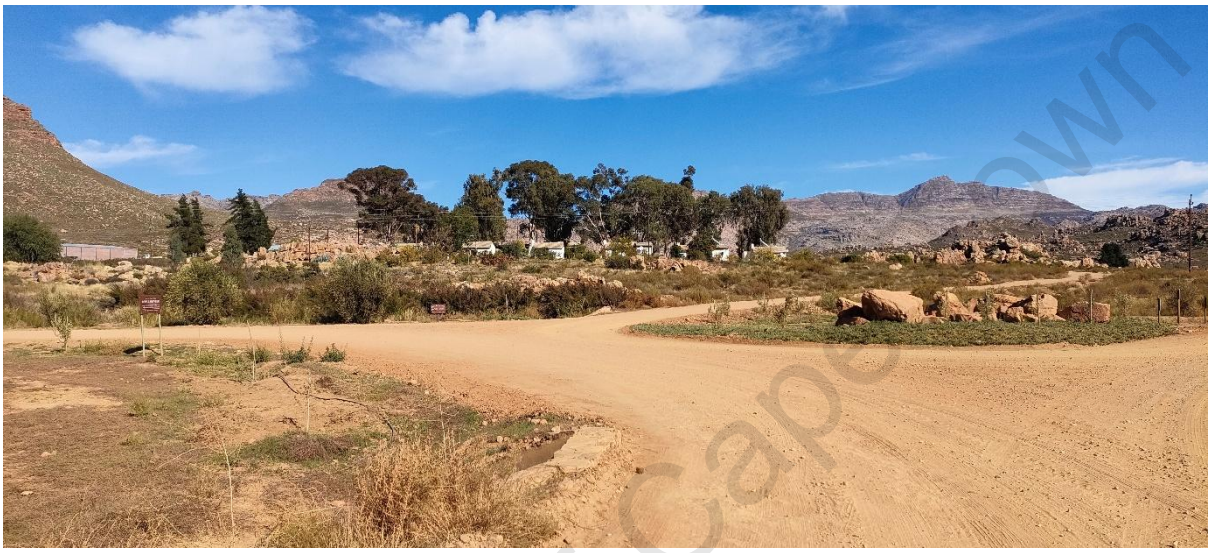
# Peace, Love and Hope: A Rural Farm Dwelling and Labouring Community's Embodied Knowledge of Wellness and Repair in an Environment that Continues to Harm.



Uné Conradie

CNRUNE001

February 2025

Dissertation Presented for the Degree of Master of Philosophy Specialising in Health Humanities and the Arts

Supervised by Dr. Susan Levine

# Contents

# Acknowledgements

Jan van Rooy, Cheslin September, Daniëlle Jenzel, Koekie Bock, Elizabelth Zas, Jerome van Rooi, Mario Mentor, Elva Fredericks, Koekie Fredericks, Appie Zass, Maritha Zass, Christina Jenzel, Joseline Mentor, Benwill Jenzel, Micheala Zas, Jay-Maree Zas, André Salomo, Karlien van Rooy, Lee-Ann September, Janelle Frederiks, Yoliancha Scheepers and Elreze Titus, Jacquinda Zas, Alicia Zas and Daneil Zass, I fear that I will never be able to give you adequate credit for the knowledge and wisdom that you shared with me so generously as co-explorers in this research project and beyond. It has changed the way I look at the world and the way that I live in it.

Thank you to David Nieuwoudt and the management team for supporting our journey with time and space. A special thank you to Pieter du Toit, for all of the communications and negotiations that you facilitated between the team and me; without you, none of this would have happened.

Dr. Susan Levine, I am so grateful to have had you as a supervisor. Your energy and enthusiasm for the project made it a joy to share with you and learn from you. Every comment, suggestion, and insight you provided expanded my view and inspired deeper reflection.

And my husband and two boys, you bring me peace, love and hope. Thank you for supporting me in all of my wild adventures. You are the best people to come home to.

# Abstract

Farm labouring and dwelling communities are considered among the most vulnerable populations in South Africa. The vast majority of health and wellness studies in these communities focus on the harmful social, psychological and biological impacts of historical, structural and institutional violence. What has not received sufficient attention is how farm labouring and dwelling communities resist the impacts of ongoing violence. This multimodal study engaged twenty-six participants living and working in a small rural farming community in the Cederberge in an arts-based research process to explore their embodied knowledge of wellness and repair in an environment that continues to harm. The arts-based research process was rooted in Victor Turner's adaptation of liminality to facilitate the co-creation of a research space where the research participants could be both the observers and the observed. What emerged from the participants' artworks, stories, and reflections was their insights and wisdom into wellness and repair, which mirrors contemporary discussions in Anthropology, Psychology, Neuroscience and the Applied Arts. The research participants portrayed wellness as inseparable from their relationships, emphasising their ability to communicate as a connected and loving community as the foundation for wellness. Embodied love also played a central role in how the research participants portrayed their capacity for daily repair in an environment that causes daily ruptures. By layering the research participants' art, stories and reflections with an interdisciplinary exploration of trauma, the study highlights the importance of being witnessed and bearing witness to moments of resistance and connection to build a collective capacity for repair in an environment that continues to harm.



**Key words:** Embodiment, repair, arts-based research, farm labouring communities, South Africa

# Chapter One: Weaving the Story Beads.

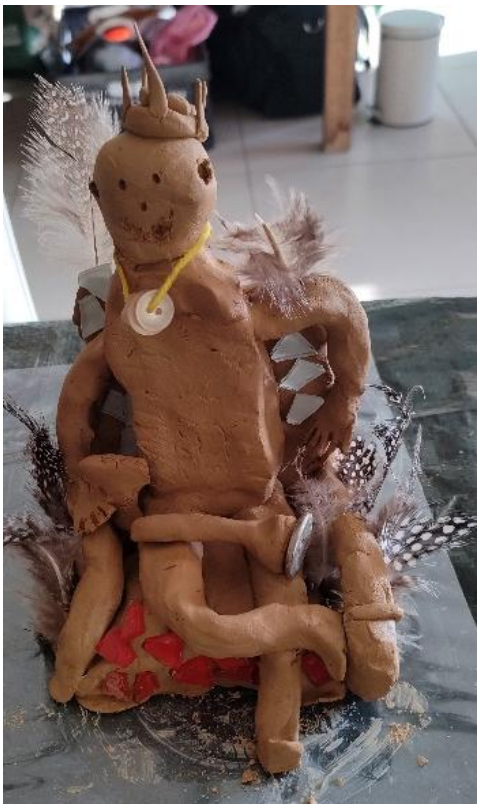


*Image: Jerome's sculpture The King, Dwarsrivier 2024.*

## The Wellspring

*Jerome: I built this little man, and I call him The King. Because it doesn't matter how simple you are, you must always feel like you are heading to your highest throne. And the decorations around him, he sits on a throne with feathers. As we all know, when you go into the history of Africa, there are many kings in Africa, and there is always a display of feathers. This little man is the King of Africa. And here is his cane, with a silver crown on top that says, 'Always Shine Bright.'*

June Bam (2021, 71), an associate professor in African Feminist Studies, writes in her book *Ausi Told Me: Why Cape Herstoriographies Matter* about an aboriginal concept, dadirri. Dadirri refers to an "inner, deep listening and quiet, a still awareness that listens to the spring deep within us, to become whole again." Bam explains that dadirri carries a responsibility to 'get to the story' and that these stories from our wellspring are meant to be 'told in cycles and retold and retold until healing steps in.' The focus of this thesis is to be part of such a process of story sharing by weaving story beads with a group of twenty-six men and women living and working on a rural farm in the Cerdberge, around the question: What is the embodied knowledge of the Dwarsrivier community about being well in an environment that continues to harm?

Studies of farm labouring and dwelling communities in the Western Cape have predominantly focused on their complex historical, social, and economic dynamics shaped by the legacy of slavery, colonialism, and apartheid. Researchers have been particularly interested in the paternalistic labour relationships between farm owners and workers, the 'dop' system of

partial payment in alcohol, the persistent challenges of housing security and land tenure, and interpersonal and sexual violence (Bam 2021, Levine 2013, van der Waal 2014). Significant attention has also been paid to the transformation of labour relations post-1994, including the impacts of labour legislation, minimum wage implementation, and farm workers' struggles for basic human rights and dignity (Levine 2013, van der Waal 2014, London 2003). A prominent scholar and activist in the field of child labour, Susan Levine (2013), shows how poverty and hunger in farm labouring and dwelling communities have worsened in post-apartheid, neo-liberal South Africa and how many brutal practices of colonialism and apartheid persist. Through the eyes of children, Levine shows how state interventions such as minimum wage implementation, the abolishment of child labour and the tot system have backfired and how farm labouring families strategise to navigate a socio-economic landscape that offers nothing to support these interventions.

What is lacking in the academic literature are studies that centre on the knowledge and wisdom of farm labouring and dwelling communities in relation to concepts of wellness and repair. Bam (2021, 159-160) describes a form of epistemicide which she calls the 'lack of agency' discourse. The dominant historical narrative claims that Cape Indigenous people offered minimal resistance to European conquest, leading to their land being allocated to whites, which was understood as exclusive possession. Resistance from Indigenous communities in the form of 15 wars in less than 200 years, which ended just before the abolition of slavery in 1828, is documented as 'theft' and 'encroachment'. In contemporary studies, there is a narrative that the paternalistic nature of the farmer-labourer relationship, which has its roots in slavery and persists to this day, has pacified farm labouring and dwelling communities such that it has to be phased out and that "light" paternalistic practices such as trusts determining what can and cannot be done with land on community-owned farms is not only acceptable but vital for the success of restitution interventions (Atkinson 2007, van der Waal 2014). There is a pervasive assumption that failed state and corporate interventions are at least partly due to a lack of agency on the part of the communities who are supposed to be empowered and protected by these interventions. While decades of manipulation and oppression do cultivate what Paulo Freire (2005, 30) calls a "culture of silence", we cannot assume that knowledge and wisdom of wellness and repair in farm labouring and dwelling communities are lacking or no longer exist. If researchers take on the responsibility to get to the wellspring stories, what might we find? And how can these stories be told and retold to understand and support repair in harmful environments?

## The Landscape

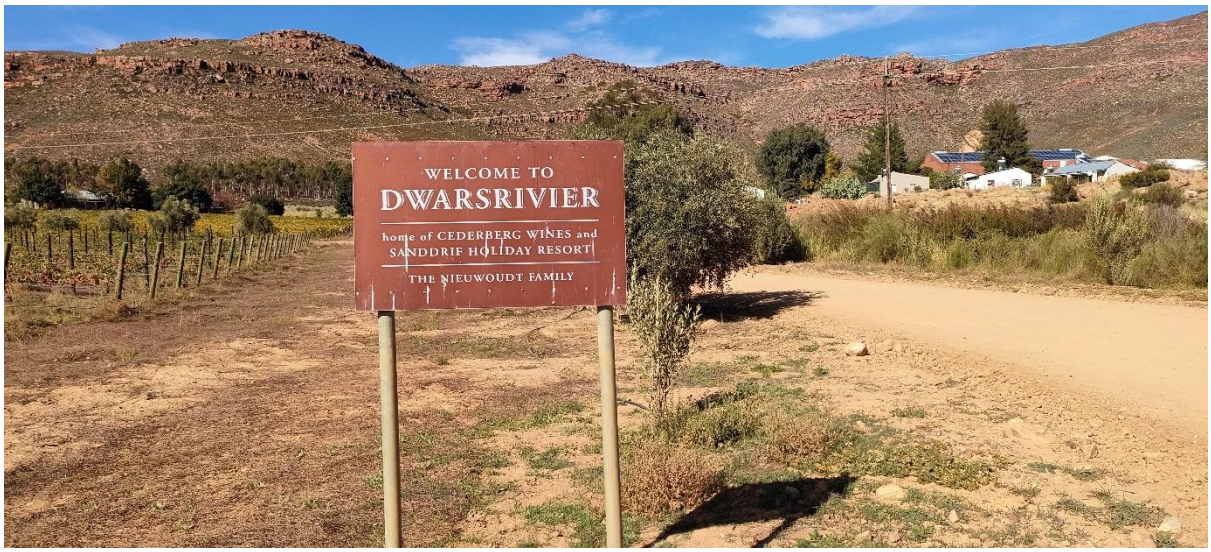



*Image: A sign at the entrance of Dwarsrivier, Dwarsrivier 2024.*

Dwarsrivier is a wine farm and holiday resort located in the heart of the Cederberg wilderness area. The farm is situated at the foot of Sneeuberg Mountain, the highest peak of the Cederberg Mountains. It is approximately 250km north of Cape Town, and the closest town, Clanwilliam, is a forty-five-minute drive away on a mountain pass. The landscape is breathtakingly beautiful with rock formations, expansive vistas and fynbos. 300 hectares of the 5,500-hectare farm are used for farming, the holiday resort, and staff housing. The remaining land is preserved for conservation. In total, one hundred and forty-five people live and work on the farm. Out of the total count, nineteen are school-aged children who stay at a boarding school during the week, sixteen are babies and pre-schoolers who attend the farm's nursery during the day, six are retired adults, five are unemployed, and three are unable to work due to disability. The remaining eighty-seven adults are employed; nine are white Afrikaans-speaking managing staff, and seventy-eight are coloured Afrikaans labouring staff. The farm is owned by the Niewoudt family, who have lived there for six generations. Some of the farm labouring families currently living on the farm have done so for at least four generations. Those who were not born on Dwarsrivier still refer to themselves as “inkomers” (those who came in), even when they have lived and worked on the farm for half a century. I am told that the land and the people born on it share secrets that the rest of us will never know.

## The Companions

*Image: A story circle about a hero's journey through the seasons, Dwarsrivier 2022*

My relationship with the Dwarsrivier community began in August of 2022 through sp(i)eel arts therapies collective, an NPO based in Cape Town, of which I am a co-director. sp(i)eel's area of focus is Arts and Health, and we were contracted by the Waitrose Foundation to facilitate a series of arts-based workshops to map experiences of harm and wellness and to co-create a community-based definition for wellness. The workshops included eighty adults and children living on the farm, aged three months to ninety years. During these workshops, the historical, structural and institutional factors impacting the community's wellbeing were identified and explored through art, movement, music and storytelling. I proposed the research project to the community as a continuation of the work that we started together, with a focus on how the community already resists the harm identified in the previous workshops as well as what they have and what they need to support repair.

Interestingly, harm and resistance manifested in the stories and artwork as three characters. Kees, a mountain leopard that had stalked and killed the dogs on the farm three years prior, was the first character to join us. Kees was caught and re-homed by the Cape Leopard Trust in the same year that the killings began, yet some participants still arrived in groups and stayed home after nightfall for fear of him. Oom Pollie, the farm owner's grandfather, joined us through Tannie Elizabeth, a retired labourer who was born on the farm. Tannie Elizabeth was very concerned for my wellness and safety. She warned me that Oom Pollie's spirit haunts the mountains in front of the cottage where I lived during my visits to Dwarsrivier. She explained that he drives anyone who comes to "do good work" away by making them restless and fearful because he does not want things to change. I wondered if Oom Pollie's spirit was behind the countless ways in which the farmer and the farm manager either wittingly or unwittingly hindered the research process, even after they gave permission to everyone who wanted to take part in the project to do so during working hours.

But I wasn't restless or fearful; I believed that the project was blessed and protected. A year earlier, while swimming in the Dwarsrivier with my colleague, Gershan Lombard, a traditional San musician and co-facilitator, I told him that a snake featured heavily in all the artwork and stories the women created that day, and that, apparently, the snake lived in the river. I

explained that it seemed like the snake was protective of some and dangerous to others. He explained to me that a dragon was protecting the mountains, the same mountains that are haunted by Oom Pollie. Before the first colonists arrived, two San men were warned by the Sun that danger was coming. They turned the Dragon into a snake and put him in the Dwarsrivier, where he remains to this day as the protector of the land. Am I allowed to think that the Dragon would also protect me, a part-time “inkomer” and our work there? I have to admit that I often turned to the river and the Dragon for wisdom and guidance during this project.

Kees, Oom Pollie, and the Dragon are symbols of our entanglement, for better and for worse, with the land and with each other across time and space, and they guide my academic reflections on the research process and the participants' stories. One way in which Medical Anthropologists have made sense of this entanglement is through the embodiment model, which has been evolving since the 1970s when Mary Douglas sought to challenge the dualism between the social and natural body (Yates-Doerr 2017, 143-144). If we accept that a person is at once a biological organism and a social being, then the concept of embodiment asserts that the environment in which a person exists will manifest in the story of a body. A body manifesting (dis)ease mirrors a conflicted, out-of-balance, and separated environment. A healthy body mirrors ease and oneness (Scheper-Hugh and Lock 1987, 7). Margaret Lock’s (2017, 8) explorations of local biologies further help to colour the concept of embodiment by highlighting the permeability of the body, referring to how biological and social processes are intertwined throughout one's life. Vanessa Agar-Jones (2013,187) explains: “I think of bodies as multiple constituted things, as blendings of companion species and inorganic material, containing multiple forms of agency and bearing the traces of multiple forms of power.” This mirrors the seminal works of Physician Gabor Maté (2022) and traumatologist Bessel van der Kolk (2014) which shows that while biomedicine tends to emphasise individual behaviour and pathologies as it relates to (dis)ease in the individual body, at a fundamental level, we exist only as interconnected organisms.

Emily Yates-Doerr (2017, 143-144) questions the emphasis of the body in health and wellness research and shows how health and wellness become embodied through health-seeking practices. This embodiment frame resonates with my understanding of the concept as an applied theatre practitioner. Applied theatre is a process-driven discipline that engages with all of the arts modalities in group-based spaces with an overarching goal of social change. From an applied theatre perspective, embodiment is an act of creation through movement, touch, colour, sound and ritual (Jones 1996, Boal 2006, Nicholson 2015, Prentki and Preston 2009). What is created is a reflection of the experiences, perceptions, ideals and dreams that often reside in our preverbal consciousness. When a person becomes a witness to what they are creating, they gain access to this wealth of historical and innate knowledge that I refer to as embodied knowledge. Bringing embodied knowledge into the conscious mind opens up a portal where experiences, perceptions, ideals and dreams can become fluid through the act of creation. A witnessed, creating body, enlightens both past and future action (Jones 1996, 226). On the other hand, when a person remains unaware of their embodied knowledge, they are in danger of being ruled by the past (Krieger 2005, 350-351).

To complement the embodiment model in my discussion of the artworks and stories that emerged from the arts-based research process, I also draw from the field of neuroscience, with particular attention to Stephen Porges's (2011) Polyvagal Theory. Porges describes Polyvagal Theory as a theory of safety that maps the body's responses to the environment

through the autonomic nervous system. His theory enables me to explore the biological mechanisms through which social forces are embodied and how they influence future action.

## The Call

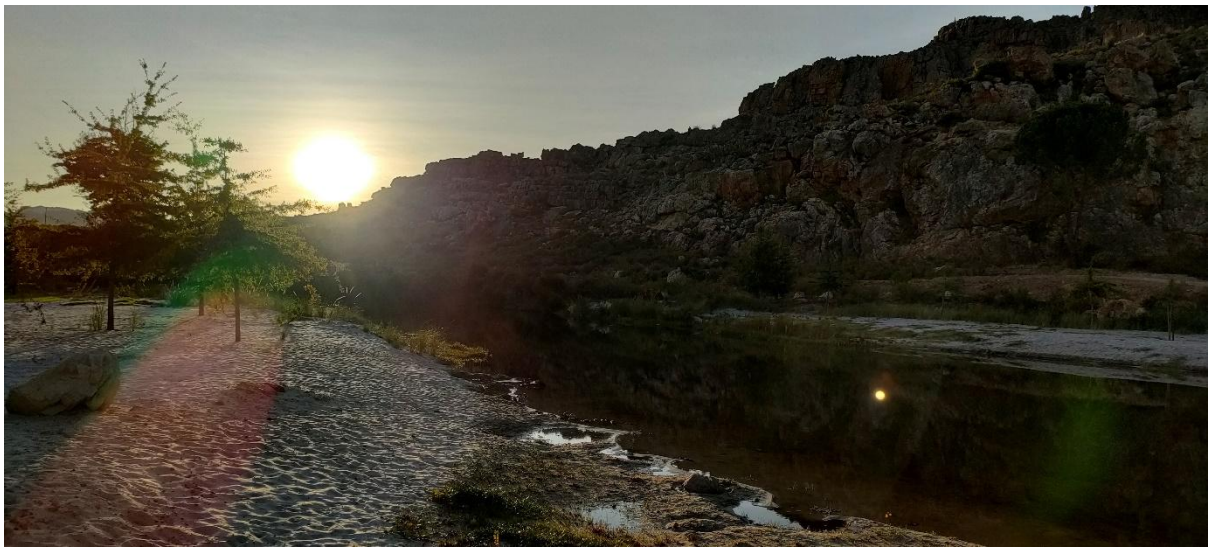


*Image: The Dwarsriver, 2024*

From the Dragon comes the call to look for power and protection. If the body remembers harm, will it also remember ways to mitigate harm and pathways of repair? Drawing from my training and experience as an applied theatre practitioner, I aim to show how the arts can be used to design a research process that is fluid, to illuminate past, present and future narratives and open them up for exploration in a way that supports multivocality (Boal 2006, Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz 1994, Nicholson 2015). Through this fluid, arts-based research process, I aim to highlight the research participants' embodied knowledge of wellness and repair in a way that also bears witness to their daily experiences of harm (Welcome and Thomas 2021, Mullings, Sobers and Thomas 2021). I lastly aim to add to an "archive of life" that celebrates how the research participants resist historical, structural and institutional violence through daily individual and communal practices (Mullings, Sobers and Thomas 2021, 412). To achieve this, I aim to present the research participants' artworks, stories, and reflections in a way that doesn't turn them into a product for dispassionate consumption, but rather keeps them alive and evolving within a story circle.

## The Challenge

*Image: Creating collective artworks, Dwarsrivier 2024*

What is my role in the Dragon's story? As a white Afrikaans researcher and facilitator, I wonder if it is my place to talk about the Dragon, let alone hope for blessings and protection from him. South African identity is complex, diverse and fraught with trauma, loss, shame and oppression (Erickson 1991, Gobodo-Madikizela 2016, Prager 2016, Vieyra 2015). Race[1], being the main indicator of privilege in the apartheid ideology, continues to play a significant role in this identity. Bodies hold relational stories from the past that can impact cues of safety or threat when they share a space (Swanepoel and Conradie 2023, 124). I am mindful that my body is not neutral in the research space; it will have an influence on what is seen and heard and felt and how it is seen and heard and felt. In my capacity as an applied theatre practitioner, I addressed this complex relational dynamic in my own body, beginning before I met with the participants, through reflective practices, which included regular clinical supervision with an art therapist as well as regular reflective meetings with colleagues and the broader arts therapy and applied arts community in South Africa. I am well-versed in violence-informed practice and have extensive experience as an applied arts practitioner to engage with the problem of power through the arts and to renegotiate power and identity in the research space. I did this by taking on an active, participatory role in the sessions, not assuming the role of expert but instead a co-creator of moments where embodied wisdom can surface (Havsteen-Franklin, et al. 2021, Chinyowa 2013). Playfulness and humour, which are inherent in an arts-based process, also played an essential role in building reciprocal and trusting relationships (Swanepoel and Conradie 2023, 124).

Furthermore, a problem with representation happens when embodied knowledge, which is experiential and intuitive, is brought into academia (Asher and Wainwright 2018, Bam 2021, Briggs and Sharp 2004). The research is presented in Western languages, in Western institutions and in metropolitan areas (Asher and Wainwright 2018, Bam 2021). Generations

[1] It has been demonstrated by Soudien (2012:7) that race is a learned concept. In South Africa, race is still closely associated with features like cultural background, economic status, political position, and education level. These characteristics are intertwined with spatial organization and the way different groups of people interact with each other. As this study is about mitigating the trauma that results from these socio-political forces, race has to be mentioned.

of lived experience accumulated in sacred places are uprooted, translated and pulled apart to be examined through the lens of predetermined epistemes. This 'epistemic violence' is inflicted on a community's knowledge and the knowledge holders so that they can be heard by those deemed to be the 'experts' (Briggs and Sharp 2004, Bam 2021). Bel Hooks in (Briggs and Sharp 2004, 665) explains that Western researchers want to know about her experiences, not her explanations: "No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way."

The current reality remains that researchers versed in Eurocentric epistemes are granted privilege and authority. If those researchers abdicate responsibility by disclaiming the right to speak about other knowledge systems, they will do nothing more than reinforce current global relations of privilege and power (Briggs and Sharp 2004, 671). The problem of power and representation, or in the history of anthropology, 'white writing black', is better addressed by asking how we conduct research, how and where we present it, and who presents the research. I turn to multimodal research, which complements my applied arts practices, to guide my thinking about representation. Multimodality as a pedagogy and a research practice calls for the destabilisation of harmful representations by paying empathetic attention to the "quiet, quotidian, and affective resonances" of images (Mullings, Sobers and Thomas 2021, 403). I aim to facilitate such an engagement by presenting images of the artwork alongside video material of the research participants' stories and reflections on their own artworks. Furthermore, the images and stories presented in this thesis are not evidentiary visual modes that aim to represent "what really happened"; they are co-created sensory moments that generate conversations and nuanced explorations of the affective, ephemeral, and non-linear aspects of power and resistance (Welcome and Thomas 2021, 3-4).

## The Journey

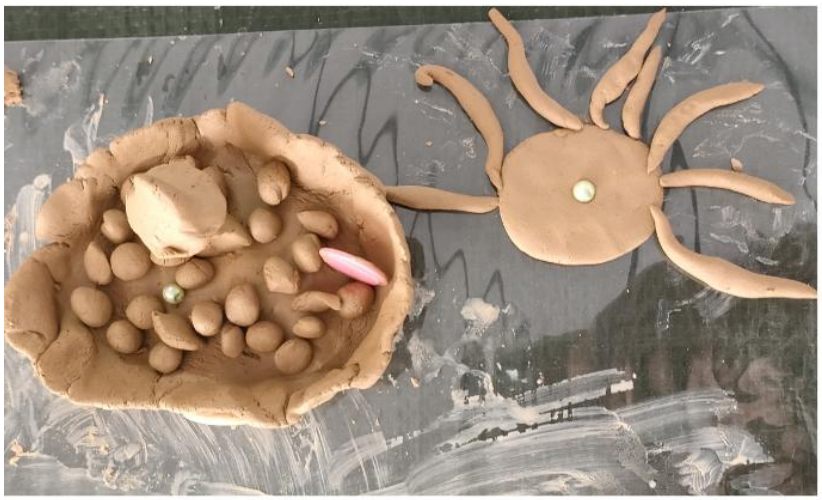
*Image: Circling to open and close every session, Dwarsrivier 2024.*

The story circle begins with a ritual. In Chapter Two, "Playing Through Borders," I draw on Victor Turner's concept of the liminal space to demonstrate the transformative potential of arts-based research methods that support expression and knowledge sharing. I show how Van Gennep's three phases of a ritual can frame a fluid research process to invite and support the research participants as co-creators who shape the methodologies and outcomes of a process that is not extractive but resourcing. I discuss the art mediums that I made available for the process and how they were chosen for their potential to highlight embodied knowledge by tapping into memories that are generational and often subconscious. The chapter closes with Turner's concept of the liminoid space and how arts-based methods should be engaged beyond a means of data collection to create research processes and dissemination practices that embody joy, agency, creativity, resistance and repair where the co-created knowledge is not only presented mindfully in academia but also left in the hands of the people to whom it belongs.

A reflective discussion that the participants had about the body sculptures they created on the second day of the research projects guides Chapter Three, "Wellness as Oneness." The sculptures expressed a need for rest and a desire for escape. To my surprise, the resulting discussion did not centre on the institutional practices that lead to overworked and tired bodies; instead, the participants highlighted the pivotal role of unity and harmony in individual and collective well-being. I explore their discussion from biological, psychosocial and embodied perspectives to highlight the interconnectedness of emotions and physiology as dynamic processes that occur within the context of relationships, from personal to cultural.

The reflective discussion that guides Chapter Three prompted a shift from individual artwork to collective mapping and storytelling, which directs Chapter Four, "Rupture and Repair". By layering the ethnographic work of South African anthropologists Fiona Ross and Thomas Cousins and the research participants' artworks and stories, I highlight how experiences of rupture and repair in historically and structurally violent environments are deeply intertwined. I also show how being witnessed and bearing witness are essential for repair, and how we look and what we see are equally important. The participants express how repair happens across time and space through daily connections and resistance, and that spirituality serves as a communal practice for connection and reflection. I discuss how the applied arts can play a supporting role and how they can be a platform to celebrate daily acts of resistance. Lastly, through reflective conversations, the research participants explained that it is through their shared vulnerability, in the everyday seeking of their own light and witnessing of each other's light, that they can begin to play together again and that it is here where they can build the capacity to look forward to alternative futures.

# Chapter Two: Playing through Borders



Scan this QR code to experience Josline sharing her name story

**Image: Joseline Mentor's Name Sculpture, Dwarsrivier 2024**

*Joseline: This is just a bowl that I made, say like a bowl that comes out like a leaf. Then you have your things in, like fruit and things in it. But it is actually about the Cederberge, that…your…how can I say it, your grapes, the leaf of a bunch of grapes that I actually made because he isn't…actually, he's misformed, he's not…how will I say this? He's full of cracks and breaks like our lives are today. Little things that you can close up later. But your life is a bit shattered. But this can…this helps to light us up again.*

On the first day of the research project, as our introduction to each other and to the clay as the art medium that I had planned to use for the project, I invited the participants to represent their names or a chosen pseudonym in clay. I had hoped to photograph each participant with their name for my records and for me to learn the names of the participants that evening before I saw them again the following day. Less than half of the participants included any name in their images. What emerged from the clay were rich stories of self. In Joseline's story, we hear how she created a container to hold what belonged to her. We hear that this container is not only connected to the environment, but it is part of the land; it is the leaf on the vine. This leaf becomes personified, and through it, she expresses brokenness and the potential for repair, which she not only relates to herself but to "us". She reflects that her act of creating this image and story is already a moment of repair for the collective: "…this helps to light us up again." Joseline's story beautifully summarises the value and potential of arts-based research: it can create a temporary space where a research participant can be both the observer and the observed; and where what was, what is and what could be, exists simultaneously. The borders of inside and outside, self and other, mind and body, researcher and participant, become blurred, and an opportunity arises to play in fluid spaces of radical potential (Boal 1995, K. C. Chinyowa 2013, Laver, et al. 2022).

Feminist critic and postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988), investigates how Western cultures research marginalised cultures in her seminal essay, Can the Subaltern[2] Speak?. She points out that Eurocentric knowledge is not innocent. It is constructed to serve Western value systems and does not serve or reflect the values of the global south. According to Spivak, the Subaltern's identity is constructed to reflect this knowledge, meaning that even when she tries to express herself, she cannot do so without the influence of the West permeating her story. The most marginalised do not have a platform to speak from their experience to affect scientific and policy debate (Briggs and Sharp 2004, 665).

Professor of applied theatre and drama, Kennedy Chinyowa (2008, 92) argues that if there is a way to witness and support the embodied knowledge of marginalised communities, it would require a research space that, at the very least, offers moments where the participants can "act, think and feel originally and freely". This asks for a research method that includes the research participants' influence and insight at every stage of the process, from the form the research will take to the final presentation of the results. The researchers must also endeavour to enter the research space as co-explorers free from the dualistic confines of good and bad, freedom and oppression, health and disease. Such a research engagement offers the potential for a sense of equal investment, shared knowledge and freedom through play. (K. Chinyowa 2008, Havsteen-Franklin, et al. 2021, Swanepoel and Conradie 2023, Laver, et al. 2022). In this chapter, I discuss how the applied arts provide an invaluable frame within which research methodologies and dissemination practices can be co-created with research participants to illuminate and support the embodied knowledge of marginalised communities.

## The liminal space

The concept of liminality is foundational to Anthropology and the arts (Laver, et al. 2022, Wels, et al. 2011). Originally a term coined by Arnold van Gennep in 1909, it became popular after Victor Turner adopted and adapted the concept for his analysis of Ndembu rituals in 1970 (Wels, et al. 2011, 1). Etymologically, the word stems from the Latin *limes*, which means 'threshold' or *limen*, meaning 'boundary'. Sociologically, 'liminality' refers to the middle phase of any ritual process. According to Van Gennep, every ritual process has three phases: separation, transition and incorporation. The middle phase, the transition from one status to the next, is where a person is no longer who they used to be and not yet who they will become (Wels, et al. 2011, 2). In this state, the usual power structures and societal orders are disrupted, allowing a person to transition from one role to another.

It is Turner's adaptations of liminality that continue to capture the imagination of researchers in a wide array of fields, including anthropology, psychology, sociology, religious studies, performance studies and architecture (Laver, et al. 2022, 2). He extended the concept beyond rituals to refer to almost any short-lived period where a hierarchy is upended, power is shared, and familiar routines are interrupted during a creative process of transition or transference (Wels, et al. 2011, 1). Augusto Boal (1995,13), the founder of Theatre of the Oppressed, which he based on Paulo Freire's (1968) Pedagogy of the Oppressed, claims that the arts as "the first human invention" originates in the ability to witness self and being aware of the fact that you are a witness to self. In this instance, where you are neither self nor other,

[2] A postcolonial term referring to the colonized mass who are socially, politically and geographically excluded from the hierarchy of power.

what once seemed fixed becomes unfixed because beliefs, identities, and power become fluid and open for review. The unplayable becomes playable. A liminal space is opened through engagement with the arts, where the complexities of the individual and the collective body in flux can be expressed and explored, and the plurality of stories past, present, and future can be shared (Vieyra 2015, 61).

Storytelling from a liminal space is rooted in the authority of knowledge accumulated in the body through generations, and it places the storyteller, irrespective of her position of power in society, in the subject rather than the object position (Chinyowa 2013, 11). The concept of liminality is a helpful lens through which to understand the dynamics of transition, which overlaps with rituals and creative processes. By highlighting the potential for crossing the borders maintained by established power structures and how this supports a temporary space where identity can become fluid, liminality as a part of the research process opens up new avenues for exploration, expression and connection. The applied arts intentionally work towards and within such spaces of liminality (Boal 1995, 13-15).

## Creating a structure that holds the 'nonstructure.'

The arts can act as a container, which can make the exploration of risky or distressing themes feel safe and self-empowering, and it is simultaneously an opener, which could make the exploration of such themes feel confronting and overwhelming (Dew, et al. 2018, Murray, et al. 2023, Ong, Mellor and Chettri 2020). A mindful application of the arts by a trained and experienced practitioner involves carefully structured sessions to guide participants into the realm of liminality through the co-creation of a temporary safe enough space and to ensure that there is a transition back into everyday life (Scrine 2021, Swanepoel and Conradie 2023, Laver, et al. 2022). To plan my fieldwork sessions, I used a structure that mirrors van Gennep's three phases of a ritual. The use of ritual to create spaces that support exploration and transition is well documented in the applied arts (Emunah 2019, Jaaniste 2024, Snow 2022) I developed this structure through my work with sp(i)eel arts therapies collective over the past decade and use it to train new applied arts practitioners and community arts facilitators. Every session moves through three stages: (1) Entering the play space, which mirrors the separation phase of a ritual; (2) story making and storytelling, which is the liminal phase; and (3) individual and collective reflection, which mirrors the incorporation phase of a ritual. Every session contains six basic building blocks: An opening routine, grounding activities, warm-up activities, the main activities, individual and group reflection and a closing routine.

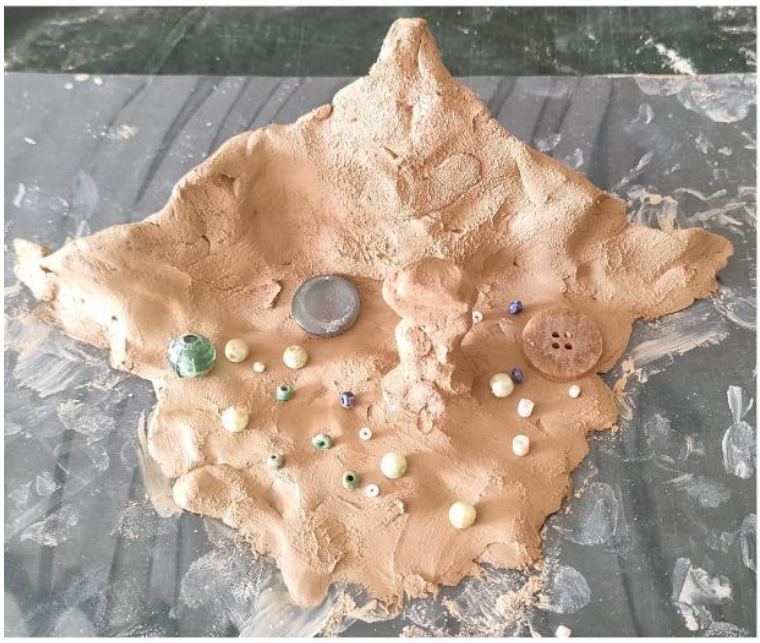
The opening routine begins before the participants arrive, and its purpose is to invite participants into a creative and experiential space that is removed from their everyday lives (Havsteen-Franklin, et al. 2021, Swanepoel and Conradie 2023). The research project took place in the community hall. The hall was hastily constructed without the kitchen and the stage that the community requested. It has housed sixty seasonal workers for over five years, a great source of pain and conflict for the community. It is where the newly formed workers' committee meets. It is where community members meet the social worker once a week. It is the space where the new creche recently held its first concert and where the community

organised a very successful Women's Day event. I signal the potential for a new experience through sight, smell, taste and touch. I arrive an hour early to make sure the space is clean. I bring soap, hand cream, a towel and toilet paper for the bathroom. I set up a welcoming table to be the first thing participants see as they enter through the door. On it, there is a bright tablecloth, with tea and coffee on trays and in ceramic jugs, wooden bowls filled with oranges and bananas, a tin of biscuits, and an essential oil burner with a mix of Frankincense, Sandalwood, and Lavender. On the left side of the hall, there are two tables with art materials. In the centre of the hall, there is a circle with chairs. When the participants come in, they will always find me by the welcoming table, inviting them to get something to eat and drink. Every session will begin with us sitting in a circle. Once we are in the circle, I give a summary of the previous session and an outline of what can be expected during this session.

Grounding activities follow the opening routine. These are ideally nonverbal activities that engage the body, like simple breath work, songs, dances, and call-and-response games. Together, the opening routine and the grounding activities create a space that signals safety to the body by gently inviting participants to be fully present and to slow their breathing and heart rate without explicitly asking them to breathe slower or deeper (Dana 2020, Havsteen-Franklin, et al. 2021, Swanepoel and Conradie 2023). In a space that is filled with complex memories and that is about to become fluid in so many of the aspects that are fixed in everyday life, these simple signals and routines become lighthouses.

The warm-up activities signal the entry into the liminal space. With these activities, session themes are explored more directly through play. An example of a warm-up activity I did during our first session was a name game where the participants said their names while making a movement to introduce themselves. Everybody in the circle mirrors the name and action before the next participant's turn. I chose this activity because the main activity was an invitation for the participants to depict their names in clay. The warm-up activities should build the participants' creative confidence and equip them with tools that they can use for the creative tasks of the main activities (Swanepoel and Conradie 2023, 125).

With the main activities, the participants are invited to play with the research question through an embodied medium. The novelty of the activity and the invitation to play with a topic that is usually not associated with play create the "this is not" state that is usually associated with liminal experiences. In this space, everyday representations become inadequate and new ways of doing or showing are required (Laver, et al. 2022, Boal 1995). How the invitation for the main activity is phrased and framed matters. For example, in our first session, I did not simply give the participants the task of building their names in clay. First, I invited the participants to explore the texture, temperature, colour and smell of the clay. I invited them to notice how the clay changed as they played with it. I invited them to notice what happened in their body as they played. Then, I asked the participants to think about their names as they played with the clay. Do they know where their names come from? Do they know what it means? What are the images that come to them as they think of their names? Then I invited the participants to represent their names in clay, giving them a good thirty minutes of uninterrupted time to do so. It is in this time of creation that embodied knowledge will surface in metaphors and symbols, and it is these metaphors and symbols that become open to review through the stories that the participants share about their images as part of the main activity. Furthermore, even though a telling might begin as an individual story, the act of sharing it brings it to the domain of what Boal (1995,45) calls "the first person plural", where it becomes part of the collective's consciousness.



Scan this QR code to experience Danielle sharing her name story

**Image: Danielle Jenzel's Name Sculpture, Dwarsrivier 2024**

> *"I depicted our environment. The Snow mountains and Mathee's cross. The reason why I did this, some of you that's done the hiking route, it is a very steep climb. You walk and you walk and you walk and you feel like you will never get to the top. But when you get to the top everything just opens up and everything is just so beautiful. And that is how we feel most of the time in our lives. You walk and you walk and you walk and you feel like you never get anywhere. But when you get to the top you see that it was worth it."*

Danielle's story is an example of how symbols and metaphors that arise during the creative process can help participants uncover a story that might not have been the dominant story that they would have shared about their name. Notice how she includes the whole group in her story and assumes that she is speaking for everyone who is listening.

The art-life connection is made by reflecting on the creative process. It is the gift or message from the body manifested in the artwork (Emunah 2019, Jaaniste 2024). Daniëlle's art-life connection was that if you persevere when you feel like you are getting nowhere, you will ultimately be rewarded. I scaffold the reflective process by first asking for a description and then an interpretation: "How did it feel in your body when you did the activity? What did you notice about yourself? What did you discover about yourself? What did you notice about the group? What did you discover about the group? Is there a gift or a message for you or your community in your artwork?" The reflective process is where knowledge is shared and integrated. It also marks the beginning of the journey out of the play space and into everyday life (Snow 2022, Boal 1995).

A closing routine marks the end of a session and facilitates a resourced return to the realities of everyday life (Emunah 2019, Snow 2022, Jaaniste 2024). Every session ends in a circle as it begins. The activity that I used as a closing practice was to invite the participants to wipe anything that arose during the session that they didn't want to take with them for the rest of their day off their bodies. They physically wiped their faces, arms, torso and legs as if dusting it off. I then invited them to put anything that they heard or saw that could give them peace

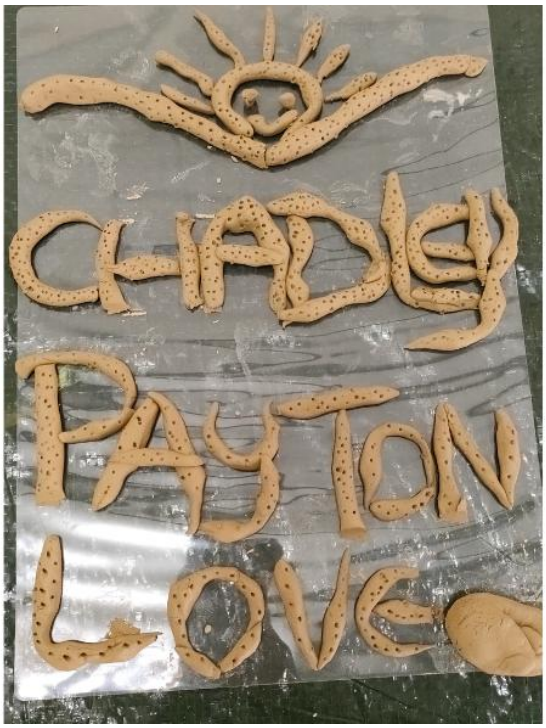
and strength in their day into the part of their body where they thought it belonged. Some participants touched their hearts, some in their heads, some in their stomachs, and some in their hands.

Arts-based research approached in this way is a method that ensures that the agency and safety of the participants are paramount. It is a method that is not extracting, but resourcing. (K. C. Chinyowa 2013, Scrine 2021, Snow 2022). A liminal space that is mindfully created to be predictable in structure but fluid in outcomes and power relations is also associated with 'communitas', another concept coined by Turner. Communitas is described as "a sense of profound collective connection and joy" (Laver, et al. 2022, 655). Oom Jan van Rooy and Koekie Thys reflected at the conclusion of the project:

> "Wellness is peace. *To be at peace, I have to appreciate someone else. In the days that we were here (research space), there was only love. We talked with each other and laughed together. We must always stay together."*

> *"We walk one road when we are together here (research space). When we leave here then we differ from each other. I believe we can…we can find a way to continue to walk together... that we mustn't leave it here, that we must continue when you (researcher) leave. I believe that we can take this further, that it won't just stay here."*

## Choosing the medium




Scan this QR code to experience Cheslin sharing his Name Story

**Image: Cheslin September's Name Scupture, Dwarsrivier 2024**

*Cheslin: I made the sun and the mountains. And then I wrote my children's names and I wrote love under it. Because I love them very much and they love me very much. As a parent, you must love your child.*

*Uné: And the sun and the mountains?*

*Ceslin: It inspires me a lot. It is what I look at every morning. When the sun comes up, it is very beautiful for me, and when the sun sets it is also beautiful. And then there's another interesting thing, then the stars come out, and it is even more beautiful. It's a wonderful planet, we live in a wonderful world. So because it is a wonderful planet that I live in, I will be a wonderful father to my children. And they will be a wonderful father to their children. And they for their children."*

Central to this thesis is the understanding that (dis)ease and wellness do not reside within an individual. A person is entangled within circles of family, community, the natural environment, society, and the wider world, all of which will manifest in the stories of the body through symptoms and actions (Scheper-Hugh and Lock 1987, Prah 2015, Yates-Doerr 2017). This entanglement extends to the mind and body, which have come to be viewed as separate in the Age of Enlightenment, a view that remains pervasive in biomedicine (Yates-Doerr 2017, Swanepoel and Conradie 2023, Maté and Maté 2022). Canadian physician, Gabor Maté (2022, 100) refutes this belief in a separated mind and body with: "We have countless hormonal, immunological, neurological, molecular, intracellular, and epigenetic pathways that make our physiology inseparable from our emotional, psychological, spiritual, and social lives".

In modern biomedicine (dis)ease is diagnosed in either the body or the mind, which is why there is such a term as mental health. Emotions are considered to be the catalyst for what turns knowledge into understanding and brings commitment and intensity to human action (Scheper-Hugh and Lock 1987, 21-31). A Western-tinted read of this might allow us to assume a hierarchal relationship between the mind and the body, thinking that an emotion-driven mind informs an action-driven body. Embodied cognition, a concept first proposed by cognitive scientists and linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, collapses this hierarchy by asserting that the thinking mind is guided by the knowledge of our experiences, which is held in the body. This idea was expanded upon by Andrew Wilson and Sabrina Golonka (2013), who hypothesised that embodied cognition does not simply represent another source of information for the mind, but that it sees the body as navigating the world and solving problems in real-time (Swanepoel and Conradie 2023, 121). There is no one-directional or up/down linear stream of information. Instead, knowledge is circulated between mind and body in an entanglement as unravelable as the entanglement between body and environment (Murray, et al. 2023, 905).

Embodied knowledge is not only accumulated through a person's interactions with the world but is also inherited (Maté and Maté 2022, Gillson and Ross 2019). As new research tools became available to scientists, their understanding of psychiatric illness became increasingly rooted in brain science. Recent studies on Holocaust survivors using modern techniques have revealed several biological indicators of trauma. Strikingly, the descendants of Holocaust survivors, who never directly experienced that devastating event, displayed the same biological and epigenetic markers of trauma. This raises an essential question regarding the significance of this research for communities that have endured historical trauma, such as South Africa. It implies that the so-called "born free" generation has the effects of Apartheid

imprinted on their epigenome (Gillson and Ross 2019, 19-20). It also informs the central question of this thesis by extension: if embodied knowledge of harm is passed down generationally, do individuals then also hold embodied knowledge of repair?

If the body holds knowledge of repair, then the arts as an embodied research method have the potential to bring that knowledge, which often resides in the preverbal consciousness, into the conscious mind. (Murray, et al. 2023, Dew, et al. 2018, Lambert, Favero and Pauwels 2021, Prah 2015, Boal 1995). Body mapping is an arts-based research method that was developed from a study of fertility rates in rural Jamaica and from clinical psychologist Jonathan Morgan's (2002) research project in which a group of women diagnosed with HIV/AIDS created keepsakes of their lives for their families. His work was published as a book in 2003, Long Life: Positive HIV Stories (Dew, et al. 2018, Skop 2016). As a therapeutic tool, it is widely used in education, community development and health, but its use as a research tool is less established (Dew, et al. 2018, 3). Notable uses of body mapping in anthropological research include Kate Abeny's (2014) PhD study on the experiences of paediatric tuberculosis patients in a centralised treatment facility in Cape Town and Efua Prah's (2013) PhD study on the experiences of children living in a temporary relocation camp in Cape Town.

My interest in body mapping was sparked by the embodied nature of the process itself. Participants choose a position to lie in while the outlines of their bodies are traced on a big sheet of paper. Creating a shape with your body and tracing someone else's body are both evocative actions. Even painting and drawing on this life-size body map requires participants to move their bodies by bending, kneeling and stretching in order to reach all of the nooks and crannies of the image that they are creating. What comes out in the form of colours, patterns, shapes and images on the paper can, therefore, come from beyond the participants' conscious response to invitations or questions from the researcher to include responses that currently reside in the preverbal consciousness, in the knowledge of the body (Boal 1995, K. C. Chinyowa 2013). These works of art then become the mirror through which the participant can observe their own story as a spectator, creating that valuable liminal space discussed above where the participant is simultaneously observer and observed. The value of this method lies in the participants' interpretation of their images and their experience of the process (Dew, et al. 2018, Lambert, Favero and Pauwels 2021, Murray, et al. 2023).

One of the limitations of body mapping is the small sample sizes that it can accommodate (Murray, et al. 2023, 904). Since I had twenty-six participants who wanted to take part in the study, body mapping would not be a suitable method for me. (Although since this study, I have started using collective body maps, where small groups of 5 work with one outline, with great success). Instead, I turned to the use of clay to build small, three-dimensional representations of the participants' bodies. The idea came from a study by Tricia Ong, David Mellor & Sabrina Chettri (2020), who used clay as a medium to create three-dimensional body maps to research the reproductive health knowledge among trafficked women in Nepal. Not only did this method solve my issue with space, but I was also drawn to art therapists' use of the medium specifically to evoke embodied knowledge (Ong, Mellor and Chettri 2020, 9). Clay, derived from earth and water, engages touch, sight, sound and smell, offering an immersive experience. Art therapist Patricia Sherwood explains:

> "work in my clinical practice with clay demonstrates that the attraction of clay lies in its capacity to capture experience as it emerges in the immediacy of the moment from the client's body, and in the surprising and often powerfully evocative forms it arouses in the client's consciousness" (Ong, Mellor and Chettri 2020, 9)

Art therapists work organically with large, deep buckets of clay called clay fields for deep immersion. Working with clay in this manner can be so evocative that researchers are strongly cautioned to instead work thematically and with small balls of clay that are not very wet, which mitigates the danger of triggering unresolved trauma during the research process (Ong, Mellor and Chettri 2020, 9-10). As mentioned earlier in the chapter, to ease the participants into the experience of working with clay, I invited them to represent their names in the clay during our first session. I provided only a small ball of firm clay for each participant, along with paint brushes and small cups of water for those who needed parts of their clay to be wetter to create their sculptures. It was striking how quickly the group were immersed in the activity and how rich the images and symbols that emerged from this nighty-minute introductory session were. It gave me confidence that I had chosen the right medium, and I was excited to see what would emerge from the body maps.

In the second session, I invited the participants to create a representation of their bodies in clay. My intention was for these sculptures to be painted and embellished in the following session, highlighting areas of the body that might hold specific stories of wellness. In sessions four and five, I planned to invite the participants to create a collective environment for the individual sculptures and explore the collective stories of wellness. However, the second session did not follow the path of the first session. While the participants were very attached to and happy with their name sculptures, many of the participants hardly wanted to look at their completed body sculptures. Beautiful imagery and valuable data emerged from these sculptures, which I will discuss in detail in chapter three, but only three of the participants were initially willing to reflect on their body sculpts. I tried to understand what had happened in this session during the group reflection:

Uné: “How did it feel to build your sculptures today?”

Daniëlle: “I never want to see this thing again.”

Jay-Maree: “It was very uncomfortable.”

Uné: “Why do you think it felt so uncomfortable?”

Jay-Maree: “It wasn’t uncomfortable, it was just not *that* comfortable.”

Koekie Bock: “Today I felt like a child. I knew I was going to make a mistake, but I still have to do it, I have to try and get it right. Even though you are going to make a mistake. And then you feel like a child.”

Uné: “That is interesting because yesterday you also said you felt like a child playing. But that felt nice. It sounds like this time, feeling like a child didn’t feel nice?”

*Collective agreement from the group.*

Uné: “I had planned to continue with the clay tomorrow, to continue with these sculpts. Is that okay?”

*No eye contact and no answer from the group.*

Uné: “Should we rather leave the clay? Are we done with it?”

Cheslin: “I would say we should rather talk with each other more so that we can find each other. Then the love will be able to live between us. Then we will understand each other.”

*Collective nods and murmurs of agreement from the group.*

From the limited information that the participants were willing or able to share with me about the discomfort they experienced while creating their body sculpts, it sounded and looked to me like the name sculpts the previous day evoked emotions of pleasure and freedom linked to childhood memories, and the body sculpts evoked feelings of shame. Since this was not a therapeutic process, and I would not be able to safely support twenty-six participants to work through these feelings, I decided not to continue with the clay. However, I was worried that some participants might be invested in their sculptures, so with the next two sessions, I invited anyone who wanted to continue working with it, the opportunity to do so. Only two participants opted to continue working with their body sculpts.

In keeping with a co-created process, I valued the groups' guidance to “talk with each other more” (Eckhardt, et al. 2021, Swanepoel and Conradie 2023). I wanted to continue with the concept of mapping as the method of exploration, so I adapted an activity that I learned from drama therapist Marlize Swanepoel, who is also the founding director of sp(i)eel arts therapies collective, for our third session. During the days prior to the third session, I walked around the farm, collecting natural objects such as sticks, stones, and acorns that would have become part of the body sculptures. I also brought a variety of found objects, such as sea shells, with me. These found natural objects, as well as a variety of craft materials, were displayed on the art table. Working individually first, the participants were invited through a step-by-step process to represent a typical day using the objects. The participants shared their individual maps with each other in small groups of five. Each of the groups was then invited to create a collective map, noting the potential places and moments for connection. These collective maps were shared with the bigger group for reflection. The atmosphere shifted back to the playfulness of the first session. With a lot of laughter and a willingness to reflect on their creations. During the last two sessions, the participants worked on a final collective map that was to be shared at the showcase.

## Sharing knowledge in a liminoid space

Community theatre is an experience that can be filled with joy, insight, empathic dialogue and mutuality (Turner 1982, Bucknall 2016, K. C. Chinyowa 2013, Laver, et al. 2022). Turner (1982) coined the term liminoid to refer to the sense of communitas, multiplicity and freedom through play that happens when an individual or a group shares their creative output with others. Liminoid works include art, music and performance that are "often part of social critiques or even revolutionary manifestos" (Turner 1982, 55). This transformative and critical potential of the arts as a medium for social change is in line with Boal's (1985) Theatre of the Oppressed. The playful and dynamic qualities of what Turner describes as liminoid is "more of an invitation than an instruction, offering possibilities rather than settled meaning" (Laver, et al. 2022, 656). I included a showcase as part of the research process for two reasons: (1) for the participants to be able to share what they have discovered with the wider community and (2) for the wider community to have the opportunity to contribute to the discussion and to share in the communitas created among the research participants.

Our final research session was dedicated to preparing for the showcase. The participants created an interactive collective artwork that would be displayed. They did not want their original name sculptures, body sculptures, and group maps to be on display. Instead, they asked me to create a PowerPoint presentation to explain the process. For this presentation, I had permission to use images of their art and videos of their reflections. They also performed a song, which I recorded and incorporated into the presentation. Finally, the whole group prepared and performed a short skit. Ten additional community members attended the showcase. The atmosphere in the hall was electric. The presentation was received like a film, with spontaneous gasps, laughter, affirming comments, and additional information from the research participants. The interactive artwork was embraced, and the final performance was joyfully delivered and received. There was a real sense of celebration in knowing that this knowledge was created here, for us, by us, and it belongs to us.

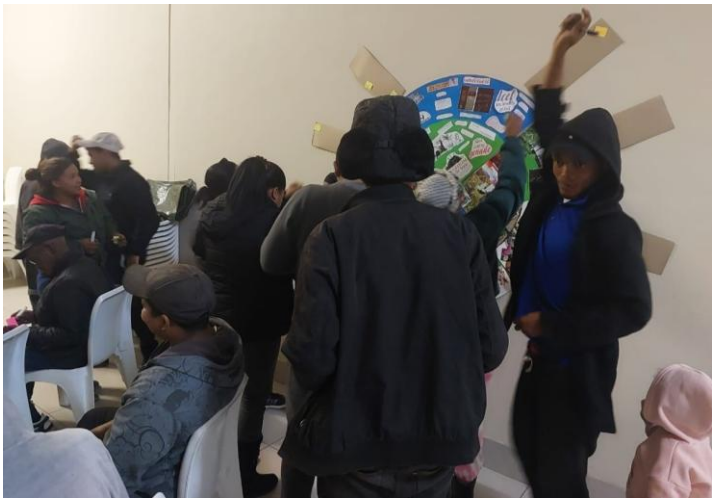


*Image: Community engaging with the collective art piece, Dwarsrivier 2024.*

The value and potential of arts-based research methods will be missed if they are engaged only as a means of gathering data. Arts-based research can be a transformative process that

highlights and honours the embodied knowledge of research participants. Engaging in practices that blur the borders between observer and observed can create a liminal space for free expression, allowing voices and ways of knowing that have historically been silenced to emerge with power and clarity. The concept of liminality shows us how a research process can be structured not only to accommodate but also to celebrate the complexities of bodies in flux through creative play and shared joy.

The stories and knowledge unveiled through such research are not merely artefacts; they embody agency, resistance, creativity, and repair. By utilising playful and immersive methods, the research process has the potential to open pathways for collective healing and understanding. What is more, incorporating arts-based methodologies into research is one way of ensuring that the knowledge gleaned is not only respected and given a space in academia but also serves those to whom it belongs.

# Chapter 3: Wellness as Wholeness

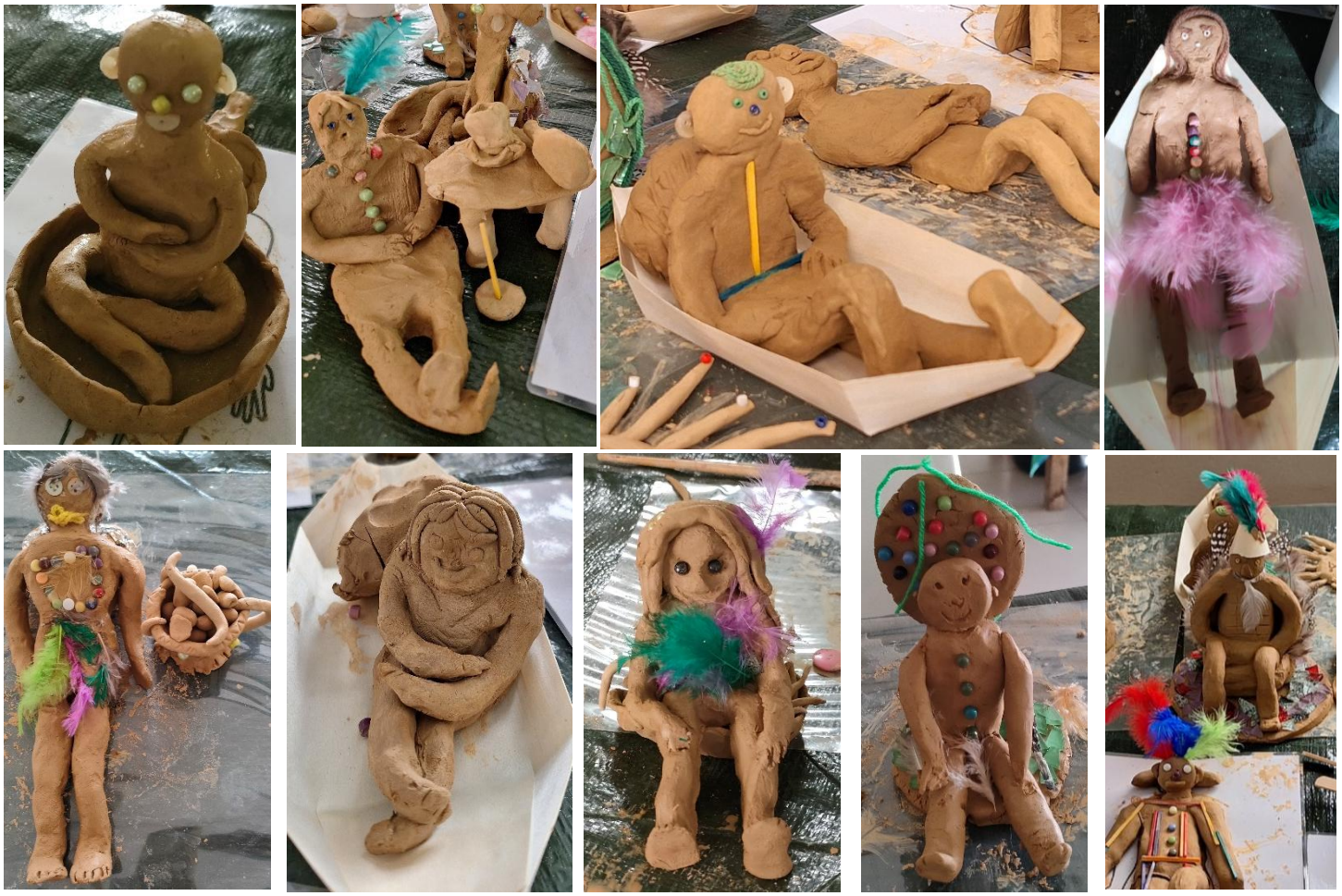
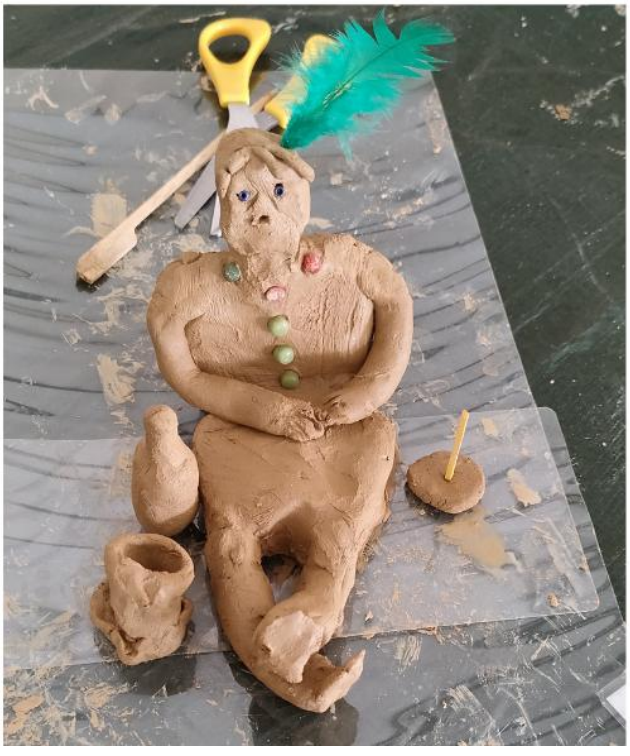


*Image: Collage of body sculptures, Dwarsrivier, 2024.*



Scan this QR code to experience Christina sharing the story of he body sculpture

**Image: Christina Jenzel's Body Sculpture, Dwarsrivier 2024**

*Chistina: I built this little man from my heart. This little man has come very far, and he has worked very hard. And he tells me that he needs to relax. And everybody knows on this farm, everybody needs to relax. And everybody needs a little rest. And everybody needs a little wine.*

On the second day of the research project, I opened our session with a simple breathing activity. I invited the participants to first become aware of their breath, to just notice how it feels, how fast or slow, how deep or shallow. I asked them to also pay attention to their bodies, to notice where they might be holding tension or feeling pain, and to send their breath to the parts of their bodies that they feel might need some care, releasing that tension with a full exhale. This led us to the warm-up activity for the session, where I wanted to create an opportunity to playfully explore some of the sensations that the participants might have become aware of during the breathing activity. I invited them to start moving their bodies and to find a movement that felt good. The participants then exaggerated this movement and made it repetitive. Going around the circle, each participant shared their movement, and the group mirrored it. There was a lot of emphasis on backs, shoulders and hips. And there was a lot of deep exhales and laughter.

From there, I invited the participants to use the clay and any of the craft materials on the table to create a sculpture that represents their own bodies in relation to wellness. Unlike the previous day, when everybody was happy to share their name stories, only six of the twenty-six participants were willing to talk about their body sculptures. However, a common thread came out in the six body stories, which I also observed in the casual conversations between and with participants as they worked: we need rest and relaxation. We moved back into our circle for a group reflection, which I suspected would revolve around the institutional practices that led to the overworked and tired bodies I had seen in the sculptures and earlier that morning in the movements. Instead, the discussion turned to unity and harmony: the unity of mind and body, the search for harmony within a community, and the central role that feelings play in the rupture and repair of these bonds. In this chapter, I will unpack our discussion around three themes: (1) the mindbody in an environment that harms, (2) the collective mindbody in an environment that harms, and (3) feelings of safety as they relate to wellness from embodied perspectives.

Day two reflective discussion:

Uné: It looks to me like the theme of relaxation—we need to relax—is a big one in this. I see all of the statues lying down or sitting down and being held by a chair, a bowl, or a tree. And I am wondering what is standing in the way of being able to relax. Why is it such an urgent thing?

Mario: If I had to say, I would say we don't relax enough here on the farm. Because you have children… even if you are off on a weekend, you still have work to do, you can't really rest. So what I think, if you can get the opportunity to go to the beach, to go and relax, or somewhere else, away from the farm, then you will feel more like you have rested.

Uné: I hear you. I've heard many people say, " I have to go away somewhere." Are you saying that because your home and your work are in the same space, it doesn't feel like you ever switch off?

Mario: Yes.

*(Agreement from the rest of the group)*

Jan: I made a little man. And he is calm, legs crossed, arms crossed. He is full of peace and full of love, and I like that.

Uné: Full of peace and full of love. Since yesterday, peace and love have come up repeatedly. And is that something that is hope? I wish for love and peace. Or is this something that is an experience, here is love and peace?

Group: Hope.

Maritha: A hope and a wish.

Joseline: We want to find it.

Jan: Love and peace are the only things that will remain.

Uné: If it is so important, why is it only a hope? What is in the way of love and peace being something that you already experience?

Mario: I would say communication gaps because we are not inclined to talk about our feelings. You keep it to yourself.

*(Collective murmurs of agreement from the rest of the group)*

Mario: So if we can communicate with each other more, then we will sort out our problems more. But I keep it to myself. I don't talk to this person or that person, so I keep it to myself. And with that burden, you then sit for the rest of your life. We don't want to talk. We don't communicate with each other.

*(Emphatic agreement from the group)*

Uné: And can that be another thing that causes this tiredness?

*(Group nodding in agreement)*

Uné: So now we have another thing, we have the work, and I never get away because my work and home are in the same place. And we have these things that we carry, almost like burdens that we carry on our backs that hurt so much, our shoulders that hurt so much, our legs that have to be so strong because of how much we carry. We carry all these things and never let it out. Could that be another reason why it feels so important to get away? I need to go somewhere else to rest. Am I putting words in your mouth?

Jerome: I would say, it could also be because you are not letting your brain get away. I give an example: when we play soccer, you do not think about your work or your house for that hour. Even if you read a good book. So you overwork yourself physically by using your brain. What you put in your brain, you put in your body. And if you put negative things in your body, your body will give

negative things back to you. So, what I do to switch off from my work and my home, do something that you like. Don't do something that makes you think about work or problems.

Daniëlle: Cut off from it.

Jerome: Cut off. Read a book. Don't go for a walk because your brain is going to run away with you. But make a garden. Make food. These are good things that can cut you off. That is why I love playing soccer. For that moment, the only thing that we think of is what we are doing. If you feed your brain positively, your body will begin to respond positively.

Koekie Thys: My opinion is, we must start singing together. These guys can sing well. We are walking one road as we are sitting here, but when we leave here, we disagree with each other. If maybe we can stay busy, look, we have to rest also, but if we can stay busy working together, then love, as Jan said, then there can be love and peace. Because as we are here now, we are one, but as soon as we leave, it is every person for himself. At home. At work. Everywhere. It is like that everywhere. There must be a way to solve the things between us. It is actually small problems. There has to be a way to solve it.

*(Agreement from the group)*

## The mindbody in a harmful environment

Jerome insists that "what you put in your brain, you put in your body." This is biologically accurate because our brain is one part of our nervous system, which also includes our spinal cord and all of the connections between it and the rest of our body. Importantly, it also includes all of the connections between our organs, back to our spinal cord and brain. From a biological perspective, how we function on every level, our thoughts, emotions, actions and aspirations, is a result of our nervous system's continuous communication between the brain, spinal cord and body and the body, spinal cord and brain (Maté and Maté 2022, Van der Kolk 2014, Porges and Porges 2023). At least biologically speaking, it is fair to say that if we want to discuss changing the self in any way, the nervous system must be part of the conversation.

Jerome goes on to say: "If you put negative things in your body, your body will give negative things back to you". Candice Pert (1997, 18), the neuroscientist who discovered the opioid receptor, which is the cellular binding site for endorphins in the brain, said in her pioneering book *Molecules of Emotion*, "I've come to believe that virtually all illness, if not psychosomatic in foundation, has a definite psychosomatic component". This is not to say that the illness is imaginary, which has become the popular understanding of the word. Pert refers to the true roots of the word: psyche, as in mind and spirit, and soma, as in the body being one. More recently, physician Gabor Maté (2022, 60) declared in *The Myth of Normal,* his seminal book on the connection between stress and disease:

> *"That evolution has furnished us with instincts, emotions, complex behaviours, and individuated organs and systems does not, in the slightest way, diminish this unity. No matter how sophisticated our minds may be, the fact remains*

> *that their basic contents—what we think, believe consciously or unconsciously, feel or are prevented from feeling— powerfully affect our bodies, for better or worse. Conversely, what our bodies experience from conception onward cannot but affect how we think, feel, perceive, and behave."*

Modern research in psychoneuroimmunology confirms what Jerome innately knows: that even speaking about a brain-body connection is misleading because connections still imply that they are separate entities (Maté and Maté 2022, Pert 1997, Van der Kolk 2014). An embodied perspective implies oneness: from the cerebral cortex and the brain's emotional nuclei to the autonomic nervous system, the immune system, the hormonal organs, the stress response system, and the internal organs, it is all one (Maté and Maté 2022, 60). Both Maté and Pert speak of the mindbody to emphasise this oneness.

Not only is the mind and body one, so is the mindbody and the environment. The belief in human separateness is a deeply entrenched one, with the current definition of nature in the Oxford Dictionary reading: "the phenomena of the physical world collectively, including plants, animals, the landscape, and other features and products of the earth, as opposed to humans or human creations." According to this definition, humans are in direct opposition to nature, with no mention of their bio-directional influence and dependence on one another. Conversely, the embodiment model shows that we are entangled with the environment to the same extent that the mind is entangled with the body (Lock 2020, Maté and Maté 2022).

In the past couple of decades, there has been a shift in psychosocial and biosocial inquiry towards a re-biologization of the world. In *Recovering the Body* Margret Lock (2017, 2020) discusses the "post-genomic" era where the human genome is no longer seen as the main driving force of life and disease. With the discovery of epigenetics and the microbiome, scientists are now proving that humans are, in fact, more bacteria than human, and our interaction with our environment changes gene expression (Lock 2017, Maté and Maté 2022). Modern science is beginning to understand what African healing knowledge has proclaimed all along, that wellness does not exist in separation:

> "As health is a balance of everything in existence, disease then results from the breakdown in relatedness, including disharmony between the individual and the rest of the Universe" (Makanya 2014, 303).

The research participants reveal their ruptured relationship with Dwarsrivier in their need to remove themselves either physically or emotionally from the environment to find rest and repair. Mario says, "if you can get an opportunity to go to the beach…or somewhere else, away from the farm" while Jerome suggests ways to mentally "cut off". While for many, Dwarsrivier's breathtaking landscape with 5500 hectares of rock formations, fynbos and vistas is the place that they escape to for rest and repair, for those living on Dwarsrivier, the environment is marred by colonial and capitalist labour practices. Even though the participants did not elaborate in this conversation on their working and living conditions, I

know from previous visits and casual interactions that most of the labourers work twelve-hour shifts from six o'clock in the morning until six o'clock in the evening, six days a week. This is outside of harvest season, when workload increases. I know that CCTV cameras have been installed in some areas to monitor how many breaks workers take, that the footage is monitored, and that wages are deducted when breaks are too frequent or too lengthy. The nearest town is an hour's drive away, and while accounts about the transport situation differ, it is clear that most families feel compelled due to lack of access to town to buy food at the farm shop "on the book". Transport payments for the children to and from their boarding school are deducted weekly. Wine can also be bought "on the book" on Mondays and Fridays, which is then deducted from the weekly wages. These deductions and accumulating debt make some families feel stuck because they cannot earn enough to pay off what they owe.

Maté (2022, 61-63) explains the biological impact that stressful living and working conditions have on wellbeing. He argues that acute stress, which is a threat that arises and can be addressed in the moment, is adaptive and makes a person more alert and more energised to deal with the threatening situation. Chronic stress, however, occurs when a threat is prolonged and beyond an individual's capacity to address, which has the opposite effect because it floods the mindbody with stress hormones for too long, causing a surplus that affects the whole system. Prolonged exposure to stress hormones like cortisol can lead to hypertension, heart disease, and other cardiovascular complications. It can also cause hypervigilance and exhaustion, which have serious implications for a person's ability to build and sustain healthy relationships (Erickson 1991, Maté and Maté 2022) Psychiatrist and traumatologist Bessel van der Kolk (2014, 54) further explains that a person's ability to mobilise or respond in a threatening situation will greatly affect how traumatising that situation is and how pervasive its impact is on the mindbody. Therefore, it is important to note the participants' feelings of wanting to leave the harmful environment, even if temporarily, but being unable to do so.

Christina tells us at the very beginning of the chapter: "*And everybody needs a little rest. And everybody needs a little wine.*" I have decided not to dedicate a chapter to alcohol use on farms, which the subject certainly deserves. I do, however, feel it is important, at the very least, to honour Christina's voice by pointing out that while it has been well established that unrecognised and untreated trauma can lead to substance use as a means of self-medicating emotional and often physical pain, what tends to be left out of the discussion is that substance use is a mindbody response to living in a state of hypervigilance because it offers "a state of temporary freedom" (Maté and Maté 2022, 232). In a casual conversation with Koekie Bock, she told me, "People think that wine is the problem. They keep on doing alcohol intervention programs. The wine is not the problem, the problem is that we are hurting." Maté (2022, 63) emphatically states that substance use, as with all ailments and resulting diseases, is the mindbody's normal reaction to an environment that is hostile and unbalanced. What is not normal is the historical, structural and institutional violence that Jerome encourages his colleagues and neighbours to "cut off" from.

## The collective mindbody in a harmful environment

Throughout the research project, the participants presented love and peace as the ultimate signs of wellness. Brenwill explained: “To be well is to help someone. If you are well, others can also be well. If my community were well, you would see understanding, a lot of care, a lot of love, and you would see hope.” It is striking that even though loving relationship is held in such high esteem, the group agreed that love and peace are not their lived experience. That, as Koekie Thys said, “It is every person for himself. At home. At work. Everywhere. It is like that everywhere.”

Koekie Thys is not only describing the lived experience of the Dwarsrivier farm labouring community, but she is also describing the essence of neoliberalism. Bruce Alexander (2000, 502), professor emeritus of psychology at Simon Fraser University, writes, “free market societies inevitably dislocates their members from…traditional family, community and religious ties…which allows an unencumbered pursuit of individual and corporate wealth.” Dislocation, comparable to the Marxist term “alienation”, describes the lack of psychosocial integration, which refers to a person’s experiences and interactions with a group as well as that group’s experience and acceptance of the person. Dislocation is a rupture in the fundamental human need to connect with one another, with oneself, and to find a sense of meaning and purpose. Maté (2022, 288) argues that “dislocation is now an entrenched facet of 'normality' in our culture”.

South Africa is historically also a site of brutal mass physical and psychic dislocation, first through colonialism and then through apartheid. On Dwarsrivier’s website it reads: “The Khoisan[3] people, who lived in harmony with the natural environment, inhabited the Cederberg area from early times, leaving behind a rich legacy of rock art. Then, during the mid-1800s, another resilient group of people set foot in the remote Cederberg – the Nieuwoudt family.” Some of the farm labouring families living on Dwarsrivier have been working and living on this farm or neighbouring farms for as long as the Niewoudt family has occupied it (personal correspondence). This is the only mention of them or their ancestors on the website.

[3] The term Khoisan is offensive to many self-identified indigenous-descendants because of its history in colonial-era physical anthropology and racist science. Indigenous San and Khoi groups were the first to make contact with European settlers in Table Bay and came to be classified as ‘Cape Coloureds’ under colonial rule. The term was also assigned to enslaved and groups of people from the East and other parts of Africa (Bam 2021, xxii) Since the abolishment of Apartheid in 1994, some San and Khoi groups prefer not to be identified as “coloured”, asking to be recognized as a distinct group with their own identity. A reaffirmation of Indigenous heritage is not only important for a sense of belonging but includes a geographic rootedness, ownership, entitlement and heritage (Van Wyk, 2016:37-38). This is vital when speaking of matters such as dislocation. Cantemporary traditional structures campaignes for ‘San and Khoi’ as the preferred term (Bam 2021, xxii), which is why it is the term that I will use. The matter of indigeneity in South Africa is complex, and terms continue to fluctuate. For an in-depth discussion, see June Bam’s 2021 book, My Ausi Told Me: Deep Listening and Intergenerational Knowledge from the Cape.

Cape San and Khoi philosophies towards land were similar and can be described as: the land is not ours, we belong to the land. Restriction of movement was enforced on nomadic San and Khoi peoples after the first Khoi and Dutch war in 1659 . Beyond the wars that followed, in the 17th and 18th centuries, Dutch settlers used their technology in the form of firearms and horses to defend the land taken from Cape San and Khoi communities, as well as their link to Cape Town bureaucracy to claim choice watered land and in a "slow, non-catastrophic process" that squeezed San and Khoi out of their ancestral spaces, restricting their access to the springs and other water sources that they needed to survive (Fourie & Green, 2015:199).

It is striking how colonial records from the 1400's describe San and Khoi communities: "They lived without crimes and misdemeanours united and governed only by their own natural love of justice and mildness of disposition…"(Bam 2021: 37). It sounds like the love and peace that the research participants are searching for. It is in stark contrast with what a Dutch farmer wrote about San and Khoi labourers in 1981: "lazy, they love to drink, they swear and fight at the slightest provocation and are generally immoral" (Lesch & Casper, 2017:415). These are the labels that are often imposed on individuals and communities, who, according to Maté (2022, 10-15), are reacting in synchronicity with our human biology to a world that is no longer normal due to the extent of relational rupture experienced and inflicted. The experience of dislocation is that of not being completely separate but of having a devastating inability to mobilise, like a dislocated limb. It is excruciatingly painful and a potent source of illness, addiction, loneliness and despair (Long 2021, Maté and Maté 2022, Alexander 2000).

When I asked the research participants why love and peace were not a lived experience, Mario had a clear and profound answer, "…because we are not inclined to talk about our feelings… if we can communicate with each other more, then we will sort out our problems more. But I keep it to myself… And with that burden, you then sit for the rest of your life." Standard psychotherapeutic practices internalise emotions, meaning that this inclination not to express feelings will be traced to individual childhood traumas in the psychotherapeutic lens (Long 2021, Maté and Maté 2022, Van der Kolk 2014). In *Nation On The Couch*, Professor of Psychology, Wahbie Long (2021, 19) quotes Carl Jung's principle of "psychic relatedness" as "the part of my heart that seeks to touch others." Long explains that emotions are not private; they are intersubjective experiences that exist between people. "Emotions are mainly social, they connect to the world." What Mario is describing is a devastating rupture in the community's ability to connect with themselves and with each other, which is rooted in historic and current economic and political forces.

South African psychologist and executive director at the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, Nomfundo Mogapi (2021) says that South Africans suffer from a 'wound of the heart'. Our country's history of dehumanisation and dislocation through colonisation and apartheid left a society bleeding (Gobodo-Madikizela 2016, Prager 2016, Vieyra 2015, Havsteen-Franklin, et al. 2021, Mogapi 2021). What is more, with the fall of the Apartheid regime, there was the promise of a collective future marked by equality that has yet to materialise. Late president Nelson Mandela spoke of the country's diverse population as intimately connected to the land and, therefore, a nation that has the potential to be at peace

with itself and the world (Vieyra 2015, 60). In this narrative, post-apartheid South Africa was to be a symbolic monument to an inclusive ideology where racial differences are no longer a source of division and oppression but rather celebrated as diversity (Gillson and Ross 2019, Gobodo-Madikizela 2016, Vieyra 2015). The lived reality is a nation socially and economically still divided by race. The original wound is deepened by yet another blow: the loss of our ideal future.

Further compounding this dual blow of historical and structural violence is the witnessing, perpetrating and being a victim of the routinised interpersonal violence, which is the lived experience of the majority of our citizens. Long (2021, 27) attributes this violence to the feeling of shame that comes with dislocation. He explains that it is impossible to enslave people without making them inferior in every aspect, and as we continue to live "in a world lorded over by whites," the experience of being black is "shame and self-contempt". This self-contempt is turned outwards and erupts as violence, not against the oppressor but against the oppressed, "the shameful person cannot tolerate, let alone inspect, their own wounds, so they wound others" (Long 2021, 82).

Critical and decolonial trauma scholars have noted that trauma is understood in the dominant Western paradigm as an individual health problem (Scrine 2021, 5). Even in the seminal work of traumatologist Bessel van der Kolk (2014), trauma is defined as distinct, time-limited events. This vaulnerabilizes groups of people and the harm they experience, focusing on the individual's suffering and measuring "healing" as the extent to which the individual can endure in a system that continues to harm (Scrine 2021, 5). In post-conflict societies such as South Africa, we are looking at collective, historical and ongoing trauma due to a historically and structurally violent environment (Erickson 1991, Gobodo-Madikizela 2016, Long 2021, Mogapi 2021). Long (2021, 60) explains that although apartheid is thought of as the cause of trauma in individuals, "our society is disinclined to regard the victims of structural violence as being the victims of trauma". According to Kai Erickson (1991:460), this type of collective trauma can harm the bonds between people and disrupt the sense of community. While individual trauma results from a mental injury that prevents a person from responding appropriately to an event or ongoing disempowerment, collective trauma damages the social fabric that once provided a sense of safety and purpose, causing a damaged social organism, similar to a damaged body. From a psychosocial perspective, the pervasive rupture the research participants are describing in their relationships with each other is the result of the multiple layers of intergenerational violence that they have endured as a community.

## A theory of safety

Stephen Porges (2023), director of the Kinsey Institute Traumatic Stress Research Consortium, says, "The need for safety is so central to our survival that virtually everything we are drawn to or enjoy is, in some way, a reflection of this need." He theorises that the search for safety is a primary organising principle in human society and evolution and that safety is not objectively determinable but rooted in how the mindbody perceives the environment (S. W.

Porges 2022, S. W. Porges 2023, Porges and Dana 2018, S. W. Porges 2011). Porges explains that, through evolution, mammals have developed mechanisms to find safety in unsafe environments, and that these mechanisms influence social behaviour, health, and wellbeing. This is the basis of the Polyvagal Theory, which Porges first proposed in 1994 in a presidential address to the Society of Psychophysiological Research titled "Orienting in a Defensive World: Mammalian Modifications of Our Evolutionary Heritage. A Polyvagal Theory."

From the perspective of Polyvagal Theory, feelings of safety[4] are determined in the minbody through the autonomic nervous system, which has a direct influence on behavioural patterns, relationships, cognitive processes, and health. (S. W. Porges 2022, 1). The traditional understanding of the autonomic nervous system is that it consists of two opposing subsystems that are in a constant tug-of-war for control: (1) The parasympathetic nervous system, which activates a desirable rest and digest state in the body, and (2) the sympathetic nervous system, which activates the well know fight-or-flight state. The vagus nerve is part of the parasympathetic nervous system and acts like a highway carrying messages from the body to the brain and vice versa. The literal translation for vagus is wanderer, an appropriate name for a nerve that touches many organs from the viscera to facial muscles (S. W. Porges 2023). The vagus nerve is well known for the role that it plays in relieving stress when it is activated, which is why there are so many vagus activation tips and exercises on social media. Through his research to develop new methodologies to measure vagal activity in neonates, Porges realised what he calls "the vagal paradox", which is that the vagus nerve can be both protective and life-threatening because vagal activation is also associated with bradycardia (extreme slowing of the heart) and apnea (inability to breathe) (Porges and Porges 2023, 67).

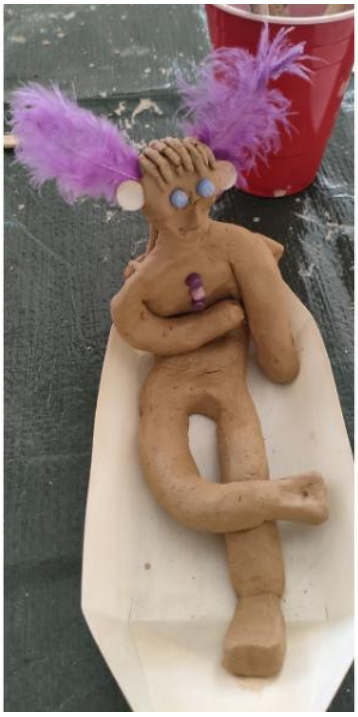
To better understand the vagal paradox, Porges looked to comparative anatomy, where he found that there are two branches to the vagus nerve, which evolved sequentially (S. W. Porges 2023, 2). The dorsal vagal branch plugs into a part of the brain stem called the dorsal vagal complex and is the most primitive part of the vagus. The dorsal vagal complex can also be found in the asocial reptiles[5] from which modern mammals evolved. When the dorsal vagus is activated, it could be debilitating. The ventral vagal branch is plugged into the part of

[4] Feelings of safety refers to a "felt sense" which is not a mental state, but a physical one. It also does not refer to safety in an objective sense, where safety can be theoretically achieved when the threat is removed (S. W. Porges 2022, 2)

[5] The critiques against Polyvagal Theory are (1) that it doesn't account for birds and their social behaviours and (2) that many modern reptiles, such as crocodiles, display complex social behaviours. Porges rebuts these critiques by pointing out that Polyvagal Theory is concerned with modern mammals becoming social creatures through evolution and how this shift resulted in anatomy that aids social behaviour as a conduit for healing, homeostasis and survival. The theory does not include the reasons for these evolutionary shifts but focuses on what can be observed from comparative neuroanatomy and the inferences that can be made from an estimated phylogenetic timeline. Birds and modern reptiles diverged from ancient reptiles millions of years after mammals and have different mechanisms to facilitate their social behaviour; they, therefore, fall outside the scope of Polyvagal Theory. (S. W. Porges 2023).

the brain stem called the ventral vagal complex, and it is a relatively modern development in mammals. This branch is restorative when activated (S. W. Porges 2021, 4).

The dorsal vagal complex is involved with the activation and regulation of organs in the gut and viscera to support homeostatic functions. When we are in life-threatening danger, the dorsal vagal complex is activated, affecting every organ in the body to slow the heartbeat and breath down beyond a calm state towards a dissociative state (S. W. Porges 2022, S. W. Porges 2023). It is what allows animals to reflexively play dead when they are under extreme threat and to essentially conserve resources under extreme duress as a tool for survival. Rational thinking and the neocortex are not involved in this process; it is triggered by feelings that come from the gut and the heart. This freeze or dissociated response happens when the threat is so great or so enduring that activating the sympathetic nervous system (the fight-flight response) is futile. It is merciful because there is no fear and little pain in this dissociative state (S. W. Porges 2021, 3).



Scan this QR code to experience Micheala sharing her name story

**Image: Micheala Zass's Body Sculpture, Dwarsrivier 2024**

*Micheala: We had to depict ourselves, and I could just see myself on a little vacation, in my little boat, sitting and looking out over other places. That is why I made him, because that is how I sometimes feel. To just climb into something and disappear over the waters. Because here everything gets too much for me. That is why I made a little man that looks like he sits on his little boat and goes away with me.*

From a polyvagal perspective what Micheala is describing could be how she feels when her dorsal vagal complex is activated. To get away from everything that "gets too much" for her, she doesn't scream, or fight or run away. We do not get a sense of high energy from her description that is typical when the sympathetic nervous system is activated. Instead, she

“climbs into something and disappears over the waters”. This is what a dorsal vagal state feels like. Everything is slower and muted. There is a drifting away from what is going on around you and you cannot be reached by other people (Dana 2020, Porges and Dana 2018). It is a mercy when you are in an unbearable situation that you are unable to change or escape from. In the dorsal vagal state, however, the mindbody systems that support communication and connection are deactivated to conserve energy for survival.

Porges suggests that to raise vulnerable offspring and build communities in a dangerous world, modern mammals evolved to activate another autonomic state that would allow them to communicate, cooperate and socialize as a means of survival. To develop the ability to seek safety from others and to project safety to others, the mindbody had to create a way to downregulate the sympathetic nervous system, which is the highly energised fight-or-flight defence state, by lowering our breath and heart rate, but not to the extent of the dorsal vagal state, which is also a defence state but is essentially paralysing. Porges theorizes that the vagus nerve evolved to include the ventral vagal complex to achieve this (S. W. Porges 2023, S. W. Porges 2022, S. W. Porges 2021).

The ventral vagal complex houses the trigeminal and facial nerves, which cause sensation in the mouth, head and face, allow us to express emotion and regulate the muscle in the middle ear, which allows us to dampen background sounds and hear speech. It also houses the glossopharyngeal nerve, which allows us to speak, and the accessory nerve, which controls the muscles in our head and neck that allow us to shrug and vocalize through our larynx and pharynx. Together, these are the muscles that enable us to be social and expressive beings. When the ventral vagal complex is activated, we can hear and listen to others better, our voices are more expressive and less monotone, our faces are more expressive, and all of this signals safety to those around us, making the interaction enjoyable. On the other hand, when one of our defence states (sympathetic nervous system or the dorsal vagal complex) is activated, our faces and voices are less expressive, and we have a harder time listening to and hearing other people’s voices. We also have a harder time digesting food. Our bodily systems that support our ability to socialize and to repair are shut down to conserve energy for immediate survival.

If we look at Mario’s comment about the community’s inability to communicate their feelings in a way that could repair ruptured relationships from a Polyvagal perspective, we could interpret this devastating disconnect as an indication of a community operating predominantly from their defence states. Koekie Thys’s comment that “we are walking one road as we are sitting here” on the other hand, indicates that while the research participants were in the research venue, participating in the research process, they were operating from a ventral state. The breathing and moving activities that I incorporated at the beginning of the session are well-established ways to activate the ventral vagal complex and I included them in a deliberate attempt to regulate defensive states because reason and reflection are dependent on the activation of the ventral vagal complex. Koekie Thys goes on to say, “But when we leave here, we disagree with each other,” reiterating that in everyday life, the community is likely predominantly functioning either from the sympathetic nervous system or the dorsal vagal complex.

The answer to why a community's defence states could be activated even if they have a strong desire to connect lies in what Porges calls neuroception. Porges suggests that from a nervous system perspective, our visceral sensory experiences are more important than cognition when it comes to determining our autonomic state, which is why objective safety does not determine behaviour (S. W. Porges 2022, Porges and Porges 2023). The term neuroception emphasises a process that is distinct from perception in that it doesn't require conscious awareness; it is a type of intelligence that is not a cognitive intelligence where "the neural evaluation of risk and safety reflexively triggers shifts in autonomic state without requiring conscious awareness" (S. W. Porges 2022, 5) When we experience pain, for example, we react to it before we are able to identify the source of the stimulus, this is a form of neuroception. Neuroception is why we sometimes walk into a room and feel immediately tense or immediately at ease. The autonomic nervous system feels inside, outside and between bodies for cues of safety and cues of threat. These cues form habitual patterns of connection or protection that shape how we respond in the present moment by creating neural pathways for defence and neural pathways for connection (Dana 2020, Porges and Dana 2018). What the research participants are describing when they say, "We can't talk about our feelings", or "It's every person for himself", is neural pathways of protection activating defence states instead of the ventral vagal complex, which supports social engagement. Neuroception is an important component of Polyvagal Theory because it removes blame and shame that we hear when Mario says "we don't want to talk" as if it is a character flaw or bad choices that they are wilfully making. It also challenges the traditional idea of many talk therapies and social intervention programmes that if people change the way they think, it will change the way that they behave.

None of the three autonomic states are in essence "good" or "bad". They all serve an important role when we can move between them to respond optimally to our current situation (Porges and Dana 2018, Dana 2020). The devastating effect of trauma is that the mindbody privileges cues of threat over cues of safety (Dana, 2020, 24). The dorsal vagal complex and sympathetic nervous systems are meant to be activated for short bursts of time. Trauma, from a Polyvagal perspective, is when the "goalpost" for detecting safety moves because of a severe[6] and/or persistent threat. The mindbody is reprogrammed to detect danger in places and situations where it would not have done before (Porges and Porges 2023, Porges and Dana 2018). The experience of trauma is the experience of rarely feeling safe enough to benefit from connection. Individuals and communities become "stuck" in fight or flight and freeze or dissociative states for extended periods, which is devastating to their ability to form healthy social bonds. This puts the callous words of the Dutch farmer in 1981 in a different perspective. Porges would argue that what he was describing was a community stuck in defensive states because of centuries of violence inflicted on them. It also explains the feelings of being stuck in a cycle of conflict that we hear from the participants and from

[6] Each person will experience threat differently. Severe threat cannot be determined through objective measurement. For some individuals a car accident will cause a trauma response and for others it will not (Dana 2020, Porges and Dana 2018, Porges and Porges, Our Polyvagal World: How Safety and Trauma Change Us 2023).

Koekie Thys's plea, "There must be a way to solve the things between us. It is actually small problems. There has to be a way to solve it."

Polyvagal Theory asserts that simple social interactions, a warm smile, a calm melodic voice, laughter, and playfulness can activate the ventral vagal complex in others. This is why Porges argues that social engagement in itself is a vital portal for activating the bodily systems that support repair and wellbeing. He calls this ability to simultaneously receive and project cues of safety to and from others co-regulation. Polyvagal Theory totes co-regulation as a biological imperative, as vital as food or sleep (Porges and Porges 2023, 86). It creates a feedback loop of safety and is how our bodies can maintain balance in an unstable world. Porges would say that what Nancy Scheper-Hugh and Margaret Lock (1987, 29) describes in *The Mindful Body* is the essence of Polyvagal Theory and co-regulation in action:

> "The language of the body, whether expressed in gesture or ritual or articulated in symptomatology (the "language of the organs"), is vastly more ambiguous and overdetermined than speech. We might, perhaps, think of those essentially wordless encounters between mother and infant, lover and beloved, mortally ill patient and healer, in which bodies are offered, unreservedly presented to the other, as prototypical. In collective healing rituals, there is a merging, a communion of mind/body, self/other, individual/group that acts in largely nonverbal and even prereflexive ways to "feel" the sick person back to a state of wellness and wholeness…"

Koekie Thys suggested in the reflection, "We need to start singing together." She told me later that she came to the farm as an orphan and had to grow up "with complete strangers". But, she explained, "I sang a lot. Where I worked, I sang, everywhere I sang, and that is how I built myself up." The suggestion that singing might be the community's path back to each other came up regularly during the process. Christina, who was born on Dwarsrivier, said, " We are beautiful singers on this farm. My biggest desire is that we start singing together again." Tannie Elizabeth, who has been living on the farm for 5 generations, told me, "We used to sing together all the time. We were known for our singing. Back when we sang together, this was a warm place to be. We were one." Singing is a known way to activate the ventral vagal complex. If the community sings together often, it could facilitate co-regulation and create new neural patterns of connection, which is the only way to move out of habitual states of defence. Jerome's suggestions of playing soccer, reading, cooking and gardening are also excellent examples of activities that activate the ventral vagal complex. From a polyvagal perspective, it is not a surprise that the research participants have embodied knowledge of how to find their way back to each other because it is a biological imperative.

Long (2021, 16-17) speaks of a political unconscious that will be ruled by the stories of its past and present "in an unconscious attempt to master the original traumas inflicted by colonial and apartheid rule" if they are not brought to the conscious mind. Polyvagal Theory similarly shows how the collective body can be biologically ruled by a violent past and present if habitual autonomic defence states are not interrupted by spaces, people and activities that activate the ventral vagal complex. The wounds of the heart that drive our behaviour and our very ability to pursue our biological imperative for connection can only repair when they

become part of our consciousness, which in turn can only happen when the minbody feels safe with another.

The seminal works of Gabor Maté, Bessel van der Kolk and Stephen Porges acknowledge the interconnectedness of emotions and physiology, recognising them as dynamic processes that occur within the context of relationships, from personal to cultural. They highlight that while biomedicine tends to emphasise individual behaviour and pathologies as it relates to health and wellness, at a fundamental level, we exist only as interconnected organisms. These observations by three men who are experts in the Western biomedical model of care resonate with the embodied knowledge of the research participants, whose emphasis on love and connection has scientific merit within and beyond Polyvagal Theory. Porges (2023, 96-98) captures it vividly when he explains that positive social interactions release the well-known "love hormone" oxytocin, which manages key aspects of our reproductive systems and also allows us to form bonds with friends, family and community members. It is a hormone that is intimately involved with the mindbody's ability to heal and with the autonomic nervous system's ability to navigate a precarious world. Wounds heal faster when oxytocin levels are higher, and high oxytocin levels correlate with an increased ability to cope with stress and duress. It is a powerful anti-inflammatory and antioxidant. Most poignant for me is that if you put undifferentiated stem cells in a culture dish with oxytocin, they bundle together and become heart cells that beat in harmony, which is why oxytocin is thought to play a central role in the mindbody's ability to heal heart disease. The wounds of our hearts, in all of their forms are healed by the same hormone that facilitates love and connection.

# Chapter 4: Rupture and Repair

In the second half of the research project, I shifted the focus from individual sculptures to collective artwork because the research participants requested more opportunities to work together. The participants divided themselves into smaller groups, and my invitation was to use found objects and craft materials to create a collective map of a typical day, noting where there are moments of connection or the potential for connection. One person from each group created a narrative for their map, which I refer to as a story of repair. The maps and stories that developed from this invitation are not realist representations of everyday life; they are abstractions meant to disrupt the colonial gaze that perpetuates stereotypes and the binaries of romance versus tragedy and abjection versus redemption that are often associated with representations of marginalised life (Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón 2019, Welcome and Thomas 2021, Mullings, Sobers and Thomas 2021).

Through their multimodal work in Jamaica, Anthropologists Leniqueca Welcome and Deborah Thomas (2021, 13-14) show how abstraction can serve as a form of repair, as it invites audiences to feel in relation to others rather than feeling for them. Similarly, this chapter is not concerned with representing the truth of what was and what is but rather with generating reflexive conversations that embrace ambiguity and create reciprocal relationships among curators, archives, and audiences. To guide the conversation, I identified four overlapping constructs that emerged from the maps and the stories: Time, Space, Spirit and Capacity. These constructs are reflected as cycles of rupture and repair that revolve around a common centre, which is the differentiated me embedded in the collective we. I discuss how the participants' stories of repair and their reflections on these stories resonate with the seminal works of two South African anthropologists: Fiona Ross's research on the experiences of women who testified before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in her book *Bearing Witness: Women and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa* (2003) and Thomas Cousins' exploration of the relationships between labourers in the timber plantations of KwaZulu-Natal in his book *The Work of Repair: Capacity after Colonialism in the Timber Plantations of South Africa* (2023) as well as the role that multimodality and the applied arts can play in highlighting, exploring and supporting the multivocal and fluid nature of rupture and repair.

## Time

Scan this QR code to experience Mario's narration of the map

**Image: Group map of daily rupture and repair, Dwarsrivier 2024**

*Mario: First, we have a little seashell; you can see that it is placed upside down because sometimes you feel so trapped. You have no desire to get up, you have no desire for life. And the beads that we placed here, are us as people that came together. And the rocks depict the hard life that we have to endure. Then we get to the candles; these two work together, this one and that one. But this one, you have to shine your light; you have to display what is good in you so that everybody can see what is good in you. And then we get to the acorns. Sometimes, you feel like that; you are on a path, and the acorns crack. Sometimes, you feel like you just fell down, and you have no desire to get up; you just want to stay down on the earth. And then this little cap is a swimming hole. And if we think about swimming, we think about enjoyment, laughing and joking, splashing with each other and lovely times. This little bird and these feathers are also connected; it is about like I said earlier, I want to go away. Fly, soar high so that everybody can see you. And this last candle is also about being seen. And this is oom Jan's stick, love and peace – you need to always remember in life. And then you can see here is a little thing far to the side. It has a little door. So, if we put all of these things together and we feel very happy, then we go around and around, and then we go in there, and then we feel very safe inside there. So, at the end of the day, we want all of these things outside of the little home; we need to try and make it fit inside of the house and look at where we can do better, where we can do different, what can we do to address all of these issues.*

Addressing and investigating social and political issues through the arts is not a new idea. Aristotle presented theatre as a powerful tool for influencing society because he theorised that art is fundamentally an imitation of nature. Imitation here does not mean copying or replication; it refers to a deeper re-creation that captures the internal movement of things toward their perfection, which Aristotle called "mimesis". When he states that "art imitates nature," it means that art seeks to recreate the creative processes inherent in nature and portray them in a way that conveys embodied knowledge about existence and human experience (Boal 2008, 3). Theatre practitioners draw on mimesis to create what applied theatre theorist and political activist Augusto Boal (2006, 74) later termed a "metaxis" - the state of belonging simultaneously to two different autonomous worlds: the reality of day-to-

day experience and the aesthetic reality of theatrical representation. This dual consciousness allows participants in applied theatre to critically examine their lived experiences through dramatic distance while maintaining emotional connection and authenticity (Jones 1996, Thompson 2009).

Aristotal's theories focused on theatre as a product and how this powerful characteristic of the arts can be used to emotionally manipulate audiences into adhering to the status quo. Boal developed a theatre where the focus is the process of creation and where the imitative quality of the arts becomes a medium for social change through a reciprocal and co-creative relationship between performer and spectator or witness and witnessed (Nicholson 2015, Boal 1995). The theatre that emerges from the group's artwork, layered with Mario's narration, is rooted in the co-creative processes developed by Boal and is meant to express the essence of the research participants' individual and collective experiences rather than just their surface appearances. Because it is the essence that is expressed, the audience will also be reflected in this theatre. In this sense, what we experience when we engage with this layered work of art and performance and what the research participants accomplished in its creation is not a captured moment in time; we are all engaged with the dynamic processes of existence and transformation that characterize the natural world. The arts, therefore, become a medium through which we can explore and express the boundless process of becoming.

It is the potential of the arts to cast the research participants, the researcher and the audience or reader as both witness and witnessed that draws Welcome and Thomas (2021, 3) to abstraction. One of the traps that anthropology can fall into is to freeze things in time by turning them into objects to study (Mullings, Sobers and Thomas 2021, 408). Abstraction, in the context of multimodal research, facilitates refusal, repair and what Thomas (2019) calls Witnessings 2.0., which refers to a nuanced and relational practice of engagement with violence and trauma. We can see this in the story that the artwork elicits from Mario. Although the artwork resembles a clock, Mario's story of rupture and repair does not follow a linear progression. Despair and hope, and oppression and freedom are intertwined and repeated in cycles in search of connection.

Through her seminal work on South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), Fiona Ross (2003) demonstrates how repair in the aftermath of state-sponsored harm is an ongoing negotiation of past experiences, present challenges, and future aspirations as individuals and communities actively engage in processes of personal and social reconstruction. The value of a close examination of the TRC processes, she explains, is "to reflect on how suffering is given voice and acknowledged" (Ross 2003, 1). Giving expression to suffering and having it witnessed is recognised across disciplines as a vital component of repair. However, Ross's work interrogates the assumption that stories of violent relational ruptures are waiting to be told and that laying them bare will necessarily offer catharsis as the truth that sets us free. She shows that remembering and witnessing harm is nuanced and complex, and recounting it within set narrative frames, such as those imposed by the TRC, hinders repair, in part because of the relationship that trauma has with time (2003, 32, 80).

Jeffery Prager (2016, 5-6) a Psychoanalyst specialising in trauma and memory describes trauma as a "memory illness." He explains the roots of trauma as past events, which manifest in the present through thoughts, feelings and behaviours triggered by memories that often remain unconscious. Essentially, traumatic memories disrupt the normal flow of time, causing individuals to relive past pain as if it were happening in the present, leading to a sense of timelessness. Bessel van der Kolk (2014, 171) explains that during the events that cause trauma, certain brain areas that are responsible for integrating experiences, such as the medial prefrontal cortex and the thalamus, shut down. This impairs the mindbody's ability to contextualise the events, making it difficult for individuals to recognise that "that was then, and this is now." The assumption underlying the TRC was that to repair the wounds of apartheid, it is essential to address memories of violence in the present rather than attempting to forget or ignore them and that re-telling and re-contextualising the narrative of the event, distinguishing the past from the present, will facilitate repair (Prager 2016, Ross 2003).

Both Prager (2016) and van der Kolk (2014) agree with this assumption, but van der Kolk highlights the complexities of talking about events that result in trauma. He notes that while finding words to describe what happened can be meaningful, it does not always support repair. He emphasises that traumatic memories are often disorganised because they are primarily stored as fragmented sensory and emotional imprints rather than as coherent narratives with a clear beginning, middle, and end, which can make it overwhelming for individuals to articulate. When a traumatic event occurs, the brain's normal processing mechanisms can become overwhelmed, leading to a breakdown in how experiences are integrated and remembered. This results in memories that consist of isolated sensations, images, sounds, and intense emotions, which are not properly assembled into a story. We can see and hear the ability of the arts to hold and express the sensory and fragmented nature of remembering suffering and oppression when Mario says, "*First, we have a little seashell; you can see that it is placed upside down because sometimes you feel so trapped…And the rocks depict the hard life that we have to endure...and the acorns crack… Sometimes, you feel like you just fell down, and you have no desire to get up; you just want to stay down on the earth.*"

Moreover, the act of remembering events that caused trauma can cause individuals to relive the physical sensations and emotions associated with it, which may not facilitate repair as intended. Van der Kolk (2014, 182) states, "When people fully recall their traumas, they 'have' the experience: They are engulfed by the sensory or emotional elements of the past". He also points out that exposing someone to their trauma through talk alone does not integrate the memory into their overall life narrative and that it is the integration of the memory, not the sharing of it, that supports repair. During a one-on-on reflection with me, Jerome touched on the significance of integrating the sensory memories of harm, *"Becoming well is a personal, inner sensation of how you physically feel about your past and about your future. And what change can you bring to what happened in your past, and what can you influence or correct in your future".*

Boal (1995, 2, 22) emphasises the use of images as a primary means of integration, stating that rather than recreating past events, the work focuses on the "here and now," engaging with the reality of the image rather than the image of reality. We can see in Mario's performance how he engages with the reality of the image. He points to each object as he systematically draws his story from them, but more than that, he embodies the essence of each object as he speaks, contracting and expanding his body as his story moves between oppression and freedom and hope and despair. The notion of catharsis in Boal's theories represents a significant theoretical evolution from the Aristotelian model, fundamentally challenging and reimagining its sociopolitical function. Aristotle viewed catharsis as a purgation of emotions that ultimately served to maintain social order by relieving spectators of their revolutionary potential. Boal reframes it as a catalyst for critical consciousness and social action. He developed what he termed a 'dynamization' approach, where emotional release is coupled with critical analysis and active participation, transforming spectators into 'spect-actors' who rehearse concrete possibilities for social transformation (Boal 2008, Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz 1994). From Boal's perspective, how Mario closes his story is an indication of catharsis, *"So at the end of the day, we want all of these things outside of the little home; we need to try and make it fit inside of the house and look at where we can do better, where we can do different, what can we do to address all of these issues."*

In her article, *Healing deurmekaar: theatre, social change and praxes of potential*, applied theatre practitioner Deborah Vieyra (2015, 2-9) uses the term "deurmekaar" for its dual meaning: to denote complexity and confusion, but also as it translates literally to "through one another." She suggests that the applied arts are an ideal medium to engage with the complex, disorganised, and sensory nature of trauma because they embrace complexity and chaos as a generative force that moves away from hegemonic narratives of suffering, which oversimplify and silence important stories. Without absconding perpetrators or ignoring harm, storytelling through the arts can move beyond the search for the "truth" of who did what to whom towards integrating the past and the present through collective meaning-making. This resonates with Welcome and Thomas's (2021, 2) discussion of multimodal research as a vital method for decolonising anthropology and enabling more nuanced and affective understandings of complex social issues, particularly those related to race, violence, and representation. They emphasise that multimodal practices, which allow for the incorporation of various forms of media and mediations in academic practices, facilitate sensory ways of knowing and engaging, which can lead to collective learning, collaboration, public engagement, and reflexivity.

Both multimodality and the applied arts as research methods and pedagogical approaches address the central question of audience in the representation of violence and suffering and the process of repair (Boal 2006, Cohen-Cruz 2010, Mullings, Sobers and Thomas 2021, Thomas 2019). It has been well established that when trauma is ignored, it is passed on across generations through various physiological, psychological, and social mechanisms (Maté and Maté 2022, Van der Kolk 2014). Storytelling through the arts creates a platform where witnessing and being witnessed can happen simultaneously and where narratives can flow between past, present and future to foster deeper connections and understandings of violence beyond representation. Ross (2003, 32) writes of the performative quality of some of the women's testimonies at the TRC hearings, as their language was rich in imagery and metaphor, and their gestures added layers of meaning and context to their testimonies. She describes how the audience was moved to respond with sounds and gestures of their own

and how they were sometimes reprimanded and silenced. When the arts are shared in a collective practice, the layers of metaphor created through image, sound, and movement not only reflect something of every person's story but also give depth and meaning to stories of harm, opening them up for exploration (Boal 1995, Vieyra 2015, Chinyowa 2013).

Boal (2008, 22) speaks of the unplayable becoming playable. Both the rigidity and the chaos of trauma can become fluid in the aesthetics of storytelling through the arts. There is an important return of influence and agency when this happens. A central feature of events that cause lasting harm is that the individual or the group have an inability in that moment to change the outcome of what is happening. Regaining a sense of influence and agency in the aftermath is vital for repair. Doing so collectively is vital for intergenerational repair (Van der Kolk 2014, Prager 2016). We see a glimpse of this agency and influence in Mario's story when he summarises, "And then you can see here is a little thing far to the side. It has a little door. So if we put all of these things together and we feel very happy, then we go around and around, and then we go in there, and then we feel very safe inside there."

## Space

Scan this QR code to experience Jerome's narration of the map

**Image: Group map of daily rupture and repair, Dwarsrivier 2024**

*Jerome: We talked through our day, and then we put all of our days together, as you go through your day and through your life. When we get up in the morning, especially me, it is difficult to get up. Especially now in the cold, because you feel like a rock, you just want to keep lying there. It is difficult, it is heavy, but you have to get up because you have a task to complete on this day. And then, as you get up, you go look for the Father, the Lord. And we used the candles to show that peace, that rest, that time spent on your knees with the Lord. And also, Maritha said, that little shell, it is just you and the Lord, like you are covered, protected. And that is how you start your day physically; it is hard to get up, but you also find peace. And then, in your day, you also find glitter and gold and silver. And with gold and silver you can walk a long road, if you are with the Lord, even when it was difficult to get up. And as you go deeper into your day, you get to work and that is when you greet each other. It is a way of interacting*

*with each other. We have a piece of paper that shows a butterfly and flowers, and that is a way of, the way that nature looks around us. Here are beads, here are sticks, and that is all of your colleagues, whom you sometimes just pass, some you see at work, some make you angry, but then you can also see it in a new light. And that is a way of communication. But while you are together, some work individually, but many work in groups; you get to where we have some greenery and, again, gold and silver. And the greenery is again an opportunity for communication but without words. That is when I just do something for you that is good for you. That is going to influence your day positively, and that will lift your day. That is what brings this greenery. And then again we get, we used blue and a seashell and an acorn to just again say when it is time to clock out, relax. At home, just sit, take off your shoes, in your garden, in your kitchen, in your room, where you can just sit, relax and be comfortable. And when we depicted our day, we had candles to show that you can visit the Father again tonight to bring peace for what lies ahead for you tomorrow.*

In *The Aesthetics of the Oppressed* Boal (2006, 45-47, 130) suggests that the aesthetic space allows for the exploration of conflicts and contradictions inherent in social structures. It serves as a "magnifying mirror" that reveals behaviours that may be hidden or unconscious, and offers a form through which to rupture from the norm and disrupt dominant narratives, facilitating awareness and potential change. It is this rupture that facilitates repair by enabling participants to envision and rehearse new possibilities for action and interaction. Through this cycle of rupture and repair, individuals, communities and societies can explore ethical decisions and create dialogue around their experiences, thereby recognising resistance and strengthening connection (Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz 1994, Prentki and Preston 2009). Multimodal anthropologist Deborah Thomas (2019, 1) discusses a similar cycle of rupture and repair through the concept of constitutive tension, which refers to the dynamic and often contradictory relationship between the dominant logic of the plantation and the spaces of resistance and self-conception maintained by enslaved individuals. This tension encapsulates the struggle between the oppressive structures of modern sovereignty,rooted in colonialism and plantation systems, and the powerful assertions of humanity and community by those subjected to these systems.

In the context of Witnessing 2.0, this constitutive tension becomes crucial. Thomas argues that the act of witnessing is not simply about observing or recording events; it involves recognising the ways in which individuals and communities navigate and resist the oppressive regimes that define their existence (Thomas 2019, Welcome and Thomas 2021). By engaging with the affective and relational aspects of witnessing, Witnessing 2.0 allows for a deeper understanding of how these tensions manifest in everyday life and political struggles. Therefore, Witnessing 2.0 can be seen as a means to explore and articulate the complexities of constitutive tension. It facilitates an engagement with the historical and ongoing impacts of colonialism and slavery while acknowledging the agency and humanity of those who resist these oppressive forces. This approach emphasises the need for responsibility and recognition in the processes of witnessing, ultimately reshaping how we understand sovereignty, subjectivity, and community in a post-plantation context (Thomas 2019, 2-4).

In the applied arts, this process is often referred to as border crossing (Thompson 2009, Nicholson 2015). Boal (2008, xxii) calls it trespassing. He says, “to free ourselves is to trespass, and to transform. It is through a creation of the new that that which has not yet existed begins to exist. To free yourself is to trespass, to trespass is to exists. To free ourselves is to exist.” In the group map, we see numerous borders, and trespassing on them drives the plot in Jerome’s

story. Moments of personal and communal repair invade every space on the map. The weight of having to face the day is enveloped in moments of connection with the Divine, Self, nature, and each other, spanning home spaces, community spaces and workspaces. In The Work of Repair, South African anthropologist Thomas Cousins (2023, 18-21) describes the local practices of labourers in the timber plantations of KwaZulu-Natal, navigating the challenges of colonial displacement, racialised exploitation, and labour conditions. Repair is framed as a political act, where the act of repairing one's life and community is intertwined with broader ruptures caused by systemic injustices and the legacy of colonialism and apartheid.

Jerome frames the story of repair so clearly as concerning me and us, where we are and where we have been, when he says, "We talked through our day, and then we put all of our days together, as you go through your day and through your life." The mindbody as the site of harm is often the focus of research, and interventions as the site of repair. In *Counting bodies? On future engagements with science studies in medical anthropology*, Emily Yates-Doerr (2017a) revisits the influential framework proposed by Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret Lock three decades ago, which categorised the mindbody into three types: the individual/phenomenological body, the social body, and the body politic. This categorisation aimed to challenge Cartesian dualisms in the field of medical anthropology and emphasise the importance of the embodied experience of health and illness. Yates-Doerr (2017b, 154) proposes the concept of "translational competency", instead, which is a practice-oriented understanding of wellness that transcends the borders of body-focused models.

Both Ross's (2003) and Cousins's (2023) work support Yates-Doerr's arguments by showing how repair is an evolving practice that is deeply interwoven with kinship, community, and the material conditions of life. Cousins, in particular, highlights how repair manifests in ordinary, everyday actions and social projects rather than grand narratives or spectacular events (Cousins 2023, 22-23). The work that constitutes repair is, therefore, locally rooted and context-specific. In her article *Where is the local?* Yates-Doerr (2017b) interrogates the concept of locality within the context of health and healing. Through her work with scientists, politicians and activists in Guatemala, she shows the multifaceted nature of "the local", emphasising that "the local" is not merely a geographical territory but rather shaped by "heterogeneity of exposure." It highlights that different individuals within the same community can experience varied biological outcomes based on their unique exposures, which can span generations. The local is thus seen as a dynamic interplay of past and present environmental factors (2017b, 378).

Porges (2023, 128) explains from a nervous system perspective that past environments significantly shape a person's responses to present environments. The autonomic state of an individual, which is influenced by their past environments, serves as an intervening variable in how they react to current situations. For instance, if someone has a history of being in stressful or threatening environments, they are more likely to enter a defensive state when faced with new stressors, which can hinder their ability to engage socially or process information effectively (Porges and Porges 2023, 28). Moreover, when a person has experienced unsafe environments, their neuroception may become sensitive to cues that signal danger, even in benign situations. As a result, they might interpret neutral or safe environments as threatening based on their experiences of previous environments. This can manifest as hyper-vigilance, anxiety, or a tendency to shut down when faced with stressors that remind them of their previous harmful experiences or spaces, which is widely understood as triggers. Triggers are stimuli that provoke a strong emotional or physiological response

relating to past experiences that caused harm. These can be sounds, sights, smells, or even specific situations that remind an individual of a traumatic experience. When a person encounters a trigger, their nervous system may react as if they are in danger, even if the immediate context is safe.

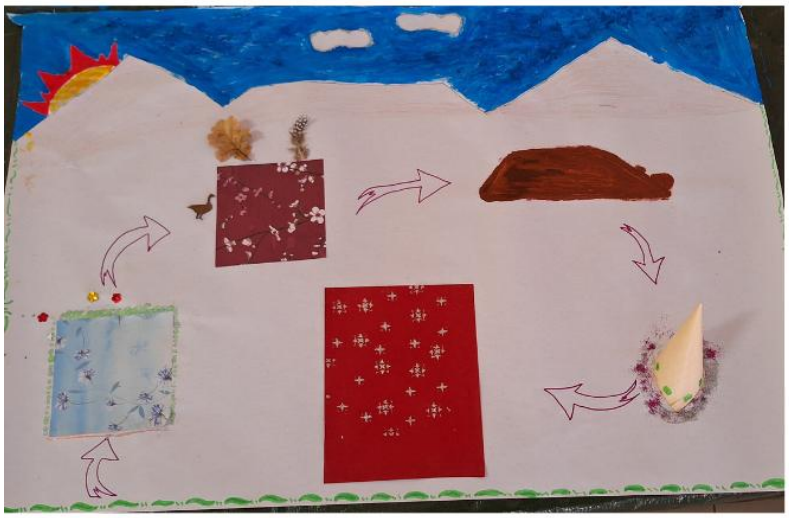
My ears perked up when I first heard Jerome talk about the glitter that they encountered throughout their day. Deb Dana (2018, 152), a clinical psychologist, interpreted the Polyvagal Theory for clinical practice. She identified glimmers as a counterpart to triggers. Glimmers are defined as cues of safety that arise from the ventral vagal state of repair. They represent small moments of positive experience that can calm a nervous system in survival mode and help restore autonomic regulation. Glimmers serve as important markers of safety amidst the potential for dysregulation. They can be fleeting, often manifesting as micro-moments of connection or positive feelings that stimulate the ventral vagal system, promoting feelings of safety and well-being. Jerome's story and the artwork that inspired it are filled glimmers: the candles that show peace and rest in the presence of the Devine, the little shell that lets you know *“you are covered, protected”*, the butterfly showing *“the way that nature looks around us”*, the greenery *“when I just do something for you that is good for you”*, to *“take off your shoes, in your garden, in your kitchen, in your room where you can just sit, relax and be comfortable”.*

Yates-Doerr (2017b, 388-390) also speaks of a “locality of connection” where “the local” is a resource for building global solidarity rather than a separate or opposing entity to the global. By focusing on specific instances of labour and social relations in the timber plantations of South Africa, Cousins (2023, 3, 14) highlights the complexities of human relationships and the ethical dimensions of survival in the face of colonial and neoliberal legacies. Cousins illustrates that local practices can inform global movements by providing lessons on resistance that are rooted in specific cultural and social realities. Overall, Yates-Doerr and Cousins demonstrate that "the local" is not a static or singular entity, but rather an ontologically partial concept shaped by various influences, including exposure, geopolitical structures, and connections across networks. This challenges traditional understandings of locality and calls for a nuanced approach that recognises the complexities inherent in how localities are constructed and experienced.

In his theatre of the oppressed Boal (1995, 27) engages with these concepts as they relate to intervention, education and repair through what he calls “the telemicroscopic nature of the aesthetic space”. The term "telemicroscopic" suggests a combination of "tele" (far) and "microscopic" (close), indicating that the aesthetic space enables participants to view situations from both a distance and in intimate detail. This duality allows for a nuanced understanding of complex social issues, where participants can step back and view the broader social context in which personal experiences occur to reflect on collective experiences and shared realities. Conversely, the microscopic aspect allows for close examination of individual feelings, thoughts, and actions. Participants can focus on their personal narratives and emotional truths, exploring the intricacies of their experiences. This detailed focus helps to uncover the layers of meaning behind personal stories, making it possible to connect individual struggles to larger social issues. The telemicroscopic potential of arts-based practices can facilitate a dynamic interplay between these two perspectives. As individuals share their stories, they can relate their personal experiences to the collective understanding of oppression and social justice. Moreover, music therapist Elly Scrine (2021, 8) shows in her article, *The Limits of Resilience and the Need for Resistance*, how the aesthetic space can

encourage reflection and dialogue, supporting participants to document their resistance strategies against oppression and to witness and celebrate acts of resistance, both personal and collective. All of the artworks and the stories that they inspired presented in this chapter are documentation and a celebration of the everyday acts of resistance against the historical, political, systemic and institutional harms that make "*you feel like you just fell down, and you have no desire to get up.*"

## Spirit



Scan this QR code to experience Cheslin's narration of the map

**Image: Group map of daily rupture and repair, Dwarsrivier 2024**

*Cheslin: To begin is the sunrise and we began this morning with prayer. On our way to work, we started greeting each other. Good morning. Loving. The wind blows through the trees; it is all love. The feathers say, as we are on our way, as people walk up to work, we greet each other. Hi, hello. Are you well? Everything is love. And then we walk towards the suffering. Where everything is so heavy. Then we don't know which way to go. Then, there are always two rocks on the road that you pick up. Sometimes you kick them, but sometimes you pick them up. Then those rocks tell you, it is actually unnecessary for you to suffer. Take those people that make you feel so heavy, take them all with you then you come to church. Sort your stuff out there where the Lord tells you, "We can't live like this amongst each other". And as we are talking amongst each other, the one person tells you, we should probably finish up, but it is so nice here. But it is getting dark now. Then one person tells you, we are not leaving; we are staying with the word of the Lord, whether it is dark or light. We stay with the word of the Lord then there is no time for discord or darkness. The word of the Lord makes everything light.*

It is striking how the participants featured rock in this map and the role that it played in Cheslin's story of repair. The entire map is set against the mountains, where rock is used to symbolise the heaviness and suffering of existence in the other stories; in this story, the rocks, when you pay attention to their wisdom, point the way to an alternative way of life. The Cederberg region is one of the richest areas of rock art in Southern Africa and forms one of the largest outdoor art galleries in the world (Parkington 2003, Deacon 1998). David Lewis-Williams (1990, 5), an archaeologist known for his South African rock art research, explains that "numerous San rock paintings apparently enter or leave the rock face". Though an

argument based on ethnographic and neuropsychological research, Lewis-Williams and his co-author Thomas Dowson conclude that San shamans would enter the spirit world through a tunnel, which in some instances began in rock shelters. Shaman artists would then paint visions from the spirit world as if they emerged from the rock, making the rock as ritually significant as the paint. “The rock is a veil between the material world and the spirit world on which those who travelled to the spirit world `fixed' their experiences” (Mowszowski 2001, 16). In *The Mind in the Cave: Consciousness and the Origins of Art* Lewis-Williams (2004) argues that rock art sites served as communal gathering spaces where spiritual ceremonies and trance dances created a shared experience that strengthened social bonds and spiritual connections. He suggests that modern images have the same spiritual power and that art has the power to unite or divide.

This communal aspect of rock art and its related ceremonies mirrors contemporary applied theatre practices, which Tim Prentki and Preston (2009, 9-18) describe as arts-based activities that bring communities together for collective reflection and transformation. The arts have long served as a powerful vessel for spiritual exploration and transformation by creating sacred spaces where the everyday is transcended to touch the eternal. In applied theatre contexts, whether in community settings, therapeutic environments or ritual spaces, the spiritual dimension of the arts takes on particular potency as participants actively engage in practices that blur the lines between performance, ceremony and inner journey. Jerzy Grotowski’s (2002) foundational work *Towards a Poor Theatre* and Peter Brook’s (1996) T*he Empty Space* show how theatrical techniques like collective breathing, sustained presence and symbolic gesture can induce altered states of consciousness similar to those found in meditation and prayer. The communal nature of applied theatre work often creates a profound sense of shared humanity and interconnectedness that many participants describe in explicitly spiritual terms.

The arts and spirituality play an intersecting role in individual transformation and collective meaning-making (Boal 1995, Brook 1996, Prentki and Preston 2009, Jones 1996, Thompson 2009). Boal (2006, 14,48,119) suggests that spirituality and the arts are intertwined because, in their essence, both involve the pursuit of identity and meaning in social reality. Officially, the workshop participants are members of the Moravian Church of South Africa. On their website (Moravian Church South Africa 2019), the church identifies themselves as the “first missionaries amongst the indigenous people of South Africa”. The website tells the story of George Schmidt who was sent to the Cape in 1737 by Count Ziegenbalg who, “while travelling on a ship of the Dutch-East-Indian Company back home to Germany had to halfway through his journey spend several weeks at the Cape where he witnessed the Dutch settlers’ treatment of the Khoi people (“Hottentot”) as lesser beings.” Schmidt believed that in order to understand the gospel, you have to be able to read the bible, which is why his first task was to “teach his Khoi brothers and sisters spoken and written Dutch.” The website claims that Schmidt was deported in 1743 because Dutch settlers were outraged by “natives” reading, writing and being baptised. The first Moravian church in South Africa was established fifty years later under Afrikaans speaking people in the Western Cape.

The relationship between Christianity, colonisation and later apartheid is fraught with violence and oppression. Through casual, individual conversations with the participants, it became clear that the church is an ongoing point of conflict in the community. From what I understood, the conflict centres around which pastors should be invited to the farm to lead the church. When I asked Jerome why the church was such a point of conflict and yet played such an important role in the participants' stories of repair, he answered, *"People feel very hurt, a lot of rage and a lot of anger. I believe we are at the point of change here on Dwarsrivier, I can see it. I notice that what we need is to come together at church, and yet church is something that causes a lot of hurt and a lot of anger. We need a new form of church, a form where we can sing and celebrate together. That will be good for us."* At the time of the research project, no pastors had come out to the farm in many months and the community had been gathering on their own, with no appointed leader, to reflect on the week together, to share stories of hardships and victories and to ask the Lord for guidance and strength for the week to come.

In their stories of repair, the participants spoke of a relationship with the Lord that was generative and protective. We see it in their references to the peace and rest that come with being in the presence of the Lord. Connection with the Lord was also strongly linked to nature. Danielle said, "The spirit within you is linked to nature. In the vineyard and in the garden, that is where you connect with yourself and the Lord. There is light for you. You open your heart and your soul, and in this way, you connect to nature throughout the day." It was striking to me that the participants never referred to themselves as Christian. They would say "I am a spiritual person" or "through my spiritual eyes". For these reasons, I am going to engage with their faith in their stories of repair more generally as spirituality and not specifically as the religion of Christianity.

The relationship between Love and spirituality in the participants' stories of repair mirrors how Cousins (2023) describes the relationship between Amandla and spirituality in the plantation labourers' work of repair. Amandla was a popular rallying cry of resistance used by freedom fighters against the apartheid regime. Protestors would call "Amandla!" and others would respond, "Ngawethu!" meaning the power (amandla) belongs to us (ngawethu). Cousins' (2023, 4) definition of Amandla moves away from an understanding of power in a conventional sense, where power is considered to be something that you have over others. He treats Amandla as an ethical substance that is central to how individuals navigate their lives, especially under conditions of extreme exploitation and fragmentation. In the work of repair, Amandla encapsulates the ability to endure, to act, and to forge relationships in an environment that is structured for apathy and rupture.

Love plays a similar role in the participants' stories of repair. Cheslyn says, "*The wind blows through the trees; it is all Love. The feathers say, as we are on our way, as people walk up to work, we greet each other. Hi, hello. Are you well? Everything is Love."* In his story, Love, as the source of everything, is what builds kinship as people "walk towards the suffering" together. It is the desire to end the suffering that brings the call from the loving earth to *"take those people that make you feel so heavy, take them all with you"* to the church, where the Lord will reveal how you can live together without suffering. Like Amandla in the work of

repair, the stories of repair show that Love is not about individual agency or a personal moral conviction but rather about a collective effort to absorb and redress the wounding effects of a history of harm and a system that continues to rupture relationships.

Cousins (2023, 131) shows how spiritual practices are embedded in the understanding of health and well-being. He describes a man named Siyanda who attributes his ill health to witchcraft, saying that jealousy from close kin manifested as physical afflictions. This illustrates how the protective potential of spirituality is contingent on relationships and that wellness is closely tied to repairing social and spiritual networks. From the outset, the research participants insisted that their wellness is predicated on their ability to build and maintain relationships. Their ability to build and maintain their relationships is dependent on their ability to embody Love, which is made possible through their connection with the Lord. Christina explains the relationship between embodied Love, spirituality and the capacity for repair in a one-on-one reflection with me,

> *"Something is lacking in the community and that is Love. We are spiritually broken down. Love is lacking because we only stand together when there is death and disease. But two or three months ago we started finding each other again. I think prayer played a big part in that because we were torn apart, but after we started playing with the kids, doing little performances with the kids and doing small functions like Mother's Day, I noticed that connection was beginning to repair. Through our weakness, we kept on praying, and now we are standing up. We sing, we do plays, we play soccer. We just all need to stand together. If we don't stand together, if we don't pray to the Lord to help us through this then it won't happen. But I believe we will get to the top, we will get where we want to be. And other people will see it. Especially like David (farm owner) will see it, and he will help us if he sees the community wants to move forward. Or anyone who comes here will see, Dwarsrivier is like it used to be; it is spiritual, you can feel it here, and help will come."*

Cousins (2023, 6, 23, 43) also shows how Amandla is rooted in a shared vulnerability to others and to the world. He discussed vulnerability as a necessary and constitutive aspect of human existence that is intertwined with the work of repair. It highlights the idea that individuals are not only susceptible to harm but also ask for acknowledgement of their capacities for both wounding and being wounded. He emphasises vulnerability as a vital quality that influences ethical conduct and relationships among people. In a post-conflict society like South Africa, where the boundaries between perpetrator and victim and oppressor and oppressed become blurred, repair involves recognising and nurturing these interdependencies, which are both spiritual and material in nature (Chinyowa 2013, Cousins 2023, Prager 2016). We can see the vulnerability and interdependence in the way that Christina speaks about Love. It was also central in Mario's story of repair, where shared suffering and shared hope were all brought into the same space where the community felt safe together. We see it in Jerome's story where *"the greenery is again an opportunity for communication but without words. That is when I just do something for you that is good for you. That is going to influence your day positively, that will lift your day."* Cheslyn shows how a spiritual connection creates the space for Love

when he closes his story of repair with, *"We are staying with the word of the Lord, whether it is dark or light. We stay with the word of the Lord then there is no time for discord or darkness. The word of the Lord makes everything light."*

To close the research session, the participants suggested a song, which they asked me to record and include as part of their art:

There's a tear in the rock
a shelter for me
There's a tear in the rock
a shelter for me
Lord take me with you, Lord take me with you
Lord take me with you, to the new Jarusalem.

Scan this QR code to experience the participants singing *Tear in the Rock*

**Image: Participants singing *Tear in the Rock*, Dwarsrivier 2024**

## Capacity

Capacity is a construct that Cousins (2023, 18-22) uses to discuss the resistance and endurance that is necessary to meet daily demands amidst exploitation. He emphasises that capacity is an ethical substance, reflecting on how individuals navigate their existence under conditions of oppression and fragmentation. He suggests that the augmentation of one's capacities is tied to ethical reflection and the relational dynamics of life and labour. We can see in the Dwarsrivier participants' stories of repair how they build the capacity to resist and endure through ethical reflection as differentiated individuals and as a collective, in private spaces and in public places. In a group reflection on the stories of repair, Christina said,

*"As we are sitting here, talking in this circle, it dawned on me, you start with prayer. You , in the morning at your home you start with prayer. And if there is no Love in your home, you can't go anywhere. And Love means there is hope for us too."* Cheslyn added, *"If there is something that has to be part of every day, then it is faith. Faith is something that you can hold on to. It is not something that will disappear. So if my friend has a problem or doesn't feel well, then I can tell him, can't I pray for you? He won't feel better immediately, but later*

*and with time, as he takes it in, then that faith that he got from me, will be part of him and he will carry it. And so it will go to the next person as well. Like a cycle.*

In her book *The Awakened Brain*, Dr Lisa Miller (2021, 139-140), a researcher of spirituality in psychology, shows how spirituality supports the capacity for repair by fostering deeper connections and a sense of belonging. In her most recent study, participants shared personal narratives related to stress, relaxation, and spiritual experiences while undergoing fMRI scans. The findings revealed distinct patterns of brain activity during the recollection of spiritual experiences. There was a noticeable deactivation of the Default Mode Network, which is linked to self-referential thinking and rumination. This suggests that spiritual experiences allow people to step back from self-focused thoughts, creating space for broader perceptions. The recalling of spiritual experiences also engages the Ventral Attention Network, which allows individuals to receive unexpected but personally meaningful insights and perceptions. This network is crucial for heightened awareness and openness to external stimuli, which makes it possible to make decisions based on information from the present moment rather than past experiences. The Frontotemporal Network, which is involved in processing emotion and relational bonding, was also activated, indicating that feelings of relational intimacy accompany spiritual awareness. Lastly, increased activation in the Posterior Cingulate Cortex and reduced activation in the Inferior Parietal Lobe suggested a softening of boundaries between self and others during spiritual experiences, leading to a sense of unity or connectedness. Together, these findings suggest that spirituality not only influences emotional processing but also enhances feelings of connection and bonding with others and the universe.

From a nervous system perspective, the capacity for repair, particularly in environments that harm, depends on the nervous system's ability to remain fluid by regularly shifting from defensive states back to the Ventral state where growth, connection and repair are supported. According to Porges (2023) and Dana (2018) this sense of fluidity in the nervous system can be cultivated through "a rhythm of reflection". A rhythm of reflection supports individuals and communities to identify moments of rupture in their relationships and articulate their experiences of disconnection. This practice fosters awareness of the autonomic responses accompanying these moments, allowing them to notice shifts in their feelings and behaviours without judgment. By naming and reflecting on these experiences, individuals and communities can begin to separate their autonomic responses from their personal narratives, reducing the burden of shame and facilitating a clearer understanding of their needs and reactions. It is striking how there is a clear rhythm of reflection in each of the repair stories discussed in the chapter. We see how the storyteller notices the felt sensation of the suffering and then looks for a glimmer to shift that sensation into something that can support connection before addressing, from a place of reciprocity, the roots of the suffering.

In her one-one-one reflection with me Christina noted that she started seeing a shift in the community's ability to connect with each other when they started playing with the children and doing little performances with the children. In Mario's story of repair, he also mentions a pond where they play together, splashing each other with water and laughing together. Porges

(2023, 42,162) emphasises play as a crucial element in developing a flexible nervous system, explaining that it is a form of "neural exercise" that helps individuals shift between different autonomic states. When you are chasing someone or being chased, for example, or you are performing in front of people, both your sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system is active. To negotiate new rules to the game or new lines for your character, you first need to downregulate the sympathetic nervous system. Engaging in play allows for the practice of moving back and forth between these states without getting stuck in defensive modes. Van der Kolk (2014) adds that activities that involve movement, rhythm, and collaborative tasks help individuals reconnect with their bodies and emotions, facilitating a sense of safety and agency. These experiences counteract feelings of helplessness and isolation that accompany trauma. He further explains that play offers a way to reconnect with others, express vulnerabilities, and rebuild trust in relationships, which is vital when trauma disrupts the social engagement system. The role of laughter in the capacity for repair is illustrated by a reflective game that Benwill described,

> *"I have three children, and it's, it's almost like a game. We call it LLH. So it is laugh, love and hope. So we planted little shrubs, the ones that you gave to me. The lavender is mine and then they planted the other ones for themselves. I water it during the week and they take care of it over weekends. I told them, you must watch what I did in the week and then on Sunday you must report back to me what happened, did the plant grow or what? That is the love that we put in and if you also go to the plant with a smile, if you laugh for him, then he will give you hope because he will grow."*

The applied arts possess unique capacities to facilitate repair through their ability to engage multiple dimensions of human experience simultaneously (Cohen-Cruz 2010, Thompson 2009). As creative practices, they offer both symbolic and literal spaces to process trauma, strengthen and rebuild connections, and imagine new possibilities for the individual and the collective (Boal 1995, Cohen-Cruz 2010, Prentki and Preston 2009). By engaging participants in embodied exploration and creative meaning-making, the applied arts transcend purely cognitive or verbal processing, allowing for the integration of emotional, somatic, and social dimensions of repair (Jones 1996, Boal 2006, Thompson 2009). This multifaceted approach is particularly valuable because it mirrors the complex nature of harm, addressing not only immediate impacts but also the deeper ruptures in social fabric, cultural continuity, and collective identity that violence creates. Through practices like collective storytelling, movement work, and participatory performance, the applied arts have the capacity to facilitate the co-creation of contained spaces where communities can engage with difficult material while building new patterns of relationship, resistance and repair (Boal 2008, Cohen-Cruz 2010, Prentki and Preston 2009). This capacity to hold both the work of processing past harm and imagining future possibilities makes the applied arts particularly effective in facilitating and supporting repair, especially in contexts where traditional therapeutic or reconciliation approaches are insufficient or culturally misaligned (Prentki and Preston 2009, Thompson 2009, Vieyra 2015).

Ross's and Cousins' seminal work on repair and the research participants' stories of repair highlight how experiences of rupture and repair, especially in historically and structurally violent environments, are deeply intertwined. Mario refers to being seen three times in his story. He is not seen as broken; he is seen as a light that shines, and he is soaring high. That being witnessed and being a witness is essential for repair is supported across disciplines, but

how we look and what we see is also important. In the South African context, rupture is not an acute event; it happens across time and space, blurring the lines between oppressor and oppressed and victim and perpetrator. Similarly, repair is not an event but moments of daily connection, resistance and growth. Spirituality and the arts as a communal practice serve as spaces for reflection where the multivocal and interconnected nature of rupture and repair can be explored and where the daily acts of resistance can be celebrated. The research participants explained that it is through our shared vulnerability, in our everyday seeking of our own light and witnessing of each other's light that we can begin to play together again, that we might find moments where we have co-created spaces that are safe enough to also hold a witnessing of the suffering that endures so that we can *"look at where we can do better, where we can do different, what can we do to address all of these issues".*

# Chapter 5: Endings and Beginnings

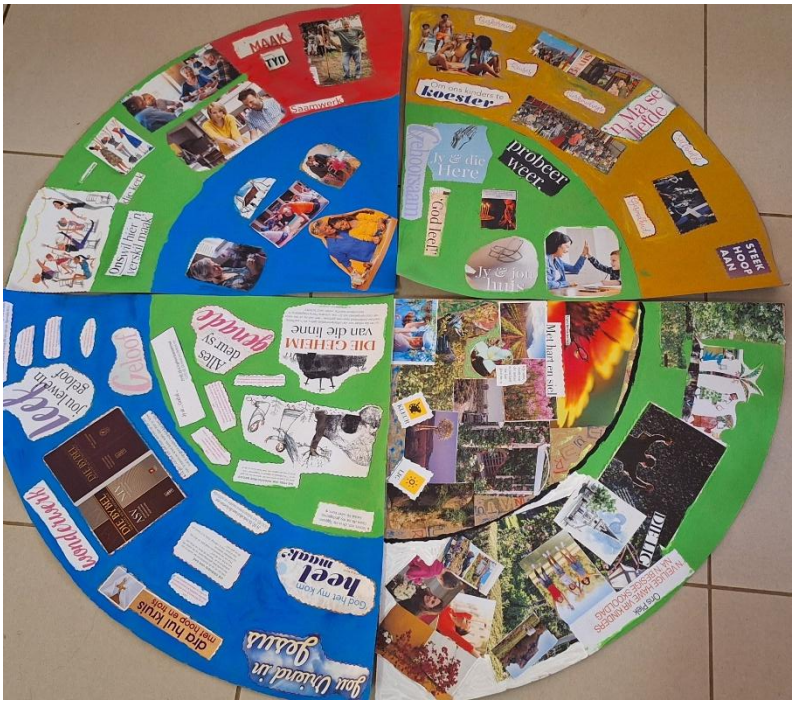



*Image: Light of Hope Wellness Map, Dwarsrivier 2024*

*"We have to notice the value in each other, otherwise we will all think that we have no value." Koekie Bock, Dwarsrivier 2024*

## Light of Hope

As we approached the end of our research process, the participants and I talked about how they wanted to present what we discovered to the wider Dwarsrivier community. They decided to present it as a map, shown in the image above. The map depicts ways in which the community can connect with self, each other, Spirit, and the land. It is a mix of practices that they already embody and practices that they want to embody in the future. They called this map Light of Hope.

Both light and hope were recurring themes in the participant's stories, artworks and reflections. Brenwill said in Chapter 3, "If my community were well, you would see understanding, a lot of care, a lot of love and you would see hope". Hope was not expressed as an individual emotion or a wish, it was a verb. Hope was coming together to reflect on what was, what is and what could be. Hope was expressed as the reason to "shine your light", which is how you show your value and power in the face of suffering. In Chapter Four, Mario's story of repair emphasises that shining your light not only reveals your own power and value but also reveals the power and value of those around you, and this is what builds the capacity for connection and repair in an environment that is structured for apathy and disconnect. The Light of Hope map mirrors the central argument of this thesis: that being witnessed and bearing witness in moments of power through shared vulnerability can strengthen connections and hope in environments that perpetuate harm.

## Embodied archives

One of my aims was to show how the arts can be applied to design a research process that is fluid, to illuminate past, present and future narratives and open them up for exploration in a way that supports multivocality. In chapter two, the concept of liminality served as a frame for showing how an arts-based research process can be structured to support fluidity. Referring to the transitional phase in rituals, liminality, as described by Arnold van Gennep and adapted by Victor Turner, offers a space where established power structures and societal norms are disrupted while the research participants are engaged in artmaking and storytelling, creating an opportunity for a shared experience and exploration that is simultaneously separate from everyday life and reflective of it. While participants are engaged in the creative processes, the boundaries between witness and witnessed, self and other are blurred. The resulting liminal space allows for a playful engagement with dominant narratives that traditional research methodologies might otherwise reinforce, nurturing radical potential and innovation. The colonial aesthetic no longer occupies the centre of such research; at the centre is the power of the people.

I also discussed how the fluidity inherent in liminal spaces enhances the potential for subconscious embodied knowledge to emerge through the artwork. As participants move through a research framework that is both predictable and flexible, their embodied knowledge becomes visible through metaphors and images that offer multiple perspectives and become open to individual and collective exploration. It is a process that highlights and supports the complexities and nuances of embodied knowledge and the entanglement of personal and communal stories. Ultimately, by rooting the research design in liminality, arts-based methodologies can transform the research process into one that celebrates resistance and repair, illuminating how research participants and communities can be supported in ways that align with their embodied knowledge of wellness.

My second aim was to highlight the research participants' embodied knowledge of wellness and repair in a way that also bears witness to their daily experiences of harm. In Chapter Four, I showed how applied arts and multimodal research practices are vital in illuminating participants' embodied knowledge, particularly in environments marked by violence and trauma, because the arts and multimodal research practices not only accommodate the sensorial nature of trauma memory but also support the integration of such memories. Drawing from multiple senses allows participants to express themselves in ways that transcend traditional verbal communication, which relies on a sequential recall which is disrupted during traumatic events.

Moreover, in Chapter Three, I discussed through Polyvagal Theory the vital role that the autonomic nervous system plays in effective and affective communication. I showed how participants who live in chronically violent environments are likely to have chronically activated sympathetic or parasympathetic states, which greatly affect memory, reasoning and connection to self and others. Arts-based practices are particularly effective in regulating the autonomic nervous system, which means that they support participants to return to a ventral vagal state from where they can participate from a place of connection.

I lastly aimed to add to an "archive of life" that celebrates the ways in which people resist historical and structural violence through daily individual and communal practices. From the participants' artworks, stories, and reflections emerged layered meaning-making that opened

up dialogues across time and space and highlighted the interplay between personal stories and collective histories. The arts-based research process facilitated a nuanced engagement with the participants' lived experiences as the participants not only recounted their experiences but also embodied them through the arts. What emerged was a reflection of the participants' perception, ideals and dreams, which enlightened both past and future actions.

Because the artworks were abstractions and not realistic representations, they disrupted the colonial gaze, which represents marginalised communities in binaries of either well or unwell, broken or whole. Instead, the participants expressed rupture and repair as existing simultaneously. They showed how everyday interactions like greetings and shared moments of laughter can strengthen connections that counteract the isolating effects of ongoing systemic violence. The images and metaphors also generated reflexive dialogues between the participants and the researcher, the researcher and existing texts from multiple disciplines and potentially also between this document and the reader. Just as the participants were both witnessed and witness during the research process, the researcher and the reader also play the dual role of witness and witnessed. There is a reciprocal relationship that can continue to develop beyond the research process and the borders between "us" and "them" begin to blur as everyone is revealed in a process of becoming.

## Valuing the wellspring stories

In Chapter One, I referred to the aboriginal wisdom of Dadirri, which tells us that in a world that perpetually ruptures, we have a deep inner knowing of how to become whole again and that repair happens when we habitually reflect on these wellspring stories together. The concept of embodiment, when viewed through an anthropological and applied arts lens, suggests that we can access our wellspring stories through the arts and share them as embodied knowledge. While a colonial gaze on marginalised communities highlights harm, deficit and pathology, the wisdom of Dadirri says that it is our wellspring stories that we need to tell over and over again if we are hoping for repair.

Throughout this thesis, I showed how the embodied knowledge of the participants supports the wisdom of Dadirri and revealed profound insights into wellness and repair that are locally rooted and globally relevant. There is a striking resonance between the wellness philosophies and practices that emerged from the participants' wellspring stories and contemporary wellness research in neuroscience, anthropology, psychology and the applied arts. They highlighted the value of understanding wellness and repair beyond the current dominant body-focused models, showing repair to be communal, evolving and alive in everyday interactions with self, spirit, each other and the land. The participants spoke of the need for weekly gatherings where they can share stories of hardships and triumphs, reflect on what they might want to change in the coming week and celebrate life together through song and dance. Their deep inner knowing of the importance of coming together in this way reflects studies across disciplines, which show that Arts-based practices can blur the lines between performance, ceremony, and inner journey and can become spaces for regular communal reflection that can strengthen social bonds and a collective capacity for repair.

This research demonstrates that wellness is not necessarily rooted in the absence of harm but in the presence of connection through everyday interactions, cultural practices, and communal rituals. Arts-based research methods and the embodied knowledge that emerges from them have the potential to move research in marginalised communities towards

studying wellness and repair in a way that recognises both the harm and the power of people in their shared vulnerability. In a country such as South Africa, where trauma is collective and ongoing, understanding and supporting repair requires research methods that allow individuals and communities to express their embodied knowledge in fluid, non-linear, symbolic and sensory ways. This would create space for multivocality, where participants are not the subjects of study but co-creators of knowledge that speaks to our past, our present and our future. By shifting toward arts-based research methods that highlight embodied knowledge, shared power, and the collective nature of repair, wellness research can become more inclusive, responsive, and transformative in addressing both historical and ongoing harm.

# References


Alexander, Bruce K. 2000. “The Globalization of Addiction.” *Addiction research* 501-526.

Asher, Kiran, and Joel Wainwright. 2018. “After Post-Development: On Capitalism, Difference, and Representation.” *Antipode* 22-44.

Atkinson, Doreen. 2007. *Going for broke: The fate of farm workers in arid South Africa*. HSRC Press.

Bam, June. 2021. *Ausi Told Me: Deep listening and intergenerational knowledge from the Cape*. Sunnyside: Jacana Media (Pty) Ltd.

Boal, Augusto. 2006. *The Aestetics of the Opressed*. London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Fancis Group.

—. 1995. *The Rainbow of Desire: The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy*. London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group.

—. 2008. *Theatre of the Opressed*. London: Pluto Press.

Briggs, John, and Joanne Sharp. 2004. “ Indigenous knowledges and development: a postcolonial caution.” *Third World Quarterly* 661-676.

Brook, Peter. 1996. *The Empty Space*. New York: Touchstone.

Bucknall, Joanna. 2016. “Liminoid Invitations and Liminoid Acts: The role of ludic strategies and tropes in immersive and micro-performance dramaturgies.” *Performance Research* 53-59.

Chinyowa, Kennedy C. 2013. “Interrogating spaces of otherness: Towards a postcritical pedagogy for applied drama and theatre.” *Applied Theatre Research* 7-16.

Chinyowa, Kennedy. 2008. “Emerging paradigms for applied drama and theatre practice in African contexts.” *African Performance Review* 85-102.

Cohen-Cruz, Jan. 2010. *Engaging Performance: Theatre as call and response*. London and New York: Routledge.

Cousins, Thomas. 2023. *The Work of Repair: Capacity after Colonialism in the Timber Plantations of South Africa*. Fordham University Press.

Dana, Deb. 2020. *Polyvagal Exercises for Safety and Connection: 50 Client-Centred Practices*. New York: WW Norton and Company.

—. 2018. *The Polyvagal Theory in Therapy: Engaging the Rhythm of Regulation*. London: W.W. Norton and Company.

Dattatreyan, Ethiraj G, and Isaac Marrero-Guillamón. 2019. “Introduction: Multimodal Anthropology and the Politics of Invention.” *American Anthropologist* 220-228.

Deacon, Janette. 1998. *Some Views on Rock Paintings in the Cederberg*. Cape Town: National Monuments Council.

Dew, Angela, Louisa Smith, Susan Collings, and Isabella D Savage. 2018. “Complexity Embodied: Using Body Mapping to Understand Complex Support Needs.” *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 1-25.

Eckhardt, Jennifer, Christoph Kaletka, Daniel Kruger, Karina Maldonado-Mariscal, and Ann c Schulz. 2021. “Ecosystems of co-creation.” *Frontiers in Sociology.*

Emunah, Reneé. 2019. *Acting for Real: Drama Therapy Process, Technique and Performance.* London: Taylor & Francis.

Erickson, Kai. 1991. “Notes on Trauma and Community.” *American Imago* 455-472.

Erickson, Kai. 1991. “Notes on Trauma and Community.” *American Imago* 455-472.

Freire, Paulo. 2005. *Pedagogy of the Opressed.* New York and London: Continuum.

Gillson, Stefanie L, and David A Ross. 2019. “From Generation to Generation: Rethinking "Soul Wounds" and Historical Trauma.” *Society of Biological Psychiatry* 19-20.

Gobodo-Madikizela, Pumla. 2016. “Introduction Breaking Intergenerational Cycles of Repetition.” In *Breaking Intergenerational Cycles of Repetition: A Global Dialogue on Historical Trauma and Memory*, by Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, 1-13. Verlag Barbara Budrich.

Grotowski, Jerzy. 2002. *Towards a Poor Theatre.* New York: Routledge.

Havsteen-Franklin, Dominik, Marlize Swanepoel, Jesika Jones, and Une Conradie. 2021. “Families and Collective Futures: Developing a Program Logic Model for Arts-Based Psychosocial Practice With South African Rural Communities.” *Frontiers* 1-17.

Jaaniste, Joanna. 2024. “Liminality and ritual in dramatherapy – The intersubjective space.” In *Space, Place and Dramatherapy: International Perspectives*, by Eliza Sweeney, 1-10. New York: Routledge.

Jones, Phil. 1996. *Drama as Therapy: Theatre as Living.* Hove and New York: Brunner-Routledge.

—. 1996. *Drama as therapy: theory practice and research.* London and New York: Routledge.

Krieger, Nancy. 2005. “Embodiment: a conceptual glossary of epidemiology.” *Journal of Epidemiol Community Health* 350-355.

Lambert, Chernelle, Paolo S H Favero, and Luc Pauwels. 2021. “Making life stories visible: an ethnographic study of body mapping in the context of HIV and AIDS in South Africa.” *Anthropology & Medicine* 175-192.

Laver, Cassie, Laura McGrath, Rachel J Liebert, Theseen Noorani, Nick Barnes, Mike Chase, Jon Hall, and Ben Wakeling. 2022. “‘You don't take things too seriously or unseriously’: Beyond recovery to liminal and liminoid possibility in a community arts and mental health project .” *Journal of Community & Applied Social* 653–664.

Levine, Susan. 2013. *Children of a bitter harvest: child labour in the Cape winelands.* Cape Town: BestRed.

Lewis-Williams, David J. 2004. *The Mind in the Cave: Consciousness and the Origins of Art.* London: Thames & Hudson.

Lewis-Williams, David J, and Thomas A Dowson. 1990. “Through the Veil: San Rock Paintings and the Rock Face.” *The South African Archaeological Bulletin* 5-16.

Lock, Margaret. 2020. “Permeable Bodies and Environmental Delineation.” In *Biosocial Worlds: Anthropology of health environments beyond determinism*, by Jens Seeberg, Andreas Roepstorff and Lotte Meinert, 15-43. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv13xpsqt.6: UCL Press.

Lock, Margaret. 2017. “Recovering the Body.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 1-14.

London, Leslie. 2003. “Human rights, environmental justice, and the health of farm workers in South Africa.” *International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Health* 59-68.

Long, Wahbie. 2021. *Nation On The Couch: Inside South Africa's Mind.* Cape Town: Melinda Ferguson Books.

Makanya, Sinthemba. 2014. “The missing links: A South African perspective on theories of health in drama therapy.” *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 302-306.

Maté, Gabor, and Daniel Maté. 2022. *The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness and Healing in a Toxic Culture.* New York: Penguin Random House.

Miller, Lisa. 2021. *The Awakened Brain: The New Science of Spirituality and Our Quest for an Inspired Life.* New York: Random House Publishing Group.

Mogapi, Nomvundo. 2021. *Blended Voices: Building an Understanding of Torture, War Trauma and Violence Through and African Lense.".* A webinar series reflection report, https://www.csvr.org.za/blended-voices-building-an-understanding-of-torture-war-trauma-violence-through-an-african-lens/: Centre for the study of violence and reconciliation.

Moravian Church South Africa. 2019. *Morivian Church South Africa.* Accessed October 17, 2024. https://www.moravianchurch.co.za/.

Mowszowski, Ruben. 2001. “Rocks of ages.” *Geographical* 14-22.

Mullings, Sireita, Shawn Sobers, and Deborah A Thomas. 2021. “The Future of Visual Anthropology in the Wake of Black Lives Matter.” *Visual Anthropology Review* 401-421.

Murray, Aisling, Mariana Steffen, Eleanor Keiller, Maria G Turri, and Jennifer Y F Lau. 2023. “Body mapping for arts-based inquiry in mental health research: a scoping review.” *Lancet Psychiatry* 896–908.

Nicholson, Helen. 2015. *Applied drama: The gift of theatre.* London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Ong, Ticia, David Mellor, and Sabrina Chettri. 2020. “Clay as a Medium in Three-Dimensional Body Mapping.” *Forun: Qualitative Social Research* 1-28.

Parkington, John. 2003. *Cederberg Rock Paintings.* Cape Town: Living Landscape Project.

Pert, Candace B. 1997. *Molecules of Emotion: The Science Behinf Mind-Body Medicine.* New York: Scribner.

Porges, Stephen W. 2021. “Polyvagal Theory: A biobehavioral journey to sociality.” *Comprehensive Psychoneuroendocrinology* 1-7.

Porges, Stephen W. 2022. “Polyvagal Theory: A Science of Safety.” *Frontiers in integrative neuroscience* 1-15.

Porges, Stephen W. 2023. “The vagal paradox: A polyvagal solution .” *Comprehensive Psychoneuroendocrinology* 1-15.

Porges, Stephen W, and Seth Porges. 2023. *Our Polyvagal World: How Safety and Trauma Change Us*. W. W. Norton and Company.

Porges, Stephen, and Deb Dana. 2018. *Clinical Applications of the Polyvagal Theory: Emergence of Polyvagal-Informed Therapies.* New Your: WW Norton.

Porges, Stephen, W. 2011. *The Polyvagal Theory: Neurophysiological Foundations of Emotions, Attachment, Communications and Self-regulation.* New York: WW Norton and Company.

Prager, Jeffrey. 2016. “Disrupting the Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma: Recovering.” In *Breaking Intergenerational Cycles of Repetition: A Global Dialogue on Historical Trauma and Memory*, by Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, 12-26. Verlag Barbara Budrich.

Prah, Efua. 2015. “Embodied urban health and illness in Cape Town: children's reflections on living in Symphony Way Temporary Relocation Area.” *Anthropology Southern Africa* 269-283.

Prentki, Tim, and Sheila Preston. 2009. *The applied theatre reader.* London and New York: Routledge.

Ross, Fiona C. 2003. *Bearing Witness: Women and the Truth and Reconcilliation Commitee in South Africa.* Pluto Press: London.

Ross, Fiona C. 2003. “On having voice and being heard: Some after-effects of testifying before the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.” *Anthropological Theory* 325-341.

Scheper-Hugh, Nancy, and Margaret M Lock. 1987. “The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology.” *Medical anthropology quarterly* 6-41.

Schutzman, Mandy, and Jan Cohen-Cruz. 1994. *Playing Boal : theatre, therapy, activism.* London and New York: Routledge.

Scrine, Elly. 2021. “The Limits of Resilience and the Need for Resistance: Articulating the Role of Music Therapy With Young People Within a Shifting Trauma Paradigm.” *Frontiers in Psychology.*

Skop, Michelle. 2016. “ The art of body mapping: A methodological guide for social work researchers.” *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work* 29-43.

Snow, Stephen. 2022. *Ethnodramatherapy: Integrating Research, Therapy, Theatre and Social Activism in One Method.* London: Routledge.

Swanepoel, Marlize, and Une Conradie. 2023. “The medicine in the circle: A case example of embodied arts-based community practice to address intergenerational trauma in rural South Africa.” *Dramatherapy* 119-131.

Thomas, Deborah A. 2019. *Political Life in the Wake of the Plantation: Sovereignty, Witnessing, Repair.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Thompson, James. 2009. *Performance Affects: Applied Theatre and the End of Effect.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Turner, Victor. 1982. *From ritual to theatre: the human seriousness of play.* New York: PAJ Publications.

Van der Kolk, Bessel. 2014. *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healinh of Trauma*. Penguin Books Ltd.

van der Waal, Kees CS (edt.). 2014. *Winelands, Wealth and Work: Transformations in the Dwars River Valley, Stellenbosch*. Pietermaritzburg: University Of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

Vieyra, Deborah. 2015. "Healing deurmekaar: theatre, social chamge and praxis of potential." *South African Theatre Journal* 58-67.

Welcome, Leniqueca A, and Deborah A Thomas. 2021. "Abstraction, Witnessing, and Repair; or, How Multimodal Research Can Destabilize the Coloniality of the Gaze." *Multimodality and Society* 1-6.

Wels, Harry, Kees van der Waal, Andrew Spiegel, and Frans Kamsteeg. 2011. "Victor Turner and liminality: An introduction ." *Anthropology Southern Africa* 1-4.

Yates-Doerr, Emily. 2017. "Counting bodies? On future engagements with science studies in medical anthropology." *Anthropology & Madicine* 142-158.

Yates-Doerr, Emily. 2017a. "Counting bodies? On future engagements with science studies in medical anthropology." *Anthropology & Madicine* 142-158.

Yates-Doerr, Emily. 2017b. "Where is the local? Partial biologies, ethnoghraphic sitings." *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 377-401.