my experiences of puberty where you loved somebody one day and the next day you hated them there never was a middle ground.

in when it comes to human beings. We do after all respond to social stimuli to which machines are immune. So the gender machine was not in any way surprising for it was an indicator of existing social relations in this community as perceived by the group. Their responses to the individuals on the floor came from their observations of life. A follow up discussion on their various roles in the gender machine revealed the following:

"I represented a man...and so I was making a dominant sound..."

"I was a woman looking after a baby... doing laundry...doing work around the house."

"I represented a woman doing manual labour, to show that a woman can also do it..."

The statements above represent three interlinked areas of discussion that were pursued throughout the workshop. We explored why dominance is almost invariably attributed to men; why household chores, nurturing and homemaking are seen as the responsibilities of the woman alone and whether gender and gender roles are really clear - cut concepts. To synthesize these discussions, which emerged from the interpretation of the gender machine, we shifted gear slightly towards a more analytical process. This was done through an exercise that is predominantly used in introductory gender training<sup>44</sup>. We felt the need to amalgamate a typically Boalian exercise and a typical gender and development exercise to ensure that we took the discussion on gender roles and accompanying stereotypes further while retaining the spirit of participation. My choice to introduce gender as a machine was specific to my workshop objectives. Through the machines, we started a process of excavating certain positions but it was not sufficient to leave it at that or move into an interrogative space. The exercise, which I will describe below encouraged the participants to debate with one another and challenge each others positions based on a set of statements, two were taken from popular magazines<sup>45</sup>. The three statements were read to the participants and they were required to respond by agreeing, disagreeing or retaining a neutral thus 'unsure' position. These three positions were located in various corners of the room where signs were put up. When the first statement was read everyone was required to go to the corner that reflected their position. The participants were then given a moment to explain why they had selected

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<sup>44</sup> This particular exercise was adapted from the Oxfam gender-training manual.

<sup>45</sup> They are key opinion shapers for young people at this age as well as later in life. We can see the popularity of magazines such as Cosmopolitan amongst relatively older women. However, later in life one can argue that we are able to decipher what is real and what is not .We are also able to use our own judgements based on life experience and not take everything we read as gospel truth.

a certain position. They were also given the opportunity to question people in other corners, who had to 'defend' their positions.

The statements were:

"A girl passed science because she thought she was a boy"

"It is worse for a girl to be single than for a boy"

"Children who grow up in homes without a father have problems forming relationships later"

The discussions during this follow up exercise were informative on many levels. In response to the first statement, although all the participants felt that one's mental capabilities are not defined by their gender some participants asserted that certain gender roles were predefined. For example, women tend to be nurturers because they 'feel more' than men. The group also argued that in most cases women are physically weaker than men and as a result accept what they have been dealt; they hardly protest against their circumstances. They felt that more often than not, women are at the receiving end of the power struggles that exist amongst men. These struggles manifest themselves through violence. In Manenberg for example, boys are relatively safer than girls in terms of sexual assault, since girls are often the victims of rape and physical abuse, perpetrated by men and boys<sup>46</sup>. Several participants argued that this arose out of the perception of women as the 'weaker' sex. One participant related how her father subscribes to this perception [of women as the weaker sex]. He encourages her brother to have as many sexual encounters as he can, making reference to his [the father's] numerous children resulting from extramarital sexual encounters. Ironically, his own daughter's sexual life is circumscribed despite his encouragement to his son to develop his experiences with other women [other people's daughters]. Some participants therefore, felt that the perception that girls are "worse off if they are single" is related to this particular phenomenon, where women are viewed as sex objects. They argued that society tends to ostracise a single woman, she is perceived to either have loose morals or be 'strange':

"...if a guy is single, no one asks any questions, but if a woman is single, people say 'Why is she single? What's wrong with her'...."

One participant in particular felt that she did not want to be single because she needed to feel loved. This position was countered, with some participants stating that a woman need not be validated by her partner, but must rather validate herself. This was interesting given that the participants who expressed this view (which was half the room), a few minutes later, agreed with the statement, 'the lack of a father leads to

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<sup>46</sup> As a result of gang related turf wars or crimes perpetrated by men.

dysfunctional relationships in future, presumably irrespective of one's self-validation. They felt that children growing up without a father had a propensity for dysfunctional relationships. They argued that children respond to situations in their households and a single mother may pass on her inability to form relationships with men to her daughter. This position was not held of children raised by men only, perhaps because it was perceived as not being possible. Men will always find another woman to assist in raising a family. They went as far as attributing the high levels of juvenile delinquency in South Africa to the predominance of female-headed households. When we questioned why this would be laid squarely at the feet of mothers, almost all of the participants argued that a father played the role of the sensible parent and decision-maker.

“... The mother will talk and talk and talk, then the father will come and say ‘Right, this is what we are going to do...’”

“... The father is the sense in the family...”

I found this position remarkable since most of these girls came from single parent families, where their mothers have played a dominant role in their upbringing. Were they arguing that any problems they encountered now or later in life would be as a result of being raised by a female parent? Only two participants contended that these roles whether in the household or in society had nothing to do with one's gender. Therefore, a child who grows up without a father need not have problems forming relationships, so long as the child's mother managed his or her upbringing well. In fact, they argued that a child from a dysfunctional family with both parents is more likely to have problems forming relationships.

Although questions around what a ‘functional’ relationship means, and the connection between this and self-validation as women, were not explored, the inconsistencies in the participants' perceptions of gender roles in the family and society was a good indicator that they began to appreciate that gender roles are not as clear - cut as they appear to be. Their varying positions indicated that they were developing an appreciation of the contradictions within the gendering process. It was also an acknowledgement that social influences orchestrated by communities have a lot to do with how women and men define and perform their gender. The contradictions between their experiences and dominant gender ideologies e.g. the single parent argument also provided a platform from which to challenge these ideologies. If their experiences indicated that hegemonic discourses around how women and men should relate and behave were not universal, this meant that even their own

experiences of disempowerment could be challenged as not being a universal truth hence transformed. This was an important step to have made on the second day of the workshop. The destabilization of the ideas around gender and gender roles were critical to the work that we were doing in *Rite of Being*.

#### **BODY SCULPTING:**

We chose to work with the body as a precursor to narrative development to motivate the group to discover alternative ways of articulating their experiences. Using aspects of Boal's Image theatre, we wanted to observe their interactions with the themes using the body as a means of communication. What was being articulated albeit silently? What was being said loudly? Was there an awareness of the body? As facilitators we also wanted to engage with their interpretations of the images; what was seen in the images. Were these as a result of carefully selected interpretations or was the group oblivious to other issues raised? The baseline survey and the experiences of four young women in the group had already pointed to high levels of bodily violations, bodily surveillance as well as invasion of spaces based on the meaning attached to feminine bodies in Manenberg. We were certain that negotiating the work with bodies and personal space would be informed by the violations that these young women have experienced. We recognised that the definition of personal space was also part of their formed identities and therefore provided sufficient time for a certain level of comfort to be built that would allow the space to be negotiated and respected. Using images and body sculpting is a powerful mechanism for observing and understanding sub texts. As facilitators we were not only interested in engaging with these sub texts but we also wanted the young women to take notice of these hidden texts.

This section analyses the use of image work with particular emphasis on the narratives behind the images. In addition to image work, I will also analyse the use of creative writing that was necessitated as a response to a sense of despondency that occurred at the end of this particular day. I connect these two moments because the last aspect evolved out of the need to synthesize and hold what felt like a deeply low point to end a working day. The emphasis here is on our response as facilitators to the situation and what that impromptu action provided the participants with.

Working more concretely with the body the participants were asked to create images that responded to statements read out by the facilitator. The participants were asked to create images about: their perception of life in Manenberg, life as a young woman in Manenberg and conflicts that involved young women. These were the questions

(though broad) that the facilitator used throughout the exercise. Working in silence was a key requirement in this exercise for it enhances concentration and helps to shift focus to the body rather than on words. The initial image work was done individually, working with what is referred to as an image brainstorm where everyone in the group created their own image in response to the facilitator's stimuli. Gradually, the group began to work in pairs. This involved the development of a series of images. A would mould B into their response to statement one. She would then position herself in relation that B. B would then step out of the image, observe, remould A into her interpretation of statement one and position themselves in the image with A thus creating a new image. This would continue until the facilitator indicated that they could move on to the next statement. Eventually, four groups were created where they had to develop consensus around what their group images would look like. Yet again, the work was conducted in silence and based on a moulding, observation and placement pattern. Given that we were now working with more bodies the exercise took longer and involved the necessary negotiation. The process was similar to the activity in pairs but in this instance the focus was on statement three only. A would begin by moulding the entire group into her understanding of statement three. She would then place herself in the image. B would step out of the image, make adjustments if necessary and place herself either in the same position or alter it. C, D, E would also do the same until the entire group were certain that this image reflected their collective position. The aim was to see the differences that emerged when more bodies interacted and how the issues were negotiated and developed within the larger groups.

It was difficult to get the groups to work in silence. It was even more difficult to get some of the participants into positions of vulnerability or where they felt exposed. It was therefore easier for them to adopt easy, less threatening positions or positions of comfort such as standing or sitting as opposed to lying on the floor or exposing their frontal body for example. Trust issues emerged with sculpting owing to a violation that arises out of touch and with women not being comfortable with their bodies, manipulating them or vice versa. Physical boundaries were very important owing to extreme violation on a daily basis in a context where trust is contested. Displaying the body or exhibiting sculptures were an equally gender laden activity as touching; both could give women pleasure but both could signal vulnerability and danger (Ruigrok, 1984 cited in, Schutzman & Cohen Cruz, 1995:110). The adoption of small groups and partners to share their sculptures was a way to address this concern.

Developing the participants' ability to become immersed in the images involved continued motivation throughout the entire workshop.

The group images were used as a basis for a group discussion that began with an observation and interpretation exercise. Each group would exhibit their image. The rest of the participants would analyse the image by looking at every minute detail such as hand positions and eyes. After the initial observation, they would then share what they were seeing. We were not only interested in the individual characters and what they appeared to be doing but also in the relationship between the characters. We wanted to string together a narrative from the image. What did the images reveal to the observers? Was the relationship between the various characters in the images clear? What did these relationships tell us about the gendering process of young women in Manenberg and the inherent conflicts based on observation? In addition to the participants' observations, we introduced some techniques to investigate the stories behind each image. For group one, using the clap of the hand, the facilitator would request the group to go back ten paces in time, in slow motion, to show the events prior to the current image. The second group, also using the clap of the hand, was required to go ten paces forward to show what happens after their current image. For the third group, the rest of the participants were required to stand behind a character in the image on display that they identified with and adopt a similar posture. They would then articulate what they thought that character was feeling in that moment. For the fourth group, we had the group members articulate the feelings of the characters they were representing. Through these techniques, the root causes, consequences, actual stories and feelings informing particular images were explored.

After the participants' observations and the exercises described above each group then had an opportunity to share their story. The interpretive exercise as I indicated earlier was designed to get the groups to take stock of their own spontaneous responses whilst building the images. What motivated their choices to position themselves in a certain way and did these positions evoke any particular memories from their lives? Often the stories were contradictory, which could indicate that they had actually followed instructions and not developed a unified position before commencing the task. In other instances, the entire group concurred on the storyline. In such cases, one of two things could have happened. Either there was a dominant member of the group who had directed the image or there was a commonality of experience.

With this activity, we were fulfilling two objectives concurrently. One, we were engaging the young women in telling stories with their bodies. The old adage of a picture speaks more than a thousand words, perhaps captures what I am referring to. Instead of telling us how they lived, we wanted them to show us. In showing us they were also interacting with other bodies and developing a collective narrative. The images captured a moment abstracted from a range of possible larger events. We wanted them to develop their ability to create a story by drawing on memory and feelings evoked by being in certain positions and connecting with other bodies. We did not tell the participants how the images would be interpreted. Therefore, their responses in going forwards and backwards in time as well as articulating their feelings were not thought responses but gut responses. I will pick up on this more concretely in the next paragraph. Beyond the interpretative exercise we also engaged in a discussion around the issues raised from the images. There was a constant process of action, reflection and action so that we were not merely creating images and analysing what we were seeing but we were also interested in having the participants analyse the views expressed and locate them within their lived reality. Through using ... introspective techniques and image theatre, it is possible to rehearse what the group is collectively feeling or understanding about the situation and their own lives (Baxter, 2005: 137). O'Neill adds that in a world where feelings have become 'mass produced and mechanical' the situation of the workshop can become therapeutic, opening a space for previously unexpressed feelings and understanding (O'Neill, 2002:70).

Through the exercises I have described above, a range of issues were identified from the images: pregnant teenage girls; girls using drugs (*tik*<sup>47</sup> and marijuana), others being physically abused [beaten up, raped, shot or shooting] and peer pressure<sup>48</sup>. Those representing girls and the community in the images depicted feelings of helplessness, loneliness and suicidal tendencies. These were predominantly negative images but positive aspects of Manenberg depicted communal activity such as washing,<sup>49</sup> children happily playing and families (with a mother, father and children) in the home going about different activities. According to the girls, the images were accurate representations of their experiences of Manenberg. The 'dominant' characters in the images were always interpreted as male while nurturing ones were

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<sup>47</sup> Is also known as Methamphetamine. It is argued that the township *Tik* is impure and is mixed with a range of household cleaning products including scouring powder, Vim.

<sup>48</sup> The identification of these issues was based on the exercises I have described above. Not all of the images were clear and precise and this was an aspect that we worked on later. However, through discussion the groups were able to verbalise what they were presenting for clarity.

<sup>49</sup> Manenberg flats have numerous clothing lines, from which laundry hangs, all the time.

interpreted as female. In some of the images, the groups did not know how to depict either a mother, father or to indicate their position in the family. The characters representing the parents appeared unsure of their actions. In one of the images, the mother appeared uncertain whether to defend her daughter, who was being beaten by the father. This dilemma raised questions around the power of the mother in the home; could she actually question the authority of the father and what were the possible consequences of doing that? Some participants, however, began to question the realism of these roles. Were women in Manenberg that powerless? The question of power particularly in relation to ideas around resisting violence and abuse shall be analysed in more detail in Chapter Five.

Connected to this powerlessness was the prevalence of the representation of domestic violence in Manenberg. The four group images all had aspects of domestic violence. Participants stated that this is not unusual, whether it is husbands abusing their wives or children being abused by their parents.

“In fact, girls and women are abused by just about every male they have relationships with: fathers, brothers, boyfriends...everyone abuses you” (Workshop participant)

One participant, while explaining her role in an image where a girl was being raped with someone else witnessing, said; “I was a guy...they [the girls] can’t do anything to me.”

This group argued that boys and men in Manenberg generally believe that a girl wearing certain types of clothing is “inviting” rape. Girls are therefore not free to dress as they wish, for fear of being perceived as ‘sex objects’. They stated that some women in the community believe that girls who dress in a certain way deserve to be raped or harassed. There appear to be strong codes of acceptable behaviour and notions of respectability when it comes to young women but not to men. One of the images had three people who were interpreted as young men because of their gait. They were gesticulating with their hands in an action that seemed like men urinating. Most participants were unsure of what this action represented. During the debrief session the group indicated that they were, “guys flashing their penises at girls passing on the street”. Members of this group indicated that it is not unusual for boys to stand in the street in boxer shorts and waggle their penises at girls wearing what they interpret as suggestive clothing. The fact that gangsters are associated with this type of behaviour also contributes to mothers curtailing their daughters’ movements.

Admonishing them [the men] for a particular action is as good as admonishing the whole gang and this could pose a security risk.

“...Sometimes, if someone tells them to wear their clothes, then they drop their shorts right there in the street and show you their penis...” (Workshop participant).

It was also pointed out that in addition to the possibility of attracting unwanted sexual advances from men, young girls are also the target of gossip by women on the street. However, participants felt that these women were responding out of fear of what might happen to girls because of what they wear. They argued that older women felt powerless when it came to ensuring the safety of the girls from rape and other forms of sexual abuse. Other participants felt that some girls in Manenberg are only interested in acquiring 'material wealth' and dressing in a certain manner is assumed to be an effective way of attracting men.

“Some girls don't care about HIV; having a baby is about having money...” This money is used to buy clothing, so that the girls can attract even wealthier men:

“...Someone will ask for money for huggies [disposable diapers] for the baby, but when you give them, they go and buy clothes...”

They argued that some girls even leave school to pursue these activities. The participants stated that for some of these girls, it is more profitable to hang around street corners in groups, most likely taking drugs. However it was also pointed out that not all of the girls who dropped out of school did so out of choice. The inability of families to pay school fees also prompted young girls to take up blue-collar jobs in local factories to support the family.

One of my observations of this day was that it served as a learning opportunity. There was massive information being churned out through the images and discussions. For those of us who were not from Manenberg we spent a significant amount of time processing the information and clarifying the issues. For example, the story about the young boys flashing their penises at girls on the street was shocking for the group from outside Manenberg and this includes me. However, the other participants also shared similar stories, which revealed a level of anger and fear at men's ability to exercise power over them because of the penis. This anger was derived from a number of experiences that the young women had of men masturbating in parked cars on the street or another, of a man who used to masturbate outside the girls' school at the specific time that the students were leaving. Even though these very private acts, which were carried out in public, were not targeted at a specific passer-by, all of these young women felt threatened and violated, because “you never know

what he might do". On this day I also observed a sense of pride in the participants from Manenberg. They were a 'repository of knowledge'. I think it felt good to be referred to, to confirm or negate certain facts because they were in a position of knowledge.

Two significant things also happened on this day. Firstly, the group was very emotionally charged. Most participants felt overwhelmed by the magnitude of the problems and questioned the viability of the project and in turn their ability to be able to effect any change. "There are so many issues, where do you even begin?" Secondly, was the fact that participants from Manenberg, were for the first time (I think) pushed to look at their community with different lenses: not with 'this is how it is' but with 'why does it have to be this way?' a push that came largely from the participants who were not from Manenberg. We decided to conduct a free writing exercise in place of the closing circle to provide an outlet for some of the emotions or feelings that were not being verbalised. Creative writing is not a Boalian technique but is a method that Mothertongue uses in its workshops. There is the popular perception that only certain people are creative writers or poets but with this exercise we aim to encourage our participants to appreciate the role of writing or journaling as an outlet for any range of emotions, whether it is rage or excitement. Often, many participants continue with this activity long after the workshop and this was also a feature with this group. Using free writing as a starting point, participants were required to write for ten minutes using the phrase; "the life of young women in Manenberg" as a starting point. At the end of the ten minutes they were required to select statements out of their prose that 'struck them' or 'leapt out at them'. They would then arrange these statements in any order to create poems. Below are some of the poems that were developed during this exercise.

**Poem I**

Pregnancy  
Prostitution  
Gangsters  
Tik-tik  
Piled up

So much is dirty-streets and families, dirtied by abuse  
Watched, always watched-by men, by boys, by gossiping women

What is it about the PENIS?

It is not the place; it is the people in the place

Where is the privacy?

Ndizakuthini

Andiyazi ukuba ndizakuthini

Opportunities

It doesn't matter... everything matters

Andiyazi

**Poem II**

Future for our children

Why does everything have to be so complicated?

I'm fed up

Stop your nonsense

The issues we have to face

Taking responsibility

I'm cool

I'm sexy-sweet

I'm a man hunter

Take my vagina for a ride

Role model

Parents

Independence

Control

Why?

**Poem III**

Environment, war zone

Imitating religions

Living under robbery

House to house, sex, drugs, stealing

Different men married

Stealing, war zone, huis tot huis, Drugs, sex, robbery

Married men, different, imitating, living under

Environment religion

Different men, married, imitating religions, stealing, environment

Living under war zone, drugs, sex, robbery, huis tot huis

Different men

Married, sex, robbery

Drugs, stealing, house to house

Imitating religions

Living under

War zone

These poems are an indicator of deeper conversations. These young women express sentiments and emotions that I do not imagine are articulated on a day-to-day basis. In fact some of their statements indicate a sense of 'confidentiality' around significant moments in their lives even with those close to them. These poems evoke powerful images of 'imprisonment'; statements such as *'watched always watched, living under robbery and control* speak to this. There are indications of sexual abuse and violence targeted at young women as well conversations around prostitution alluding to transactional sex and married men alluding to extramarital relationships. There is also the primacy given to the male organ, indicating the 'power of the penis' as a tool for domination over women. These sentiments affirm discussions emerging from the image theatre exercise. Yet within this there is an allusion to 'a route out' that young women have adopted to engage with the restraints imposed upon them. MacFadden argues that for the majority of black women the connection between power and pleasure is not often recognised and remains a largely un-embraced and undefended territory (MacFadden, 2003: 50). Statements such as: *I'm cool I'm sexy-sweet, I'm a man hunter, Take my vagina for a ride* indicates the subversion of the predominant notion of the 'good girl' to the 'bad' girl image. These statements challenged my belief system. It forced me to confront my own notions of morality that are rooted in Catholicism, fears around HIV/AIDS as well as a restrained expression of femininity and sexuality. Yet while I silently issued moral judgements I also questioned why a woman who is comfortable with her sexuality, comfortable with her body and chooses to use it as she wishes, is vilified.

The role of religion in the gendering process of women in Manenberg cannot be underestimated. The dichotomy between 'good' girls and 'bad' girls that is echoed in the poetry and images has its roots in organized religion. Women have been conceived at different points as either good or bad, e.g. Virgin Mary as the intercessor and Eve as the first sinner. The intersection that determines what makes them good and bad lies in their womanhood. It is a cultural and religious attitude to favour the values of ovulation, of child bearing over those of menstruation by discounting the latter experience (Shuttle & Redgrove, 1986:29). Thus a Christian may think of her childbearing role with joy, but not of her menses or of her sexuality, "thus matronhood is separated from sexuality, the values of ovulation from the other values" (Shuttle & Redgrove, 1986:29). The motherhood vs. wifehood dichotomy is also worth exploring given the high rates of teenage pregnancy in Manenberg. Amadiume (1997) and Oyewumi's (2000) analysis of the wife/mother distinction take this discussion further. Oyewumi argues that subordination is embedded in the position of a wife, whereas

the position of a mother is a position of power, motherhood being ... a cherished identity for many African women (Oyewumi, 2000: 24). Walker's research with teenage mothers in Durban takes this further. She argues that teenage mothers ... did not view their pregnancies as shameful disasters but rather as an affirmation of their womanhood. An extremely high value is placed on children for and in themselves... so high that marriage in some contexts is quite irrelevant to the bearing of children (Walker, 1995: 24). Salo's argument that there is a high value placed on motherhood and consequently children as a result of the high mortality rate in Manenberg speaks to this (Salo, September 2005. Interview: Cape Town).

However, the events described in the poetry as well as the discussion around the image work indicate shifting patterns. Women and particularly younger women are becoming agents and increasingly taking initiative to negotiate extra marital sexual relationships on terms, which are at least partially held by them. The socio-economic basis for this strategy is a norm of informal sexual relationships involving a transfer of economically significant gifts from the men to women (Amfred, 2004: 23). So for example, the young women who were referred to as having children as a route to financial independence support this position. Taking note of these shifting patterns as facilitators' involved understanding the gendering process in Manenberg these become slightly more nuanced and not merely about 'negative' and 'positive' practices. Even as we were asking the young women to take cognisance of the sub-texts in their actions and environment, I also needed to take note of the subtexts I brought into the process. These included preconceived ideas around the powerlessness of teenage mothers and assumptions around their lack of choice in the matter of having children at an early age. These ideas were rooted in my beliefs about the appropriate time to begin sexual activity amongst women informed by a range of factors within my socialization process including but not limited to religion, in this case Catholicism<sup>50</sup>. Naturally, the stories I encountered in the workshop led me to shift my own perceptions and move away from seeing all of these women as victims and to begin seeing them as active agents.

#### **DEVELOPING STORYLINES:**

This subsection will look at the development of the storylines. This focus is intended to highlight the theatrical (in terms of stories) choices made by the group and what these choices reflected. I hope to bring to light the groups' pre-occupations and what were willing to share. The process of developing these models and performing them is also

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<sup>50</sup> I spent four years in a Catholic boarding school in rural Nyanza.

useful to analysing the opportunities and weaknesses of forum theatre. Forum theatre is intended as a strategy that elicits collective problem posing and solving. Ideally members of the community or group whose problems it aims to expose should make a theatre piece. The theatre piece should ask questions about the problems generated by the group (Boal, 1995:130). Participatory theatre methods such as forum theatre engage participants in generating, interpreting and re-presenting their ideas. By taking on a role, the player exists simultaneously in two worlds: as a character inside the experience of the 'as if world' and as an actor evaluating the situation from the outside, within the real world. The player is both involved and detached alternating from one to the other observing the self in action, comparing the two worlds to arrive at some understanding or meaning (Courtney, 1988: 57).

The models, for which I will provide a synopsis later on, were developed over the eleven days of the workshop. Through a series of exercises, tasks and drama - based techniques story ideas were formed. They were eventually put together during the last three days into solid forum theatre plays. I will briefly discuss some of the techniques we introduced to the group on day four, five and six of the workshop. I shall also look at how some of these techniques were adapted by the four working groups that were in place at this point. These techniques were designed to develop the participants' capabilities to develop plays beyond a written script. In addition to using Boal's technique of image theatre that had already begun to stimulate the participants' thoughts around developing narratives beyond a moment (the still image), we also introduced newspaper theatre.

Newspaper theatre consists of several techniques that are designed to transform daily news items or any other non-dramatic material, into theatrical performances (Boal, 1979:143). The participants were given statements that were derived mainly from Salo's (2004) dissertation.<sup>51</sup> With these statements each group was required to develop a short scene that recreated the events that could have led to or emerged from the statement issued to them. This exercise was designed to serve two purposes. One was to extend the idea of creating concrete story lines that flowed from a relatively logical beginning to an end. It was also meant to continue with the gender analysis that had been initiated at the beginning of the workshop. It was important that the discussions and analysis from the previous days were picked up in the following sessions and their understanding deepened. The statements and the technique of newspaper theatre served as a way to fulfil these two objectives.

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<sup>51</sup> Specifically the section on rites of passage for young girls in Manenberg

The statements were:

**Statement I**

"Last Saturday evening when my boyfriend and I visited the hok<sup>52</sup>, I stared in amazement at some of the young girls...they are mere children but they were there too, smoking long cigarettes, wearing really short dresses and heavily made up. I'm grateful my lot are not like that."

**Statement II**

"She hid from everyone. On Friday she complained constantly about a stomach ache. Nanny gave her Harman's and colic drops...later that night, she went to the toilet and then called her mother frantically. Nanny arrived just in time to see the baby's head emerge."

**Statement III**

"I don't care what they say about me, these old women who live in this street gossip about me all day long. They think because I dress fashionably, I'm bad..."

**Statement IV**

"I told her so! It is her own fault that they raped her. She insisted on hanging out in the shebeens in Nyanga. She brought scandal to our home. What will the people in the street say?"

In their working groups the participants developed scenes that also included still images<sup>53</sup> as a theatrical device to either assist in stimulating the creation of the story or to mark transitions for example between scenes, thoughts. In essence we wanted them to integrate images in the plays in lieu of lengthy explanations. The first scene showed a woman narrating to her neighbour how she had witnessed the activities of underage girls in a *hok* on a Saturday night. The woman showed contempt rather than concern that such young girls should be drinking alcohol and smoking at such a young age. Participants felt that the manner in which the narration occurred showed that the woman did not care about what happened to the girls. The Manenberg participants identified this attitude as being representative of the reality. In the second scene, a teenage girl falls pregnant and no one is aware of this until she goes into labour in the bathroom of her mother's house. Ironically, prior to this event, her mother condemns her friend who was unaware of her child's pregnancy. When I read about this incident in Salo's dissertation I did not imagine it could have been more than an isolated case. On the contrary, many of the young girls from Manenberg were not surprised and

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<sup>52</sup> A "hok" is a makeshift shop, with a pool table, a jukebox and possibly other games.

<sup>53</sup> Such as those made during the body sculpting exercise.

confirmed this as a common occurrence. It is highly unlikely that the respondent in Salo's dissertation could have been the same girl that was being referred to in the discussions by the workshop participants. They argued that girls are neglected by their families and other members of the community simply use this misfortune as fodder for gossip. Through the third and fourth scene, other causes of gossip were identified. The scenes inferred that young women's dress could either attract unwanted sexual advances from men or be the subject of gossip by women. The latter was addressed in the third performance, while the fourth scene addressed the notion that women's dressing patterns contribute to rape. A very contemporary and ongoing concern when it comes to sexual violation offences where dressing is seen to connote sexual availability<sup>54</sup>. Discussions around decent and indecent dressing became the subject of much debate especially with the tight controls placed on women's dressing due to religious requirements. It also came to our attention that religion was not the only factor but women also 'dressed down', dressed like boys or adopted masculine mannerisms in order to avoid sexual harassment and bodily violation. This pointed to the negative associations to femininity that have been occasioned by a culture of sexual violence. The rejection of femininity by three young women from Manenberg who were also undergoing major sexual orientation confusion<sup>55</sup> is brought on by what it is perceived to attract.

We also introduced the concept of storytelling as a mechanism for developing forum theatre models. The use of storytelling comes from the work I have done with APT in Kenya. We worked from the principle that stories, wise sayings and riddles were and are a major tool for imparting values. An examination of most<sup>56</sup> traditional legends and wise sayings reveal immense gender stereotypes and bias. Working with stories was a way through which we could challenge members of any community, to rethink and re-craft their stories. Adapting them as forum theatre models provides an opportunity to re-mythologize and imbue these stories with different meanings. It obviously involves tweaking the stories, restructuring the role of the narrator and dramatising the story in question. The story is selected for its ability to articulate the issues that the group is concerned with. It also has to offer dramatic possibilities without being coated

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<sup>54</sup> As was epitomized with the former deputy president Jacob Zuma's argument during his rape trial, that "she was wearing a khangas" to indicate that she was displaying sexual availability. There was a period in 2003 in many major cities in Kenya where women would be stripped for wearing mini skirts. Men argued that the women were 'tempting' them.

<sup>55</sup> These three women all thought that they were lesbians. The idea of lesbianism appealed to them because it was a route out of unwanted sexual advances, which were often forced and not mutual. They dressed and acted in what would be referred as a typically 'butch' manner, in order to be tough and safeguard themselves.

<sup>56</sup> Luo stories reveal enormous gender stereotypes. The Luo are one of the forty two ethnic groups in Kenya and the third largest ethnic group in the country. I am a Luo and have spent a significant amount of time working with traditional Luo stories and crafting them into forum theatre models.

with too many euphemisms and metaphors. We began the storytelling session by inviting two participants to each share a story. Through these models we analysed various aspects of storytelling. The role of the animated narrator was noted as important. The two storytellers had different styles and succeeded in highlighting what would and would not work when narrating a story. We focussed on the use of the body; the narrator must not be static but should embody the story. Through the narrator the listeners should be able to travel to the world in the story. The use of songs was also pointed out as useful. They were successfully used in one of the stories and stimulated audience participation and engagement. The use of props was identified as adding to the realism of the narrative, which had obviously been absent in this exercise.

Transforming a story into a forum piece involves redefining the role of the narrator into a Joker/commentator and turning the narrative into a drama. To take this idea forward we broke the discussion by refocusing on developing theatrical aids. The exercise was aimed at channelling the groups focus on turning everyday objects, trash into useful material for their dramatic presentations. A pile of newspapers was placed at the centre of the circle and each participant was required to come into the circle and use the paper as it is normally used. In essence, what are the various ways that newspapers are used: reading, lighting a fire, as toilet paper. The second task involved transforming the newspaper into something else; the participants began creating pillows, cigarettes, hats, toilets and blankets amongst others. After this collective activity they broke into their working groups to develop objects. The groups already had two scenes; the relatively underdeveloped scenes from the image theatre, where a number of issues had already been identified and a semi-narrative probed. The second were from the newspaper theatre session. Using these pieces as inspiration, they would create objects that matched any of those storylines. At this point we were not concerned about the long-term applicability of the objects. We wanted the group to broaden their thinking. It was also an opportunity for them to discover their creative potential. Some of the objects were abandoned after this exercise, others were carried on to the final pieces, but most importantly new objects were created for the abandoned ones. This indicated their appreciation of the value that objects added to the theatricality of the pieces. It was also a realization that they had readily available resources and did not have to use actual objects for them to make meaning.

"I never knew that I could do drama or I could make a prop. But at that very moment ...I had to make this thing and it was magnificent."

**"I was making this ashtray and this bottle of beer...It was very amazing for myself, because I never knew I could be so creative with a piece of newspaper."**

The building of ingenuity with the newspaper exercise was not only about the objects but could also be transferred into ideas around activism and agency<sup>57</sup> that we wanted the young women to engage with. By moving out of spaces where the predominant thinking was one of despair or echoing a lack of resources we were moving them into a space where they could begin to identify resources available to transform their experiences of disempowerment. We were therefore fostering a realization that they had power to shift their circumstances.

Using their objects, the groups had to devise new scenes. The group had a number of choices; they could either retain the storylines from the image work, newspaper theatre or develop new pieces that incorporated elements of storytelling. All the pieces made good use of their objects, used in some performances as visuals and accessories (beer bottles, guns, cigarettes, bags) and in others as characters (babies, little girl). Technical input at this point centred on issues of staging; where did the action occur in relation to the audience? For the groups that utilised the storytelling model, where was the narrator situated in relation to both the action and the audience. Most importantly, how did all these issues affect the audience's engagement in the action?

By this point in the workshop, we could already see a vast improvement. The participants were immersed in the process and very readily embraced the idea of constructive criticism. The feedback sessions had very little to do with attacking each other but more to do with improving each group's presentation. It was therefore prudent to concretely introduce the concept of forum theatre at this point. The theory behind the methodology had been touched on at the beginning of the workshop but grasping forum theatre involves seeing it in action. Since potential plays were emerging we needed the groups to slowly begin to conform to the structure of a forum theatre model. The groups selected the plays that they would strengthen for the remainder of the workshop. Based on this selection we set about re-crafting the plays for forum theatre beginning with strengthening of all the characters in the plays. The character development exercise involved the development of the characters lifeline, from birth to date, noting significant events in their lives. After this they had to create a walk, an idiosyncrasy and a voice for their character. This involved all the participants

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<sup>57</sup> A key objective of the project that I spoke about at the beginning of this chapter

spending time near the People's Centre to observe people and identify those who they felt resembled their characters. From this observation, which on occasion required them to speak to the person, they would adopt the necessary characteristics.

We also had a plenary session, which began with a 'hot seating' exercise. During the 'hot seat' session, the presenting group was placed in the centre of the room. The rest of the group were allowed to 'drill' them and ask questions about their lives which they had to respond to, in character. We were building spontaneity and improvisation because they could not anticipate what they would be asked. This would be the case when implementing the forum theatre plays. An actor cannot always know what a spectator will suggest. They must therefore be ready to think on their feet and stay in character. It was also important that the groups start playing their characters and not themselves. After the 'hot seat', we facilitated a group exercise that set up a number of scenarios. These scenarios were called out and the participants were required to interact with each other in character. For example: you have just received news that your mother is dead or it is eleven p.m. you are in the last taxi from town, which has broken down on the N2. Through these exercises we wanted them to start moving outside themselves and take on the characters they had created. This is not an easy task but the idea was to get them thinking about the separation between themselves and their characters.

This exercise served two functions. The first was from a theatrical perspective, where it was designed to encourage a separation of the individual from the character. This was important to ensure a level of depersonalisation from the stories they were embodying. The second was taking cognisance that the forum theatre models we were developing were dealing with complex personal yet political issues. As feminist activists we recognized that in using forum theatre as method to engage in a dialogue around transformation we were not looking for an overnight revolution. We acknowledged that transformative dialogue in any instance requires innovation, spontaneity. Thus by recognising the crisis in the models as central to the disempowerment of young women in this community we were signalling through the interactions, a need to respond to the situation as it presented itself in that moment. In essence we were not prescribing a format to dealing with rape, teenage pregnancies or the onset of puberty, but with each scene and in different settings, different strategies would be adopted. Innovation and responding to the situation at hand are key strategies adopted by feminist activists and researchers.

There were a number of conversations occurring simultaneously. One was the introduction of various ways of developing plays beyond the written script. This was done through image theatre, newspaper theatre and storytelling. We were constantly reminding them of the dramatic elements, the use of the body, voice and now the use of other objects. In this instance we were also emphasizing the use of locally available and cheap materials that would add value to their pieces. Secondly, there was a continued interrogation of what was being represented. Was it a reflection of Manenberg? What did these occurrences say to the group about the power relations between men and women? How did they think these situations could be transformed? Could they be transformed? Were they learning anything new about their environment? Were they seeing things differently? It was not only about creating plays, but also about the point behind the plays. We could also see the recurrence of certain issues; sexual violence, poverty, the idea of community gossip as a strategy to police young women's sexuality and the rejection of overt femininity as a strategy to deal with sexual violence.

It was not always easy to engage fully with these discussions. As is evident with this summary the days were packed with activities. This on occasion involved going into a 'professional' rehearsal space that involved constant repetition of scenes and activities. We were also not keen to turn this into a classroom where the 'students' had to report and give politically correct statements on what they were thinking. During their group tasks and breaks they had an opportunity to engage with each other on what all of these activities and questions were bringing to mind. Conversations with some of the girls as well as observations also indicated the transformation they were going through even if only on a physical level. One of the participants, Lily appeared to have 'crawled out' from under her shell. She had been very quiet and uncommunicative at the beginning but now seemed to take on a new life when on the 'stage'. I discovered that she could smile and her face lit up every time she did so. I had never seen her smile before because she was very conscious of her missing front teeth<sup>58</sup>. The closing circle provided an opportunity for reflection but this was not always sufficient. We often ended late and given the intensity of the work people were exhausted at the end of the day. One of the most effective ways (for us at least) was to engage the group in a free writing exercise every once in a while to get a sense of where the group was mentally because we could easily observe the

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<sup>58</sup> This is seen as a fashion statement and most young people in the townships remove fairly healthy lower teeth (the number depends on the individual). They are then replaced with gold dentures if they can afford them or normal dentures. However, there are many theories around this activity including; being an indicator of gang membership, improved ability to perform oral sex as well as the idea of having beautiful perfect, straight teeth.

theatrical growth. Below are some excerpts from a free writing exercise<sup>59</sup> conducted at the end of the sixth day. This is to reflect the thoughts of the young women, which we were not able to engage (in terms of allocating time to hear them as facilitators) during the intense four days of building the plays.

"I learned a lot...to be more specific, and to be more quick and to think on your feet. (...) And be more intense also. Like I never knew, I could think so quick and just put stuff together. (...) Like in standard five they always told me, ja, you are stupid. 'Coz I was so scared to come out of my shell."

"Think outside the box...Voice out my opinions...with much effort. Produced good work..."

"...Acting ...you must trust each other..."

"Ability to stand up for what I rightfully think is right"

"...Self-confidence...Overcame fear...Never gave up and we must never give up."

"...We as The Mothertongue Project can truly make a difference; we can stand together and fight for the right."

"Eye-opener ...Stories...So close in space, so far in realities."

However, there were also a number of challenges, the first being the ability to manage youth. Some of the older participants found it difficult to cope with the younger participants from Manenberg. Three girls in particular, who were relatively younger, were for lack of a better word impossible. It was a feat to get them to rehearse and often their group members resorted to calling us (the facilitators) to get them to work on their pieces. This was obviously a response (rebellion) to the intensity of the work at this point and our insistence on the importance of plays being good pieces of theatre. It also highlighted one of the contradictions of 'emancipatory' processes, which is the need to reinforce authority sometimes in a fairly dictatorial manner while at the same time needing to respect the process as being democratic and in a sense resting with the participants. On the one hand there is a need to espouse principles of consciousness and on the other take care not to reproduce the very dynamics that you are meant to be breaking is a challenge. My experience with this group as well as in other workshops where I have been part of the facilitation team has been the recognition that as a facilitator you still hold power and in many instances need to 'bank' information as a way to get to consciousness. Reconciling what appear to be two contradictory ideas that of asserting power and building consciousness

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<sup>59</sup> It followed the same pattern as the one previously described in this chapter.

particularly within the context of work that is distinctly described, as 'conscious raising' is difficult. Within the role of the facilitator who is described as being a listener and a guide also rests power, a dynamic that plays a role in workshop processes and which has to be recognised.

There were also class divisions that emerged at this point which were largely connected to education. Two incidents come to mind. During one of the feedback sessions, one girl was told that her Afrikaans was 'too high class'. Her response was that she did not know how to speak 'low class Afrikaans' and should be taught. While this was taken with the necessary humour, it became the root of many jokes during the workshop. "We are low class, they are high class", became a response whenever the groups were asked to analyse the relationship between various characters in the plays.

"...We are friends, but the rest of us are 'low class', so we we're always on her case..."

This incident loops back to the Scott's discourse on 'hidden' and 'public' transcripts. Jokes of this nature point to ongoing power relations even within a group that would be seen as relatively homogenous. Class, race and gender as factors critical to analysing oppression and disempowerment are epitomised here. This incident destabilises the idea of a homogeneous group even when they appear to have a shared identity. The class debate is drawn in as a means of distinguishing this participant from others who look 'like her'<sup>60</sup>. Scott asserts that the third realm, which manifests itself in the form of jokes, is a critical site within which to examine the coded version of the hidden transcript (Scott, 1987:19). These euphemisms allow the researcher to observe infrapolitics and map a realm of dissent without waiting for open rebellion (Scott, 1987:20). Taking cognisance of the social sites within which these acts occur also point to the underlying meaning behind "...We are friends, but the rest of us are 'low class', so we we're always on her case..." Examined within the context of the play we see what appears to be the triumph of the supposedly weak over the strong. These girls who are read as lower class and therefore significantly powerless in comparison to their 'high class' counterpart have an opportunity to exert their power and triumph over what could also be considered as social oppression. Scotts argues and I concur, that the recovery of non-hegemonic voices and practices requires a different form of analysis other than the analysis of the elites [oppressor], owing to the constraints under which they are produced (Scott, 1987: 19). It was clear that in addressing wider

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<sup>60</sup> They were all 'Coloured' girls.

societal disparities we also needed to listen to and understand the internal politics and what these pointed to.

The second incident involves the presence of the three UCT drama students in the workshop. While this was a source of great inspiration in two groups it became a problem in one group. I am not too sure whether this was purely an educational question or whether there were racial undertones to it. One participant in particular who has been active in community theatre work in Khayelitsha felt uncomfortable working with Charlene (the UCT student in her group who also happened to be White). She felt that her ideas were rarely taken on board and instead Charlene lauded it over the group by positioning her ideas as better than the others owing to her training (she was a first year at drama school). The other members of the group were relatively inexperienced; therefore it became a battle between Charlene and Thandi. This conflict was brought to my attention but the group found a way of dealing with it by taking Charlene out of the creative process by selecting her as a potential Joker<sup>61</sup>. I thought this was a very innovative way of shifting the emerging power struggles in the group.

Emerging strongly from this section is a shift from merely developing storylines but a strategic engagement with the themes in the stories. We begin to see a group whose consciousness is being developed, who question, challenge and share strategies for countering situations of disempowerment. Through various activities such as the newspaper exercise, character development and 'hot seating' we begin to engage the participants in identifying 'resources' and strategies for dealing with situations of 'oppression' when they arise. The group is slowly moving into an activist space, a space where they recognise their potential, ability and resources and this is attested to by the feedback from the exercises. However these realizations occur whilst negotiating class dynamics amongst participants as well as engaging with the power relations informed by the facilitator- participant dynamic. Acknowledging these dynamics is critical to deconstructing the idea of a homogenised 'oppressed' that is generally assumed by forum theatre as a practice. However, it recognises the feminist position on the importance of a contextual analysis.

#### **WORKING WITH FORUM THEATRE:**

After eight days we had developed with the participants, theatre skills and an ability to examine their experiences with a gender lens. We also had solid models to work with

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<sup>61</sup> However the problems did not end there since Charlene did not turn out to be good Joker after all.

and we began to simulate forum theatre performances. This section will lend itself to a discussion around the identification of the Joker's, their concerns, emerging realizations and tensions during this process. I will also analyse the idea of developing consciousness in relation to the Joker's by analysing their responses to one play. However, before I delve into this I will provide a synopsis of the four models that emerged from the four-day process described in the storylines section above.

#### **PLAY ONE: JENNY.**

The play revolved around twelve year old Jenny. The play starts off with a happy-go-lucky young girl, who spends time playing with her peers both boys and girls. She spends a substantial amount of time with her grandmother who takes care of her during the day while her mother is at work. She begins her period in school and this is evident through a bloodstain on her dress. Her friends begin to laugh at her and tell her she slept with a man and that's why she has blood on her skirt. She runs home to her mother to tell her what has happened. Her mother tells her everything will be fine. She is now a grown woman and things must change. She is given a long skirt to wear and accompanying instructions. From now on she must come back straight from school and stay indoors. She must no longer play with boys for she is now a woman. Unknown to her mother, there is a young man who comes to visit Jenny at home while her mother is at work. Convinced that he loves her she develops a relationship with him that eventually leads to sex and a pregnancy. Jenny drops out of school after the birth of her child and joins a fellow 'gang' of teenage mothers who spend their time smoking *dagga*<sup>62</sup>, drinking alcohol and taking care of their children. This group of teenage mothers is approached by a local gangster to help him do a 'small job' for which they will be paid. Jenny is reluctant but her friends convince her it will give her money to buy diapers and take care of her child properly. The play ends with the young women and gangster caught in a cross fire with the police.

#### **PLAY TWO: PUSHUPS**

This play is about gangsterism and drugs. It explores the story of three sixteen year-old girls Candy, Suzy and Pushups who are bored and have nothing to do after school. Candy has a bright idea that they should try some *dagga* since she has heard it is fun and harmless. While Suzy is on board, Pushups is visibly reluctant. Across the street, the local gang lord harangues his agent for not bringing in enough money. The agent is blamed for not doing a good job and is given a three-hour deadline to come up with potential drug clients. The agent finds the three girls on the street and tells

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<sup>62</sup> Cannabis Sativa or Marijuana

them that with a little money he can 'show' them a good time. They indicate that they don't have money. He says that should not be a problem something can be arranged. He takes them to his boss who is very pleased with the catch. He gives them the drugs and demands payment but the girls reiterate that they don't have money. The drug dealer sees an alternative mode of payment and this is evident when he begins to circle Pushups suggestively. Her friends keen to get their 'hit', quickly catch on and offer Pushups as an alternative to the cash. The play ends with Pushups pinned up against the wall by the gangster while her two friends are high on dagga.

#### **PLAY THREE: RAPE PLAY.**

This play deals with the story of a young woman who is raped on her way home from a friend's house. Lucy comes from a single parent home with a mother who is an alcoholic. After her rape, she is unable to find any help within the home or outside. Lucy conceives as a result of the rape and is pushed to the brink. She goes into depression. Her friends' from school notice there is something wrong but offer alcohol and drugs as a way of coping. They tell her that this is the only way to deal with her problems. While she is initially reluctant she eventually succumbs to their pressure and begins to use drugs. Her child on the other hand remains neglected at home, taken care of by her drunken mother. This play like the first one ends with Lucy in a fight with the 'merchant' over non-payment.

#### **PLAY FOUR: BABIES COME FROM PUMPKIN SEEDS.**

This play is about fourteen year old Charmaine who has a twenty year old boyfriend. Her boyfriend James is keen to play 'games' whose repercussions she does not understand. She shares this with her friends who tell her she runs the risk of getting pregnant if she continues to play those games. In fact they refuse to hang out with her if that is what she does. She goes home to confirm her friends' assertions from her mother. Her mother is evasive and uses anger to detract attention from the question: where do baby's come from? Her mother eventually tells an insistent Charmaine that babies come from pumpkin seeds. So is that how her mother got her? Yes, she ate pumpkin seeds and she sends Charmaine off to the shop. The neighbor arrives to inform Charmaine's mother that her daughter is up to no good. She was recently spotted with an older boy James, as recently as last night when she said she was going to Judy's house. The neighbour relishes in telling Charmaine's mother that she is not doing a good job as a mother and that her daughter is *skelm*. While Charmaine's mother holds her own by engaging in a war of words with the neighbour, alarm bells go off in her head. She confronts Chairmaine on her return from the shop

to explain, who this James character is and what she has been up to. A terrified Charmaine tells all, including the games (read sex) that she and James have been playing. Her mother is livid and the play ends with her screaming at her daughter and threatening to give her a thrashing to teach her a lesson.

The systemic factors at play were evident in these stories. The notion of 'puberty rites' in this particular context cannot be seen as a set of scripted events corralled together into a communal structure. It is not only about the lack of functioning communal structures whether in the home or in the society but also the question of whether there is a unified communal identity if not based on race but on a shared geographical space. Even where extended family networks seem to be functional such as the link between grandmothers raising their grandchildren it is largely as a result of a breakdown in the primary family structure. Their trajectory into their grandchildren's life is from a position of taking on responsibilities as a result of the primary parent's abdication. A big concern for me was the complexity of the issues in the plays. It was important that the models are balanced. In the sense that they should not be loaded with too many adverse circumstances that would result in what Baxter refers to as a rehearsal for defeat, where the dangers to the protagonist oppress further (Baxter, 2005:134). However, Baxter adds that in some instances the model has to be presented that way since it is a reflection of the reality. This was the case in our situation. In such instances Baxter argues it is important to investigate what took place prior to the events the model presents by using participatory devices to unravel the questions asked of the participants (Baxter, 2005: 135). Instead of looking at the end of the play and questioning what the spectators could do in that particular moment, we would have to re-examine the events prior to the crisis and tackle the problems from there. In essence we would need to engage in a root-cause analysis. Such an approach would be important if we were to give justice to the seriousness of these issues and a good Joker would be essential to such a process.

A forum piece hinges on the Joker. She is the linchpin between the play and the audience. She manages the interactions, probes responses and persuades spectators to move out of their comfort zones into critical reflection by enacting their suggestions. The Joker is the antithesis of a facilitator. The Joker is the Socratic teacher in that while assuming ignorance of the outcome, s/he should question the process to explore new understanding and alternatives to the status quo (Boal, 1995:133). Boal argues that the Joker is a 'difficultator' who makes it impossible to arrive at naïve, magical or fatuous solutions to the problems posed (Boal, 1995: 234).

Through forum theatre the Joker should interact with the spectators in order to provoke deeper thinking and understanding of the social context (Boal, 1995: 234). It is certainly the Joker's primary function to interrogate the socio-economic, political and cultural context of the problem, never allowing the spect - actors to use magic solutions and provoking analysis of the underlying structures oppression show in the scene (Boal, 1995:133). This was important if they were to effectively pursue the objectives of the project while facilitating.

We engaged in a practical process of understanding the role of a Joker. I demonstrated the role of the Joker by simulating one of the plays. During this exercise I focussed on a number of aspects that I knew would be important, based on my experience. I laid emphasis on the introduction and welcome. A good introduction is essential to a forum theatre piece. The spectators have to be prepared for their role as actors and this has to be indicated in the beginning. The first contact the Joker has with the audience is also critical to preparing them for their participation. It is useful to begin with a simple song, game or any activity that would get the audience involved at this early stage. The introduction also involves identifying who you are and why you are there. This is very important if you are offering yourself as a referral or point of contact. This sounds and can be a fairly lengthy exercise but has to be succinct, informative as well as leave the spectators with the necessary anticipation for the play. Once the play began, I wanted the group to observe my relationship with the actors. The Joker must be positioned discretely at the side observing both the action and spectators. The Joker must watch out for points in the play where the spectator's interest is sparked and remember those areas for analysis later. The Joker must know when the play ends and come in at the precise moment and capture the spectators' attention. Forum plays are open - ended and spectators are never quite sure when the play ends especially if you are not on a stage where lights go off or curtains are drawn. The simulation also involved getting the audience to identify the issues depicted in the play and exploring ways of transforming them through discussion and action. Managing audience interaction also involves managing the actors who will be called upon to replay a scene several times. The actors must be alert and respond to the Jokers direction and not resist it. The rapport between the Jokers and the actor must be good. A Joker has to know their play very well and understand the point behind the play. What issues do you want the audience to think about? How are you going to ask the right questions to ensure that the key issues are debated upon? Through the spectators we were preparing the participants to engage with various strategies. Through the Joker's questioning and probing the spectators would be

pushed to engage with the issues presented in the play from a feminist perspective. Was it just about the rape as an occurrence or why rape happens in the first place? Was it about mothers improving communication with their daughters or why they chose a 'protective route' when their daughters began menstruating. What lay behind the fear of discussing sex with their daughters and what did this silence lead to? Even if we were speaking about improved communication or an initiation of dialogue with daughters what should that conversation look like? In essence we were asking the Jokers to push the audiences to look beyond the surface level responses e.g.: "She was raped, that is not right; she should go to Rape Crisis". Yes, she goes to Rape Crisis but is there something else that can be done? "The mother is a drunkard she should stop drinking". Why is she drinking so much? Why are drugs an easy choice for young women at that age? What pushes them to take drugs? Beyond saying one of the friends should educate her on the risks of drugs, which is important; it is also about establishing why she started using those drugs in the first place. This simulation was geared at preparing the participants to begin viewing the audience as site where they could engage strategically by sharing their ideas around what they considered important. Through the Joker we were developing the idea of a social activist and how this could be actualised.

After the simulation the groups selected one individual who they thought could fulfil this role, based on what they had observed. At this stage four participants were selected, but the number later increased to five. Each Joker had a trial session. At the end of each session the audience and the actors evaluated their performance. I make a point of turning these simulations into very chaotic events. My argument is that the Jokers and actors should be presented with the worst-case scenario. Most of the participants picked up the cue and as spectators took on characters. There were disruptive community members, gang lords, and women arguing with one another. There were those who maintained the peace as well as constructive and destructive interventions on the floor. If they can manage that, then they will be able to handle anything. This recreation is not far - fetched because, 'in every market there is a mad man' and even when situations appear chaotic spectators always find a way to manage the 'spoilors' amongst them.

We also held a separate session with the six women who were selected as Jokers. We wanted them to critically engage with why we were doing these plays and this project. Admittedly, this was quite a task we were asking the Jokers to take on but within the right environment it is possible. During this session, the *Rape Play* became

the focus of much debate. On the several occasions that the play was performed in the workshop there was a tendency for people to 'avoid' the rape question and deal with the other issues such as peer pressure and drug abuse. Often people suggested counselling and mentioned names of nearby centres where the young girl could get help. They then spent time dealing with the drug problem. This could mean one of two things, either that in this instance they felt there was nothing they could do about rape beyond sending the survivor for counselling or drugs are a more pressing concern, I am not sure which is which. There was a tendency to externalize 'the help' when it came to rape e.g. go to Rape Crisis. Very few strategies emphasized the role of the family or community in tackling the problem cited. On the other hand in terms of the drug problem it appeared through their responses that they felt that had much more power to tackle the matter. Most of the alternatives were often about the characters taking some definitive action e.g. identifying the gang lords or taking back the streets.

Two additional Jokers were selected to deal with the possible language barrier when performing in Tambo square, which had a large Xhosa - speaking community. One of the new Jokers was Thandi who in addition to language also came on board because she felt that Charlene had done a poor job of facilitating their play (which happened to be the *Rape Play*). Charlene<sup>63</sup> argued that rape was not central to the play and that it was the consequences of the rape that needed to be addressed. She stated that when the play was being created it was geared towards addressing the sub-issues and not rape per se. Thandi<sup>64</sup> disagreed, saying that by failing to address the rape issue we were continuing to silence the matter further. This then elicited discussion around what sort of interventions could be explored in a public forum. Psychoanalysts argue that recreating the trauma can also include the use of 'surplus reality' (Williams, 1989: 62). This psychodrama technique allows the protagonist to alter the outcome of the events being portrayed. A rescuer may enter the story and prevent the trauma from being completed, a fortuitous turn of events may take place, or the victim may find unprecedented powers that alter the ending. It thus restores to the victim the sense of control and hope that were robbed by the trauma (Williams, 1989: 62). Were we looking some form of early warning mechanism? Or were we looking for a collective response to incidences of rape and other forms of gender based violence by developing support systems within the home and community led initiatives?

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<sup>63</sup> While contributing to the debate on the *Rape Play*

<sup>64</sup> Thandi is a rape survivor.

It was clear to me that a level of questioning had developed amongst these young women, which had been underdeveloped when we first began the workshop. I don't want to pose as having uncovered something new. I believe that we merely provided a range of tools; drama; gender analysis that allowed the group to begin to engage differently with their reality. The choice to articulate what constituted their experiences, some of which were deeply scarring in public, was an indicator of a journey towards building consciousness. There was a connection made to the political nature of these issues and a belief that the participants could be agents for change.

The race/class/experience dynamic<sup>65</sup> was a constant feature at this point in the workshop. They were played out during the simulations under the guise of characters or during the discussions with the Jokers. Charlene for instance was reluctant to take on what she termed as a feminist stance adopted by Mothertongue in working solely with girls. She was not sure how to engage with community members if she was called upon to 'defend' why we were working with girls only. She was scared of how she would be read by the community if she took on this position, which she was not sure she agreed with. For the others who came from a position of lived experience with the issues at hand such as rape, legitimised their intervention and gave them the confidence to question these occurrences with more authority and conviction. However, all the Jokers from outside Manenberg were conscious of how they would be 'read' and received, irrespective of the fact that one was Coloured and the other two were Xhosa and would be working within a predominantly Xhosa area – Tambo square. They were adamant that their 'difference' would be noted and position them as 'rescuers'.

The public display of highly political yet personal matters was of utmost importance to these women through their choice of play themes. However despite this confidence there were also insecurities. One Joker articulated this;

"How do you create an environment where the community can begin to engage [around issues of rites of passage]... What happens if you happen to be right and the gangster is wrong? How will the gangster accept this given the dominance that their role gives them?"

These were obviously critical questions that we would have to engage with, once the outreach performances began. I shall reflect briefly on this aspect of the work in the concluding chapter. After all Forum Theatre is about societal transformation and this

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<sup>65</sup> This was a dominant feature within the workshop that deserves concrete exploration in future research.

cannot be assessed in isolation from its impact on the 'real world'. Nonetheless these are questions that are worth pursuing as a separate research project.

### **REALITY CHECK: BUILDING THE MOUNTAIN**

This section will lend itself to a discussion around the idea of homogeneity amongst 'oppressed' groups. It also tackles questions around transformative processes and our role as facilitators within such engagements. Practitioners have argued that there is a tendency of TO (as a whole) to neglect differences within oppressed groups (Ruigrok, 1984 cited in Schutzman & Cohen – Cruz, 1995: 194). It is often assumed that the oppressed are a homogenous group who are united in their fight against the 'oppressor'. This is not necessarily the case and differences within the 'oppressed' group can be destructive and detract from the greater goal. Freire speaks to this when he asserts that:

The fear of freedom which afflicts the oppressed, a fear which may equally well lead them to desire the role of the oppressor or bind them to role of oppressed should be examined. One of the basic elements of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed is prescription. Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness. Thus the behaviour of the oppressed is a prescribed behaviour, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor (Freire, 1972:28).

However, what happens when the 'oppressed' group is being 'asked' to articulate their own solutions. Perhaps it is because those using forum theatre have often made plays and then taken them into the community hence being removed from the problem itself and are merely conducting their social responsibility by giving back. Often a group of actors are hired to perform these plays. Sometimes, they may be sufficiently irked by social injustice that they are moved into action. At the end of the day they get into buses or cars and drive back to relatively safe homes and live very different lives. They are oppressed in their own way but are relatively lower in the ranks of oppression.

Freire continues:

Only as they [the oppressed] discover themselves to be 'hosts' of the oppressor can they contribute to the midwifery of their liberating pedagogy. As long as they live in the duality in which *to be is to be like* and *to be like is to be like the oppressor*, this contribution is impossible (Freire, 1972:30).

This fundamental shift lay at the heart of making what we were doing successful. As a feminist this would mean recognising that the social structures within which we are operating in are lopsided and are dominated by male approaches to knowing and actualising these knowledge's, thus leaving women out of mainstream discourse. I

have singled out an incident that occurred at the end of the workshop to elucidate this point.

On the closing day of the workshop, we felt it was important to build synergy and create the space for those who did not wish to or were not able to continue with the extended work, to articulate this. To facilitate this, I conducted an exercise that comes largely from workshops I have run in conflict transformation. I enjoy this exercise not only because it can be extremely simple if the group takes time to think about it but also because it tends to draw attention to group dynamics. I must admit that in all the times I have led this exercise, I have never witnessed the outcome below.

### **Building the mountain [of peace].<sup>66</sup>**

The goal of this exercise is to literally build a mountain using chairs. The exercise is best conducted using a chant. I often use a simple Kiswahili song, which I teach to the group even in non-Kenyan contexts.

Tupande na tupande x 2 –solo (lets climb, lets climb)  
Mlima tutapanda – chorus (The mountain we shall climb)  
Tupande huo mlima (Lets climb that mountain)  
Mlima tutapanda – chorus (The mountain we shall climb)  
Tupande taratibu (Lets climb slowly)  
Mlima tutapanda – chorus (The mountain we shall climb)  
Tupande kwa makini (Lets climb with diligence)  
Mlima tutapanda – chorus (The mountain we shall climb)

Tujenge na tujenge – solo (Lets build, lets build)  
Mlima tutajenga – Chorus (The mountain we shall build)  
Tujenge huo mlima (Lets build that mountain)  
Mlima tutajenga – Chorus (The mountain we shall build)  
Tujenge taratibu (Lets build slowly)  
Mlima tutajenga – Chorus (The mountain we shall build)  
Tujenge kwa haraka (Lets build quickly)  
Mlima tutajenga – Chorus (The mountain we shall build)

The soloist adds variations to the rhythm and words calling for the mountain to be built faster, slower, with more diligence, with patience based on the mood of the group. The exercise has some rules: Participants are required to walk or dance, each holding their chair in front of them and responding to the chant around the circle. They shall remain standing and singing throughout the entire exercise. The mountain is constructed in the centre of the circle, with group singing around it. The mountain has a base consisting of three chairs only. The game will start from scratch if any of the

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<sup>66</sup> I do not know the origin of this exercise. I observed one of my colleagues at APT utilise it in a workshop in the year 2000 in rural Nyanza with a women's group. I have subsequently used it in a variety of workshops that I have conducted. It is often referred to in APT circles as building the mountain of peace because it is often used within the framework of exploring local capacities for peace building.

following should happen: if more than three chairs are placed on the ground or if a fourth chair placed in whatever position touches the ground, if more than one person enters the circle at a time and should the chairs collapse. Each individual is responsible for her own chair. They should not guide, advice or take others chairs for placement on the mountain. Each one must place her chair on the mountain.

This exercise can run for ten minutes or as long as one hour depending on the dynamics in the group. It is obvious that the exercise requires a considerable amount of patience, which most people do not have. It also requires that people think strategically and act responsibly. The placement of one chair plays a part in whether the mountain shall stand or collapse. Often people are too eager to get rid of their chair and leave the rest of the work to the others. This is done without the realisation that the placement of the three chairs that form the base determines how long we will be singing and walking with chairs. Eventually the responsibility that was being shirked comes back to you. There are also those who choose to wait and see how things develop. As the task progresses it becomes increasingly difficult for them to find the right location for their chairs and end up feeling immense pressure from the group in the event that their chair is responsible for the collapse of the mountain and hence the re - commencement of the exercise. I generally choose to stay with the exercise no matter how long it takes because in all cases the mountain can be built successfully. Leaving it unfinished often demoralizes the group further.

In Manenberg, the exercise went on for a good forty-five minutes with the usual collapses, fatigue and joy at the looming success. The problem emerged during the final round when the mountain was standing save for one chair. Candy who was holding the 'final piece to the puzzle' so to speak literally refused to place her chair. One of the girls walking next to her took the chair from her to end the wait. However, I indicated to her that Candy should be responsible for her own chair. Initially, people were good-humoured about it. They eventually began getting jittery, the singing lulled, the movement stopped and the stares in her direction could no longer be camouflaged. After ten minutes, she chose to drop her chair on the floor in the middle of the circle and sat down. In reviewing the video footage from this activity, I was reminded of the emotions in the room at that point. The shock was both visible and audible. During my initial recollections, I thought that we chose to leave the exercise at that point. However, I discovered from the video footage that despite the visible deflation, we deconstructed the almost complete mountain and began one final round during which the mountain was built.

We opened the space for reflection on the exercise. Naturally the matter of the abandoned chair was the centre of discussion. Almost everyone expressed disappointment and anger. Some even argued that she was selfish and demanded an explanation from Candy. In her defence, she stated that there was too much pressure from the others. Many people asked why she did not think that she was letting the others down. Why did she not take the risk of having the mountain collapse by placing her chair? She never responded. I guess the most annoying aspect of all of this, was the fact that she did not apologise nor did it appear from her reaction that such a gesture was important to deal with the very visible anger in the group. I choose to reflect on this exercise because Candy was a very good facilitator and was seen by many of the young girls in Manenberg as a role model. She was 'Coloured', did not live in Manenberg, was employed, had travelled abroad and was articulate. She had also taken it upon herself to be a counsellor and an ear to some of the young women. That role had in itself exploded earlier in the process when she had let slip something that she had been told in confidence, in front of two girls who were perceived to have 'loose tongues'. The fear of a confidentiality breach later turned out to be unfounded. As a Joker (and a good one at that), Candy during the trial performances<sup>67</sup> threatened to abandon her group in the field because they were not listening to her. After the reflection we asked those who were interested in continuing with the project to stand on one side and those who could not to remain seated. Yet again Candy kept everyone guessing with Lucy<sup>68</sup> staying put beside her until I said we did not have the whole day to waste. At this point Lucy joined the rest of the group but Candy remained seated for another minute before joining the rest.

Her actions in plain terms tested my already thin tolerance levels. It took a lot out of me<sup>69</sup> to stop myself from asking her to leave the room when she chose to keep us waiting after disrupting an important team building exercise. However, Candy's actions also alert me to the irony of resistance. She had stated it clearly: there was too much pressure. In the face of pressure she chose to step out. This is reasonable under 'normal' circumstances; it is in effect what we were asking young women to do when faced with peer pressure – resist. Nonetheless, as a facilitator, I felt that the pressure she cited was not 'negative' peer pressure. At that point in time, I was not in the frame of mind to begin reflecting about the irony; instead I questioned society's imprint on this young woman particularly in relation to meeting expectations and being

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<sup>67</sup> These were conducted as part of the workshop, see programme in appendix.

<sup>68</sup> The same girl who had tried to place Candy's chair

<sup>69</sup> One of my biggest lessons from Manenberg has been my ability to exercise patience and restraint. I am known to have a short temper and working with this group taught me to keep that fuse in check.

dependable. Ironically, this carefully scripted exercise in its design ought to raise these very matters. However, my goal in using this activity was not to engage in an analysis of the micro-dynamics in this group. Important as they were, I was interested in building some sense of cohesion during the closing hours of the workshop. In fact I was not interested in unearthing further conflict.

This process while being democratic also had a set of rules, which were clearly spelt out. Participation in this activity was not a matter of choice; it was a matter of fact given one's presence as a participant in the room. Her action in that moment was for me about challenging my authority as the leader of that activity. I do not think I could have remained impartial<sup>70</sup> during the reflection because I shared the sentiments of the group who felt let down. I did not articulate this though. In that moment, engaging in a feminist analysis of context by examining the intersections between race, class, history and economics were not a consideration; neither do I think this analysis would have been understood by this group. For them and me, it was plain insolence. What appears above, as an outburst on my part as a researcher is an aspect of research that feminists have steadfastly refused to ignore. Recognising these emotions as what Jagger refers to as "outlaw emotions afford feminists the unique opportunity to create alternative epistemologies that would show... how our changing emotional responses stimulate us to new insights" (Jagger, 1989:11). This is the willingness to address what happens when the research act evokes 'negative' reactions for the investigator and her subject (Fonow & Cook, 1991: 10). As some feminist researchers have pointed there are expectations of the researcher by researched and vice versa however hard we try to mask or demystify them. This also applies to the facilitator - participant relationship. It includes the need to assert control, as was required of me by some of the participants after the debriefing of this exercise. A number of them came up to me stating that the matter had not been resolved to their satisfaction and that I should in a way force an apology out of Candy, an action I refused to take. My refusal was informed by my own sentiments on the situation in addition to feeling that if these participants felt strongly about the apology, they would pursue it without it having to be enforced by a higher authority (me).

There are lessons to be learnt from Candy's actions and the opportunity that this exercise offered in analysing the infra - politics within the group. This can happen on two levels. The first, is an acknowledgement that there was clearly an open act of rebellion or resistance to what Candy referred to as peer pressure, which I have

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<sup>70</sup> I did not articulate my sentiments to the group and chose to remain the impartial facilitator.

pointed out highlights the irony and contradictions that as facilitators in the 'business of transformation' face. We sit in a situation where we recognise the action as a valid response to the situation at hand but we are concomitantly negotiating the power dynamic or 'insubordination' in response to an exercise that is conducted in a space that is meant to be 'democratic'<sup>71</sup> but where there are also specific rules governing that participation.

On another level, one cannot fail to engage with what this act of 'rebellion' signified and I will draw on Scott to explore the meaning behind this action. Scott argues that there is no system of domination that does not reproduce its own routine harvests of insults and injury to human dignity ...including rape (Scott, 1987:37). Perhaps the worst of these, he continues is the experience of abuse where one had no choice but to helplessly look on. This inability to defend oneself against the abuses of domination is simultaneously an assault on one's physical body and one's personhood or dignity (Scott, 1987: 37). The cruellest form of human bondage is that it transforms the assertion of personal dignity into a mortal risk (Scott, 1987:37). Conformity in the face of domination is thus occasionally and unforgettably a question of suppressing a violent rage in the interest of oneself (Scott, 1987:37). Scott asserts that without the sanctions imposed by power relations, subordinates would be tempted to return a blow with a blow, an insult with an insult (Scott, 1987:38). However, the 'voice' they are refused in the public finds expression backstage (Scott, 1987:38). Candy was a recent survivor of rape at the time we were conducting the workshop. I can only imagine what it would mean to be violated at such a level, especially when living in a society where blame often lies on the woman survivor rather than the male perpetrator. If we were to draw a correlation to Scott's assertion above, and previously in this thesis, what we witnessed was the public display of a hidden transcript. A 'hidden transcript' that pointed to the rage probably stemming from what it means to be dominated and concomitant ideas around the assertion of power and authority, which in this is instance, can also be linked to the sexual violation she experienced. There are two ways that we can look at what happened in this exercise. One way would be to see the workshop space as the backstage, the alternative space where she was free to rage and express those emotions that were otherwise impossible to articulate during her experience of rape, as well as other experiences of powerlessness, that as women we constantly navigate. In adopting this analysis, we would see her action as a conscious choice and that the workshop did indeed provide a safety net where she could articulate these emotions without fear

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<sup>71</sup> Used here to refer to choice and freedom to participate or not.

of retaliation. In this case what we would have witnessed was the hidden transcript. A second option would be to see Candy's action as a slip, an unintended action that was informed by the hidden transcript (rage and rebellion against domination), which was reproduced by the exercise. In this case what we would have had access to was a partly sanitised version of the hidden transcript. Whatever the case may be, we were provided with an opportunity to engage with what may be termed as 'subversive' conversations amongst the 'oppressed'. As a feminist, this provided an opportunity to recognize that the first level of transformation, the exercise of agency and strategising against domination was occurring.

Looking back at my interpretations of this moment, the differences are clear. My engagement and analysis of the exercise as a project administrator was influenced by a range of dynamics, including the pressure to document a project that indicated cohesion rather than exploring personal dislocation which is in fact a given in project work. Yet, when I began developing my research proposal for thesis in February 2006, this was the first moment that came to mind, because as a researcher I believe it provided a rich site for analysis. This was almost a year later after the workshop. As a researcher my engagement with this material is motivated by what it has taught me and what others engaged in similar processes can take out of it. Which is a more honest account; I dare say it would be the research. However, this does not take away from the dilemmas that I have consistently highlighted in previous chapters, faced by being a person named a feminist activist researcher.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

This thesis set out to examine the opportunities that forum theatre presented for a feminist engaging with twenty-three young women from Manenberg on the processes of gendering women in their community. This was examined within the framework of the *Rite of Being* project. This thesis also set out to document the experiences of Mothertongue and I as a researcher and Project Manager within the implementing organization. I began by laying out the theoretical and practical processes that inform the analysis in this thesis in Chapter One. I drew from three major areas, beginning with a broad history of 'community theatre' in South Africa, global and national discourses on gender and development as well as an examination of Manenberg and the processes of gendering within it. This background acted as a foundation within which to understand the dynamics of researching the 'other', particularly when this is heightened by nationality, class, race and language barriers. It also provided an understanding of the range of influences on the work of Mothertongue prior to the implementation of *Rite of Being* and thereafter. My influence within this took cognisance of my years of engagement with forum theatre processes in the East Africa region. This was captured in chapters two and three. Chapter Four focussed on the research questions by engaging in an analysis of key moments selected from the forum theatre workshop. This analysis was approached from both a methodological (forum theatre) and a feminist epistemological perspective. I arrived at a number of conclusions through this process and these will now be summarized. This concluding chapter is based on a redefinition of strategies for engagement and transformation. I want to emphasize the fact that I will pose a range of questions rather than provide answers. It is my position that the dilemmas faced particularly within activism are layered and the process of questioning is bound to reveal much more than a provision of definite answers. This chapter has been divided into three broad areas that do not in any way reflect the range of lessons emerging from the moments analysed in Chapter Four. They are merely a way to synthesise points of discussion.

### **FORUM THEATRE AS RESEARCH: DISCOVERING NEW KNOWLEDGE'S.**

As a theatre practitioner, I believe in the power of forum theatre. In that moment when spectators are engaged enough to get up on stage to try out their ideas, it allows actors<sup>72</sup> to see that it does work and that people are interested in engaging with the subject matter. The fact that the methodology creatively engages community members for forty-five minutes to one-hour discussion around critical issues without

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<sup>72</sup> For lack of a better word, I am referring to untrained actors or novices to forum theatre who are often uncertain about the possibility of spectator participation.

having rehearsed or being prepared for the 'show' reaffirms the potency of the method.

Some of the workshop exercises developed within forum theatre such as image theatre and newspaper theatre offer opportunity for uncovering and discovering information without being prescriptive, a principle that is central to both forum theatre and feminist epistemology. The focus on collective information generation and relinquishing the process<sup>73</sup> of knowledge production to the participants espouses feminist principles of collaborative scholarship. Cook speaks to this when she states that the notion of feminist collaboration brings about deeper intellectual analysis and an original approach to framing questions with a mindset of innovation that is needed to deal with the gendered context of research (Fonow & Cook, 1991: 2). A well-managed workshop process with the methods cited above is well suited for an in depth analysis to the stories presented.

Forum theatre lays emphasis on action. I watched a Joker from Centro de Teatro D'oprimido<sup>74</sup> run a forum theatre session in Germany in October 2006. I was struck by his seeming impatience with the long-winded explanation that the spectator gave before coming onto the stage. His body language seemed to shout, stand up and act! While this is of course a purely personal approach to handling spectators my interest is in the notion of action. Ideas, suggestions and strategies are not just spoken about, they need to be rehearsed, tested and debated. If you can engage the sensorial in what it means to be that protagonist in the play, perhaps you will engage with the issue differently the next time you encounter it in your home or neighbourhood and even be motivated to act. This is because it has moved from an idea in the head to a live experience albeit within the 'structured' setting of the play. This echoes what Cook refers to as the most common expression of action [in feminist circles] is found in the intention. This emancipatory impulse can be found in positions ranging from a radical insistence that the purpose of research is the total transformation of patriarchy and corresponding empowerment of women, to a more liberal insistence that specific attention be paid to the policy implications of research on women (Fonow & Cook, 1991: 6). At the radical end of the continuum are those who have argued, that intention alone does not guarantee outcomes, feminist scholars must play active roles in the struggle for women's liberation to guard against the misuse of their theoretical and methodological innovations (Fonow & Cook, 1991: 6). This is a debate that has

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<sup>73</sup> I use this tentatively, since we are aware that the facilitator ultimately remains in control of the process. The process may run away, but it is the facilitator's responsibility to manage any diversions.

<sup>74</sup> Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

also raged amongst forum theatre practitioners who have questioned the impact of the play beyond the performance. However, this does not fall within the scope of this research. My goal is to draw connections to the idea of change and transformation that is espoused by both feminist activist research as well as forum theatre.

The forum theatre process also provides a research opportunity that informs the product, which is the play. While a facilitator can try to prepare actors for possible responses from spectators, one never knows what to expect. Forum theatre processes are situational and within that offer opportunity for creativity, spontaneity and improvisation from both a theatrical perspective and an analytical one. Cook asserts that as a research opportunity, using the situation at hand is a methodological strategy in gathering non-reactive data because they [respondents] have little control over their own settings (Fonow & Cook, 1991:4). There are levels of honesty that one obtains through the creative process that are unlikely to come through in a questionnaire or oral interview for example where responses tend to be more contained and deliberate as opposed to the more spontaneous reaction in the former.

#### **FORUM THEATRE: A POTENTIAL FEMINIST METHOD.**

Only as they [the oppressed] discover themselves to be 'hosts' of the oppressor can they contribute to the midwifery of their liberating pedagogy. As long as they live in the duality in which *to be is to be like* and *to be like is to be like the oppressor*, this contribution is impossible (Freire, 1972:30).

Deconstructing the duality that Freire refers to above can only occur through various engagement strategies ideally employed by the oppressed after a conscientisation process. This deconstruction is also predicated on the notion of a homogenised 'oppressed'. Theatre practitioners have argued that there is a tendency of theatre of the oppressed to neglect differences within oppressed groups (Ruigrok, 1995:194 cited in Cohen-Cruz & Schutzman, 1995). This unified notion of the oppressed naturally influences how we choose to read these processes of engagement and determine our assessment of how 'liberated the oppressed' are. The ideas around transformation and liberation in this instance would be based on a set of active engagement strategies. By active I mean visible and seemingly proactive steps towards challenging the status quo. This is not necessarily the solution to every problem and will not necessarily be the case in a heterogeneous environment, where the idea of a unified identity and a shared oppression is non-existent. This approach to looking at transformation leaves out of the fray an array of individual engagement strategies deployed sporadically at both a micro and macro level. Lamphere states

that in examining the politics of engagement and disengagement, women's strategies are directly related to the ways in which power is structured; because they are often marginalized by formal power structures, women may choose to disengage or withdraw from the structures of power utilised by men (Lamphere, 1974 cited in Green, 1999: 152). To understand this we need to take a closer look at the definition of power and its manifestation. There are different kinds of power and by focussing only on formal power we fail to understand the full set of resources employed by women (Green, 1999:152). A more nuanced understanding of power renders an analysis of women's position in society significantly more complex than is usually assumed (Green, 1999: 152).

The young women we worked with continue to exercise agency and negotiate an extremely difficult and complex environment. My experience in Manenberg as a Mothertongue member has led to the appreciation of what it means to engage or more aptly how to respond to situations that are deemed oppressive. Collins argues that a subordinate group not only experiences a different reality than a group that rules but also a subordinate group may interpret that reality differently than a dominant group (Collins, 1993 cited in Green, 1999:156). Do we expect an overnight coup and a radical shift in the status of women? No, because the reality we are dealing can be traced to years of negativity, low levels of self-esteem, wider socio-economic and political issues in addition to a history that will not be erased overnight. Do we anticipate that these young women will radically shift their lives overnight? Not necessarily. The case of a survivor of rape by an eighty two year old grandfather who has been engaged in years of intergenerational abuse comes to mind. Both her mother and sister have fallen prey to the same man. When I heard this story, I could neither comprehend why this man was not jailed or beaten up, given his age nor could I fathom the fact that she continued to live in the same house as her grandfather/perpetrator. The question remains, what were her options? It turned out that her mother was reluctant to throw a man his age out of the home given the principles of Islam that guided her life. Nonetheless, she struck a 'deal' with her father; she would continue to look after him so long as he was never in the house alone with her daughter (his granddaughter). This meant that her daughter had to find ways of avoiding the house if the grandfather was in there alone, either by staying at her sister's house or hanging out with her friends until her mother returned.

I concur with Green's position that, even when apparently acting passively, women are actively making decisions and taking what control is possible in the

circumstances. Even by forgetting or minimising the abuse, women are attempting to control its impact on them (Green, 1999:196). Many of these coping mechanisms embrace the traditionally defined female role. I have shared the view that feminisation protects women from the worst aspects of subordination and perpetuates that subordination (Ferguson, 1984 cited in Green, 1999: 196). However, it is the struggle for group survival that is important. One has to recognize that in the absence of alternatives one has to survive within the very structures that are in place. Some of these survival strategies are often based on the observation of men's behaviour (Roberts, 1984 cited in Green, 1999: 196). One of the lessons that I take forward from this process is that instead of documenting what appears on the surface to be the passivity of the oppressed, we need to understand how women are coping with and transcending their personal and social vicissitudes (Green, 1999:196). I agree with Green, that disengagement should by no means be seen as a sign of women's withdrawal from politics or as delineating public from private acts (Green, 1999:196). Rather, through strategies of disengagement women exercise what are often traditional female prerogatives to seize power and rectify intolerable situations (Green, 1999: 156)

#### **FEMINIST ORGANISING; THE ACTIVIST, RESEARCHER DICHOTOMY, LESSONS FOR MOTHERTONGUE**

What shape can be envisioned for a democratic organization other than the collective? There can be no dogmatic answer to this question. Just as the collective decision-making model works in some situations, but not in others, there can be no one true democratic organizational form that will work effectively in all culture and in all political contexts... there is something to be learned from appropriating and adapting some of the ideas about organizational processes...from practical experiences of business... even though ten years ago they were condemned as hierarchical, bureaucratic and patriarchal (Smith, 1997: 254).

Smith's concluding remarks in a chapter that offered an honest insight into the workings of Caribbean women's theatre collective *Sistren*, indicates a need for a re-visioning of the practicalities of feminist organising. There has been considerable evidence from women and men who work in flat organizational structures that, formal forms of dominance and control are replaced by informal forms; resulting in a 'tyranny of powerlessness' (Molyneux, 1998: 54). In many ways the implementation of *Rite of Being* began the process of administrative restructuring of *Mother Tongue*. As a collective we were required to run with more efficiency, more structure at a financial and administrative level. Clear managerial roles emerged and with that came increased efficiency. The collective took on a new meaning and function. More

attention paid to actual execution of tasks rather than reflection on how such tasks could possibly be executed.

Indigenous organizations like ours are not immune to the international environment particularly the funding environment. While at the substantive level development agencies which question current norms of development may be more receptive to challenging gender stereotyping and women's subordination, at a structural level, they may actually be less friendly to carers (Sweetman, 1997:5). Additional moral pressure to overwork is experienced by staff in organisations, which have a commitment to 'changing the world' (Sweetman, 1997:5). This is an experience with which we were familiar. Despite the development of the structures that I described, we were overstretched. The reality of project specific funding is that 80% is allocated to project activities with the assumption that activists will survive on their passion for change. As a result it becomes difficult to recruit or even have the time to pass on the necessary skills to other individuals who can carry on with the tasks at hand. Given that organizations like *Mothertongue* are not yet at the point where we are self-sustaining, we need to take on other projects in order to survive. It then becomes a question of survival and staying healthy enough to be passionate. This re-echoes Smith's reflections on *Sistren* that I highlighted in Chapter One. Project to project funding within *Sistren* came at the detriment of personal development and recreation for members of the collective, issues that became a luxury in the rush from one project to the next (Smith, 1997: 233). Many activists are worked to the bone and by the time they are able to earn a living from doing what they are passionate about, they need to focus on recovering from years of poverty and sacrifice. While taking care not to reproduce dependency and domination by funding institutions there is a need to recognise that by supporting initiatives aimed at sustaining the organization, its employees and their health, they are in turn supporting gender equity concerns.

During the course of this research, I have realised that I have for a long time romanticised the notion of the activist/researcher. I have consistently argued that there is no need to conduct research if it does not inform some practical process of social transformation, which impacts on the quality of life of women. Well, being actively engaged and concomitantly conducting research, both of which play by different sets of rules is not an easy task. There are inherent tensions and conflicts. At what point do you separate your administrative tasks of responding to funding partners about impact, dealing with participants who did not arrive, running to the bank and in the midst of all of that take time out to observe with an open and critical

mind the dynamics in the group. Most importantly in-between the activist and researcher lies an individual whose life must operate outside the confines of project reports and the rape and drug abuse statistics. That individual disappears because we often tend to become a sponge for all the problems we encounter in the community and take them on. The question of care for the caregivers needs to be factored into organizational processes to ensure that the mental and physical health of employees is maintained.

#### **FUTURE RESEARCH CONSIDERATIONS:**

An examination of the viability of forum theatre as a methodology would not be complete without examining its application in the society, beyond the workshop space. It is after all a method that is founded on mass based liberation ideologies. By applicability, I am not questioning whether it can work, because experiences around the world attest to that. Rather, I am questioning its application whilst responding to deeply personal and political issues that are related to being gendered as a woman in a context such as Manenberg. I will step out of the workshop experience, which was the focus of this research to look at some challenges that would be worth examining in future research.

Given the nature of forum theatre in terms of its performance in sometimes very public spaces I believe we may have rendered issues such as rape open to ridicule and trivialization. I recall during one of the outreach performances of *the rape play*, a number of young boys ran after the protagonist shouting when can we rape you? These remarks can be unpacked in any number of ways. The first argument could be that they are young. The second argument would be to see this as an indicator of the normalisation of a serious sexual offence even at such a young age. The third position would be acknowledge that perhaps this is an inherently violent society where young men already believe that they have and can exercise power over women's bodies irrespective of their age. This type of feedback ('can we rape you') however disturbing was important to hear. Nonetheless, I question whether the forum in this particular instance only reinforced rather than alerted the community to the gravity of the matter especially when we are dealing with issues that are related to sexuality, sex and bodies.

There are questions around the responsibility that practitioners need to have for the disruption we create in communities, I infer that we had a responsibility to create safety nets for these young women given, particularly given their age and their

environment. Going out into the community 'chipped away' at the young women's resolve and it took a lot of work to rebuild. It is my position that forum theatre is suitable for needs assessment for teasing out issues and understanding prevailing attitudes around a situation. This needs to be reinforced in my opinion not by a post performance discussion but by a post performance workshop that will continue to creatively analyse the emerging issues, with due respect and sensitivity. This can be difficult when you hold a performance with sporadic audiences in market places and bus stops. In such instances one has to contend with the assumption that a few took away the vital questions being posed by the play.

The participant's experiences in the community, at least with the trial performances indicated to some extent that they had walked a particular journey, which the entire community had not. The young women went into a community that had continued 'living its life'. In essence, the structures of subordination had not been interrupted. Yet, this group was beginning to deconstruct this idea of normalcy. We created a group of young women who were beginning to question community norms around how women were socialised. They were thinking differently. We made assumptions about the homogeneity in the community; ideas around shared identity and *communitas*, which the baseline survey and the women's analysis revealed, were crumbling. We were challenging the dominant discourse, which in this community was and still is controlled by male ganging practices. One of the challenges we continued to face within the project was redeveloping the conviction that they had at the beginning of the workshop.

This dissertation focused on specific 'moments' that occurred, within the workshop space. Nonetheless, I see these as critical areas that I will consider for future research. These questions will complement the findings in this thesis and address some of forum theatre's methodological shortcomings. They will also contribute to the existing body of knowledge on feminist theatre, feminist research and feminist activism.

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Rite of Being: An Executive Summary; 2007

## APPENDICES

### WORKSHOP PROGRAMME:

DATE	ACTIVITY	OBJECTIVE
June 25 <sup>th</sup> 2005 – Saturday	Meeting of facilitators and rapporteur. Familiarization with tasks Final photocopying etc	Knowledge of each other's roles, responsibilities.
June 27 <sup>th</sup> 2005 - Monday 9.00 – 5.00 p.m.	Workshop begins. Registration Introductions Ice breaking and confidence building. Expectations, fears Setting ground rules. Start times end times, breaks. Duty allocations e.g. time keepers etc.  Background information on the project.  Introduction to theatre – theatre games to loosen and become familiar with the genre. An introduction to the use and role of theatre games. The ten aspects of spontaneity in Forum Theatre, exercises for solving problems, exercises for creating amusements and exercises for total body involvement. Space for sharing of the participants indigenous arts forms – song, dance and other activities they have been involved in.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals will know one another and their skills.</li> <li>• Knowledge about the project partners and process.</li> <li>• A taste of the methodology that will be utilised for the next two weeks and for the rest of the project.</li> <li>• Pace set for the next eleven days.</li> </ul>
June 28 <sup>th</sup> 2005 – Tuesday	An introduction to image theatre. Use of the body and use of pictures. Sculpture, mirror, body language. From images to narrative. From Image to story building Group tasks and presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the concept and meaning of image theatre.</li> <li>• Ability to formulate skits from images.</li> <li>• Determine the appropriateness of image theatre</li> <li>• Team building.</li> </ul>
June 29 <sup>th</sup> 2005 - Wednesday	Reflections and reports.  Introduction to newspaper theatre - Play building using harmful rites of passage as the discussion point  Improvising and devising. Simultaneous dramaturgy.  Group tasks – the creation of skits around rites of passage.  Group presentations and discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to capture and share some of their own games from this day.</li> <li>• Begin to creatively workshop a skit as a team on a specific issue and present it to an audience.</li> <li>• Facilitators should be able to assess level of involvement in the process by all.</li> <li>• Exploring spontaneity.</li> </ul>
June 30 <sup>th</sup> 2005 – Thursday	From narrative to forum theatre. The use of storytelling as a means to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants should be able to devise and tell</li> </ul>

	<p>create a skit. The Narrator as the facilitator joker</p> <p>From storytelling to play building</p> <p>Techniques of story telling</p> <p>Story telling for forum theatre</p>	<p>narratives concerning rites of passage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They should be able to tell and re-tell narratives from their community that perpetuate negative rites of passage.</li> <li>• They should be able to assess the strength of the narrative as a performance mode in Africa and its suitability for their communities.</li> <li>• Participants should be able to create a solo or group narrative performance.</li> </ul>
July 1 <sup>st</sup> 2005 - Friday	<p>Protagonist and antagonist</p> <p>Character development</p> <p>Defining awareness Acting</p> <p>Listening, Seeing and not stating,</p> <p>Verbal agility, Contact with spec-actors and participant audience, Silence.</p> <p>Developing the artist – actor/actress skills</p> <p>The Joker/ artist. Facilitator</p>	<p>The participant will become acquainted with forum theatre methods and techniques, in terms of research, the use of games and exercise, images, rituals, storytelling, role of the joker, relation of protagonist with antagonist and tritagonist etc.</p>
July 2 <sup>nd</sup> 2005 - Saturday	<p>Facilitating Community theatre.</p> <p>Sharpen facilitation skills.</p> <p>Why do we approach a community?</p> <p>How do you approach a community what are the facilitator responsibilities while entering a community? Who is the community? How to involve different voices of the community? Who defines the issues? What is the ideal and real way of working in theatre and community development: a theatre made "for" the community or a theatre created "by" the community</p> <p>How to work as an outsider facilitator</p> <p>Field exercise.</p> <p>Preparation, selecting issues to be addressed, form and content form theatre technique to be applied.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate an ability to mobilise and organize the community towards addressing specific issues.</li> <li>• Ability to facilitate a theatre workshop on 'rites of passage'.</li> </ul>
July 4 <sup>th</sup> 2005 – Monday	<p>Rehearsal of pieces and technical input</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group should show competence and ease in identification of specific issues related to rites of passage and the best moments to put it on stage.</li> </ul>
July 5 <sup>th</sup> 2005 – Tuesday	<p>Set up a trial audience for mini-pieces</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants should have managed to reach the target audience with the issue.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Succeeded in inviting the audience to be active actors in the production.</li> <li>• Session should help participants assess their level of success with an external audience and try their skills in facilitation.</li> </ul>
July 6 <sup>th</sup> 2005 – Wednesday	Reflections, lessons learnt, tightening work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What areas need tightening?</li> <li>• Fears.</li> <li>• The meaning of an audience in a forum theatre play.</li> <li>• Refocus process based on experience.</li> </ul>
July 7 <sup>th</sup> 2005 – Thursday	Trial performances.	
July 8 <sup>th</sup> 2005 – Friday	Reflections and lessons learnt, reviews.	Participants should develop a plan of action for their rehearsals and performances
July 9 <sup>th</sup> 2005 – Saturday	<b>ACTION PLANNING AND CLOSE OF WORKSHOP</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When will performances begin?</li> <li>• Where will they take place?</li> <li>• What frequency.</li> <li>• Who is in charge?</li> </ul>

## INTRODUCTION EXERCISES:

<p>Name Discovery</p>	<p><b>Exercise:</b>          In small pieces of paper each and everyone is asked to describe themselves. They are asked not to write their names, not to indicate any overt characteristics such as the colour of the clothes they are wearing or the colour of their hair. They should describe themselves in ways other than the physical or visible. The description should not include more than ten phrases. These papers are then collected shuffled and handed out randomly to all the participants. In essence each participant receives a random paper and they are required to walk round the room and find the person who fits the description of the paper they hold. On finding this person, they spend some time with them. Only then establish their name and other details that may be of interest if not already included in the paper. Upon establishing the individuals name they then had the task of finding a way to praise their partner using the letters of their name and the information provided in the paper. They also had to do so in a creative format i.e. through song, poetry, praise or story. For example; Exciting Dedicated Independent Truthful Happy (EDITH).</p>	<p>To allow individuals to think about themselves beyond their names and physical attributes. To create the space for participants to interact with each other beyond the surface response. To encourage participants to begin thinking out of the box by finding ways for creative expression. To learn the value of praise and appreciating others and of being praised and valued.</p>
<p>Ice breakers</p>	<p><b>Exercise:</b>  <b>Heart &amp; sword:</b>          In pairs, each person makes a fist with their right hand and places it behind their back. This fist represents their heart. They then hold out their left hand with the index finger pointing forward and this is the sword. The goal of the game is for each one to pierce the others heart with their sword all the while preventing their own heart from being struck.  <b>Songs:</b>          Wathintha Bafazi and Ithemba Lethu</p>	<p>Warm up the body. Begin to enjoy the aspect of playing. To begin a process of forging bonds through simple rituals such as singing and dancing together. The songs are also historically; the first song is historically important given its connection to the 1956 women's march to Pretoria to protest pass laws. The songs are also in praise of women as opposed to popular songs that objectify them and were selected for this purpose.</p>

	Two songs were offered to the group and these were subsequently adopted as the groups' songs. The entire circle sang the songs every morning with each participant contributing a movement that would be copied. The second song lthemba Lethu speaks about 'our hope as women for future'.	
Fears and Expectations	<p><b>Exercise:</b>  <b>Give &amp; Gain sun:</b>  Using two differently coloured cardboard cards each participant is requested to write one thing they would like to gain on one card and on the other one thing that they would like to give to the process.  Accompanied by one of the songs that became the groups' ritual songs each participant goes up and reads their 'give' and 'gain' and pin these cards on the wall, the final product being a colourful sun on the wall.</p>	As name suggests the exercise is about recognising that learning is a shared process and that in whatever way the 'learner' and 'teacher' equally have something to contribute to the process.
Building Trust.	<p><b>Exercise:</b>  <b>Columbian Hypnosis:</b>  One actor holds her palm forward, fingers upright a few centimetres away from the face of another. As if hypnotised they must keep their face constantly the same distance from the hand of the hypnotiser, hairline level with her finger tips, chin more or less level with the base of her palm. The hypnotiser starts a series of movements with her hand, up, down, left, right, backwards, forwards her hand vertical in relation to the ground. The partner must contort her body in every way possible to maintain the same distance between face and hand. If necessary the hypnotic hand can be swapped. The hypnotic hand must never do movements that are too rapid to be followed. The hypnotiser must force her partner into all sorts of ridiculous, grotesque, uncomfortable positions which will put into motion a series of muscle structures which are never, or only</p>	<p>To discover the body and the discomfort that comes in being in certain positions. This is significant given that TO focuses on situations of discomfort and in asking people to respond to our plays we are also asking them to move out of their positions of comfort.  To be aware of the power relations that exist in all spheres of life and that even in the subtlest of activities, we often want to exert control over others whether for fun or to achieve our personal goals. This is done without realising that exercising power over others also impacts on you. For example in the variation of the Columbian hypnosis the 'hypnotiser' in excitement often ends up running around trying to confuse the others often not realising until much later that are equally over exerting themselves and that slower</p>

	<p>rarely activated.</p> <p>Variation: The 'hypnotiser' can also guide two actors one with each hand and can do any movement she likes. The leaders must not stop moving since the exercise is for her benefit as well. The two led actors must not touch and must find their own equilibrium (Boal: 63-64).</p> <p><b>Blind walks:</b> The group is divided into pairs; one partner will be blind, the other will be her guide. The guide will hold the hand of the her blind partner gently guiding her through the room and ensuring that she does not collide with others. After some time she will swap her partner for another one ensuring at all times that contact is maintained with both blind partners. This means that the guides must ensure that their partners are not left unattended. This swap occurs several times and the guides become the blind and experience the entire exercise.</p> <p><b>Trust Circle:</b> Ask the group to form smaller circles of five people. Ask one volunteer to go into the centre of each of the smaller circles. They volunteer should then close their eyes and let themselves fall back without bending the waist or arching their backs or lifting their heels off the ground. Everybody else must tighten the circle and the volunteer falls support her with their hands and propel her into another direction. It is important that there are at least three people taking care of the person at the centre.</p>	<p>movements would ease the process.</p> <p>Trust is a core element in all of these exercises. Trust that your leader of guide shall not put you in harms way. That they shall be responsible for your safety. This is often a difficult goal to achieve at the beginning of processes because people get caught up in the excitement of the game and forget the safety of others. In a lot of ways it also speaks to the fact that people assume that others will not totally put their trust in them and that they will hold back for good measure.</p>
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## QUESTIONNAIRE

The Mothertongue Project is carrying out a survey for a project called Rite of Being Mothertongue is a women's arts organisation based in Cape Town. We would appreciate if you would take time out to assist in gathering this information.

Name: ..... Gender: ..... Age:  
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Address: ..... Tel no. .... Population group:  
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1. What is your understanding of a rite of passage?
2. Do you think puberty rites of passage are important? Please explain.
3. To your knowledge are there any recognised formal rites of passage in this community for girls and boys? Please give us examples.
4. Are there problems that are experienced by young women and young boys because of the lack of formal rites of passage? Please tell us what they are?

**Girls**

**Boys**

5. Do you think young girls are more affected? Please explain if your answer is yes.
6. If your answer is no, please tell us why?
7. What are the existing puberty rites of passage for girls within Manenberg? Whether positive or negative.
8. In your opinion, what and how do these rites of passage mentioned above, contribute to the development of the young women in Manenberg? Please explain
9. Do you think positive rites of passage for girls should be re-introduced if they are not already in place? If yes, please explain.
10. If no, please explain?
11. This project intends to target girls only, do you think that will be a problem? If Yes, explain why.
12. What in your opinion are the positive rites of passage that should be created for young girls?
13. Who do you think is responsible for creating and sustaining this process mentioned above?
14. Why do you think the structures/people you have mentioned above are best placed to do this work?

15. Are there any organisations that you have heard or seen working around this specific issue (**puberty rites of passage**) in Manenberg? Kindly mention a few that you know.

16. What is the area of focus – in terms of puberty rites of passage? (Link the organisation mentioned above to the focus of work)

They work with boys only.	
They work with boys and girls.	
They work with pregnant girls.	
They work with drug addicts.	
They work with girls who belong to gangs.	
Other.....	
I do not know what they do	

17. What methodology do they apply?

They run workshops.	
They call meetings in the community.	
They make plays and perform them in the community.	
They make newsletters and books.	
They offer counselling services	
Other .....	
I do not know.	

18. Have you participated in their projects? If so, in what capacity?

19. What is the community's (your) perception of the impact of these initiatives mentioned above?

20. Do you think that theatre/drama would be a useful means of engaging young women in the discussion around puberty rites of passage? If yes please, explain.

21. If no, please explain?

22. Are you a member of any group or community initiative in Manenberg?

23. Please tell us the name of the group and what position you hold in it?

24. What work does your group do?

25. Is there additional information you would like to provide that would be useful to our work in the area?

THANK YOU!

## SCENES FROM THE WORKSHOP:

### BODY SCULPTING



### CREATIVE WRITING:



### WORKING WITH OBJECTS



### POSTER DEVELOPMENT



SCENES FROM THE PLAYS



THE GROUP:

