

EMPOWERING WOMEN ACTIVISTS: CREATING A MONSTER

The contentious politics of gender
within social justice activism

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Abstract

This Master's Research Project has sought to investigate the discursive space for 'gender struggles' within contemporary South African class based social justice activism. It has done so in the form of a qualitative case study, analysing particular 'gender' interventions designed by a left-wing popular education organisation during 2006, and how these are theorized and contextualised against this specific moment in time in post-apartheid South Africa. The research has looked at how and why the organisation is presently trying to challenge gendered power inequalities in its internal and external work, strengthening women activists in the Community-based organisations and Social Movements which it targets, and contribute to putting women's strategic gender interests on the agenda of these movements, while simultaneously seeking to theorize the meaning of 'political' gender work in relation to its dominant perspective of class justice. The researcher has followed a specific empowerment initiative targeting women activists during the year, and has also engaged closely with the institutional dynamics in the organisation under study. The data has been gathered through interviews with staff members and women activists, and through participatory observation in educational events and office meetings.

The theoretical framework for the study was designed in relation to Shireen Hassim's investigations of the "discursive space" for South African feminist groups to articulate their demands while continuing to work within the dominant, male-led resistance movements (Hassim, 2006:14-19), and to Amanda Gouws' theorizing of citizenship as including 'embodied' participation in political processes and activism (Gouws, 2005:1-16,71-87). It furthermore builds on contemporary theories on social movements and grassroots mobilisation in South Africa (recaptured by Ballard et al, 2006:3-19), on feminist consciousness-raising (Kaplan, 1997) and on organisational change for gender equality (Rao and Kelleher, 2003).

Some of the suggestions made, while analysing the data against this theoretical framework, include; That the conflict which has emerged in the organisation under study in relation to the new 'gender programme' is indeed a contestation over the meaning of 'political' gender work, and over who can be a legitimate 'political actor' (Hassim, 2006:17); simultaneously and contradictive, there is an awareness in the organisations that the nature of the 'working class' is shifting in pace with neo-liberal globalisation processes, and that rank-and-file members in working class organisations are now the unemployed or the casual workers, a majority of them being women (although leadership structures largely remain male territory), which

theoretically should also prompt a shift in the focal organisations approach to 'political' gender work, but in practice, this is still a struggle; the empowerment programme which the research has followed closely throughout the year has led to women participants being ostracised, after surfacing issues of sexual harassment in the movements, but the rational/intellectual, spiritual and emotional learning which has happened in the group is analyzed as having been empowering on both an individual and collective level, inspiring new women's network to develop within movements of both men and women.

The study suggests that engaging 'gender' and expanding the notion of 'political work' and who can be a 'political actor' is crucial if left-wing education and support organisations seek to remain relevant within a rapidly changing context.

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Abbreviations

AEC – Anti-Eviction Campaign

AIDS – Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

ANC – African National Congress

APF – Anti-Privatisation Forum

ARVs – Anti-Retrovirals

BRDT - Batlhabine Rural Development Trust

CBO – Community-based Organisation

COSATU – Congress of South African Trade Unions

GRG – Gender Reference Group

HIV – Human Immunodeficiency Virus

ILRIG – International Labour Research and Information Group

LPM – Landless Peoples' Movement

MEC – Member of Executive Council

NEPAD – New Partnership for Africa's Development

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

OWCC – Orange Farm Water Crisis Committee

SACCAWU – South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union

SACHED – South African Committee for Higher Education

SACP – South African Communist Party

SANCO – South African National Civic Organisation

SECC – Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee

SC – Strategy Centre (of Khanya College)

SM – Social Movement

SMI – Social Movements Indaba

TAC – Treatment Action Campaign

UDF – United Democratic Front

WSF – World Social Forum

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Chapter 1: Introduction and summary of the thesis

In this Chapter, the rationale for and goals of the research are described. The research questions are introduced, the theoretical framework is briefly outlined, and the structure of the thesis presented.

Introduction

This research is embedded in key questions concerning contemporary feminist activism within the South African terrain of social justice movements. Such questions address not only South African political dynamics but are also closely linked to broad challenges for the meaning of contemporary feminist politics within the global struggles between dominant Western agendas for “developing nations” and the demands of constituencies concerned at a daily level with issues of material and political survival. It would be possible to articulate these questions in the following way: What does it practically mean to “take gender seriously” within the struggle for social justice in present day South Africa? What are the political implications of attempting to integrate a feminist agenda into the fight for political, social and economic justice, in organisations involving both men and women, and how would an attempt to join these struggles, and encourage active participation by women on all levels of organisations look like in practice in twenty-first century South Africa? How are the possible successes or failures of such an attempt conditioned by the structurally created (local and global) political opportunities, the available networks or resources and the processes of self-definition through which these organisations frame their struggles? These are the underlying questions for the study presented in this Master’s Research Project in Gender Studies.

The research’s theoretical framework is designed in relationship to Shireen Hassim’s investigations of the “discursive space” for South African feminist groups to articulate their demands while continuing to work within the dominant, male-led resistance movements (Hassim, 2006:14-19), and to Amanda Gouws’s theorizing of citizenship as including ‘embodied’ participation (Gouws, 2005:1-16, 71-87). It furthermore builds on contemporary theories of social movements and grassroots mobilisation in South Africa (recaptured by Ballard et al, 2006:3-19) on feminist consciousness-raising (Kaplan, 1997) and on organisational change for Gender Equality (Rao and Kelleher, 2003).

This study may be classified as a qualitative case study, which analyses particular interventions designed in 2005 and 2006 by a left-wing popular education organisation,

Khanya College, which is based in Johannesburg. Khanya College works with training programmes, research, publications, campaigns and other forms of organisational support, mainly towards rural and urban Social Movements¹ (SMs) and Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) in South Africa. The work of the College is building broadly on a left-wing, Marxist-leaning analysis of contemporary African and international issues concerning labour, policy, development and international solidarity, located within the vocabulary of political, economic and social justice (see further Chapter 4). The College works with individuals and organisations in working class and poor communities, and it adheres to broad goals of gender equality, though it does not define itself as a feminist organisation. Since 2005, it has made attempts to more seriously incorporate gender onto its agenda, in response to the changing nature of the South African working class, and of the gendered composition in the emerging mass movements, where women are in majority (see Chapter 3).

The research looks at how, and why Khanya College is presently trying to challenge gendered power inequalities in its internal and external work, strengthen women activists² and contribute to putting women activists' strategic gender interests³ on the agenda of SMs and CBOs, while simultaneously seeking to theorize the meaning of 'political' gender work in relation to its dominant perspective of class justice.

In order to contextualise these efforts, the thesis opens with a discussion on the methodological approach of the research, and from there moves on to the literature review which provides a background to women's activism and struggles for an egalitarian citizenship within class-focused organizations in South Africa; summarizes the emergence of progressive CBOs and SMs in South Africa, and the status of 'gender issues' within these organisations against the backdrop of contemporary local and global politics; and presents theory on contemporary feminist "interventions" within organizations as part of their programmatic and activist work.

This literature review allows me to draw parallels between women's experiences as activists in class focused organisations historically and presently, to compare Khanya Colleges' work

1 Jelin, E, quoted in Ballard et al (2006:2-3), defines social movements as "forms of collective action with a high degree of popular participation, which use non-institutional channels, and which formulate demands while simultaneously finding forms of action to express themselves as collective subjects, that is, as a group or social category". In a South African context the radical and confrontational nature of what is popularly referred to as Social Movements should be noted.

2 Here, I refer to activists as men and women who are involved on a voluntary basis in community based organizations and social movements, striving for social change.

3 The concepts "strategic" and "practical" gender interests developed by Molyneux are being used in this thesis. For further explanation, see chapter 3.

to address gendered inequalities with other similar efforts, and to analyze these efforts against theories of gender interventions and the dominant political discourse in CBOs and SMs. The research then provides an overview over the key interventions in Khanya College in 2005 and 2006, and explores why they were being undertaken at this point in time. The intervention which forms the main focus of the research is an empowerment programme for around 20 women activists, the Gender Reference Group (GRG), which aims to increase women's participation within organisations working for social change in contemporary South Africa. This programme has been studied in detail, through participatory observation and interviews, looking at how its focus and methodology correspond with the lived experiences of the women participants. The GRG and its conceptual framework will be further explained in Chapters 4 and 6.

The study moves between the two arenas: the GRG and Khanya College as an institution, to reflect the contestations amongst staff members over the meaning of 'political' gender work, and the tense relationship between 'women' and 'power', which illustrate the limitations of 'women's empowerment' efforts.

Rationale and Aim

The literature on women's activism within CBOs and SMs in post-apartheid South Africa is mainly focused on women's organisations (see for example Kaplan, 1997, Fester, 2005, Hassim, 2001 and 2004), and rarely on CBOs and SMs in which men and women are mobilised jointly as a group or social category. A growing body of research has been investigating social movements in South Africa over the past few years (Bond, 2004, Desai, 2003, Dwyer, 2004, Ballard et al, 2005, McKinley and Naidoo, 2004), stressing, among other things, that these movements are in fact 'new', with most of them emerging at the end of the 1990s in response to increased poverty, and that the majority of SMs are basing their theoretical rationale on class-based ideologies, with demands on the government to improve material living conditions for poor people as its core. The literature also points out that the movements challenge the government's economic policies and failures of meeting basic needs, through using innovative and often confrontational methods, resisting government repression and enforcement of what are viewed as unjust policies (see further Chapter 3). Only limited South African research has been done on gender issues, and on the experiences of women as activists in social movements, although most researchers of social movements

vaguely allude to the fact that the movements are largely built up by women⁴. A recent South African paper looking into the role of women within two broad based social movements in the Western Cape (the Anti-Eviction Forum, AEC, and the Treatment Action Campaign, TAC), written by Xali, Davies-Van Es and Gentle (2005), outlines the difficulties of coming to terms with gendered power relations in the movements, which exists despite of the strong presence of women as members, and notes how this contrasts with the lack of women in leadership positions. The paper, however, does not suggest concrete measures on how to tackle the problem. Nor does it sufficiently draw on a developed theoretical framework for investigating the meaning of gender dynamics within political spaces, although there is an attempt to ground the analysis in the sexual division of labour, and the gendered nature of the post-apartheid society.

In Development Update (Vol. 5 No. 2, 2004) both Nina Benjamin and Saranel Benjamin discuss women's experiences as activists in social movements, pointing to the problems of a female dominated membership which is reproducing male leadership, and noting the lack of debate on gender issues within the movements. Saranel Benjamin further points out that it is the traditional 'women's sphere' which is under attack through neo-liberal globalisation, and it is therefore to be expected that women activists are forming the backbone of these new movements. Other recent papers on social movements touch briefly on gendered power relations as an area emerging to be addressed (Mottiar and Friedman 2004, on TAC) or describe experiences of sexism in the movements from an insider perspective (Pointer, 2004, on AEC). Several writers stress the need to further investigate the gendered nature of activism, pointing out that there are big gaps in our understanding of this aspect (Gouws, 2005, Mottiar and Friedman, 2004). This literature will be further reviewed in Chapter 3. If gender relations in CBOs and SMs are an under-investigated topic, even fewer academic studies are focusing on interventions to change gender relations within organisations in a South African context. Friedman's account of her gender work within an NGO-space in the National Land Coalition (NLC) (Friedman 1999), and in other spheres such as higher education, are some of the few available resources.⁵ The theory I am using when looking at organisational change work for gender equality is thus mainly international.

⁴ Internationally, there is however a growing body of research looking at women's participation within social movements.

⁵ It should be noted that literature on institutional culture and gender in other organizational spheres, such as those of higher education, the church and others could provide broader frame for the "gap" explored in this thesis. However, time constraints have not allowed for a thorough exploration of these theoretical fields.

The aim of this study is to map the process of a contemporary initiative which seeks to strengthen women activists and challenge and transform gendered power relations within movements, and to make some contribution to the understanding of women's experiences as activists in class- or issue-based organisations. This thesis also attempts to make contribution to theories about possibilities for integration of feminist political orientation into perspectives of class or issue-based political analysis and activism.

Furthermore, the aim with the research has been to make some contribution to the work of Khanya College and other like-minded organisations, to women and men who are activists in CBOs and SMs, and to other researchers doing further explorations into the sphere of women's empowerment, organisational change for gender equality and gender dynamics in social movements.

The underlying assumption of the research is that popular education programmes for women's empowerment have the possibility to strengthen and deepen women's participation as citizens in organisations fighting for gender justice.

Khanya College as focal site for the research

My primary intention has been to look at Khanya College as a case study, without claiming to be able to generalize more broadly from this organisation's experience. By designing the study to focus in-depth on one organisation, I hope to "optimize understanding of the case rather than generalization beyond" (Stake, 2000:436). I suggest that Khanya College is relevant as a focal site for the research, since it situates theoretical debates which are well known from international research and from research on women's movements in South Africa in a new context: that of SMs and CBOs consisting of both women and men.

The research devotes some attention to contextual factors enabling and shaping Khanya College's efforts to change gendered power relations, and locates the organization within South African debates on "popular education" as they have changed between 1986, when Khanya College opened, and 2006. The following questions have grounded this contextualization:

- Why are training and research organisations working with Social Movements (SMs) and CBOs emerging to address gender inequalities as an integral part of their work for socio-economic justice at this point in time?
- What activities is Khanya College undertaking currently to ensure women activists' participation as 'embodied citizens', and how are these interventions theorized?

- Are the interventions corresponding with women's lived experiences as activists within SMs and CBOs? Are they helpful in terms of raising consciousness and transforming unequal gendered power relations in the movements and inside the College?
- How is the change work for gender equality inside the College conditioned by internal power dynamics, and by the external context, and how does this impact on attempts to 'take gender seriously'?

It can be argued that questions around resistance to change work, and transformation of gendered power relations within CBOs and Social Movements cannot be measured simply through interviews with Khanya staff and women activists. While it would have been valuable to also interview the male activists, the limitations of time and space within this research project made this impossible. Instead, I used my participation at the Winter School 2006, contributions by male activists to the Winter School newsletter, the evaluation report of the Winter School, and the women activists' interpretations of the attitudes of their male comrades in the movements to understand these dynamics.

Theoretical framework and findings

The theoretical framework used as a basis for analysis of the material collected consists of a broad variety of related concepts, all which are further elaborated on in Chapters 3 and 5: Amanda Gouws's (Gouws, 2005) re-conceptualisation of 'citizenship', into which she includes both status, participation, discourse and locales (building on the work of Ruth Lister and Kathleen B Jones) will be utilised in theorising aspects of women's agency and participation in CBOs and SMs as gendered/sexed bodies, reflecting their social/biological realities (Jones, 1990). Jane Jenson's concept 'the universe of political discourse' and Maxine Molyneux's theorizing around the issue of authority, as presented by Shireen Hassim in her investigations of the possibilities for the South African women's movement to set its own agenda and priorities, will be utilized to make sense of the conflict around the 'political meaning' of gender work in Khanya College, which emerged strongly during 2006. Hassim explains that the "universe of political discourse delineates what is considered to be "political" as opposed to private, religious, or economic ... it sets the boundaries for political action and identifies which actors in society are considered to be legitimate in particular settings" (Hassim, 2006:17). This speaks directly to the discourse inside Khanya College. The value placed on women activists' dominant forms of separate organising will be furthered investigated through the lens of Maxine Molyneaux classic 'grid' designed to

analyze the aims and goals of women's organisations: those focusing on women's 'strategic gender interests' (with the objective of overcoming women's subordination) and those focusing on women's 'practical gender interests' (responding to women's 'responsibilities' as a result of the sexual division of labour, not including a vision of emancipation or equality) (Molyneaux, 1985:233). While investigating the impact of the attempts to empower women activists, Temma Kaplan's (Kaplan, 1997) theorizing of how a feminist consciousness can be raised among women activists will be used, in conjunction with the theorization of Paulo Freire and other theorists of adult and popular education, looking into the link between consciousness-raising and transformation (Freire, 1996). In Chapter 5, I will lean on the theorization of organisational change for gender equality, and particularly investigating Rao, Kelleher and Stuart's conceptualisation of the importance of engaging the 'deep structure of organisations', where the often uncomfortable link between 'women' and 'power' tends to be cemented (Rao, Kelleher and Stuart, 1999). These theories are brought together through the logic of the thesis, starting out with discussing women's participation as 'embodied citizens' in social movements. From there it moves onto looking at how the 'universe of political discourse' conditions which issues are considered to be 'political' as opposed to 'private', influencing what topics can be raised in the context of a women's empowerment programme in a social justice organisation. Theories which discuss how 'feminist consciousness' can be raised, and the possibilities for it to encourage transformation are then presented, and the link between challenging gendered power dynamics inside and outside of an organisation is subsequently alluded to. Leaning on this theoretical framework, conclusions have been drawn around the politics of gender, the empowerment of women and institutional change for gender equality within the organisation under study, which also is relevant for other class oriented popular movements and organisations in contemporary South Africa.

An important part of my argumentation rests on the assumption that in order to remain relevant within a rapidly changing South African context, it is vital for popular education organisations like Khanya College to theorize the meaning of the 'working class' today, where the fully employed, waged factory worker is no longer in majority (this point has been made by researchers such as Benjamin, S, 2004, and Xali, Davies-Van Es and Gentle, 2005). The main constituents of the "working class" are people who are not working, or who are trapped in low-paid, seasonal, home-based and contract work. In this group, women are a majority, and for organisations targeting the 'working class', these women grassroots activists

in the townships, can therefore not be forced to fit in with preconceived educational models aimed at the organised factory worker.

My overall analysis argues with Rao, Stuart and Kelleher that for organisations attempting to do serious change work for gender equality, it is necessary to combine internal and external efforts, since an organisation which does not practice gender equality on the inside is unlikely to be able to impact positively on the status quo outside (Rao, Stuart and Kelleher, 1999:11). Working simultaneously on both these arenas is an overwhelming task, but, as my findings show, if not every one in the organisation is willing to transform, and to find new ways of working, then the external programmes risk being undermined and lose credibility (See further Chapter 7 – Conclusions). Therefore, it is crucial to seek dialogue and try and include every one in the process, for a gender programme to be successful. This links to the recent emerging debate about men and the construction of masculinities in the Southern African context (see i.e. Walker and Reid (eds), 2005, and Morrell (ed), 2001) pointing to the (well-theorized) fact that masculinities, as well as femininities, are performed (Butler, 1990) and constructed, and that any attempt to challenge patriarchy should thus, in some way, involve both men and women. I further suggest that for women to be able to participate fully in organisations of both men and women, it is not enough to open up spaces in these organisations, where women can participate on an “equal” basis as men. This may enable some women to become ‘honorary men’, detached from the cultural norms of feminization and the gendered expectations around them. Such “equality” does not however automatically contribute to creating an environment which allows both men and women to participate as ‘embodied citizens’, taking into account not only the class and racial aspects of the complex web forming their lived experiences, but also allowing for the inclusion of the gendered/sexed body into such movements, and to substantially incorporate an emancipatory vision for gender equality onto their political agenda. To allow for such inclusion and visions, the deep (masculinity biased) power structures of organisations need to be made visible and transformed (Rao and Kelleher, 2003:6-10) in order to challenge the hegemonic discourse of left-wing politics, incorporating the body/the material and allowing for issues of sexuality, reproductive rights and the construction of gendered identities, which have so far been silenced in such spaces, to emerge.

For education and support organisations like Khanya College, this requires a radical restructuring of the methodology, and other ways of measuring and evaluating the work, which are not conditioned by masculinity biased power structures.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into 7 chapters. This introductory chapter is followed by the methodology, the historical background and theory, presentations of findings, analysis and conclusion.

In *Chapter 2*, the methodology used in this thesis, which can be described as a mix between interviews complemented with participatory observation, and self-reflexive feminist activism, is introduced and problematized. In this chapter, I argue that this flexible approach to research methodology has allowed me to come closer to the heart of the issues at stake, and to receive more honest accounts from the interviewees, than would have been possible had I taken on a conventional 'disembodied' researcher role.

In *Chapter 3*, literature contextualising historical and contemporary forms of women's activism within class-based organisations in South Africa is presented, which speaks to my subsequent investigation of interventions around 'women's activism' in these spaces. I look at literature covering the changing composition of the South African working class due to neoliberal globalisation, which has affected the kind of working-class formations that have evolved in townships and rural areas, and their gendered composition. I also present theories on citizenship, and especially on the participatory aspect of 'women's' citizenship, as well as theories around women's strategic and practical gender interests, and on the emergence of social movements, including the place of 'gender relations' within these movements.

In *Chapter 4*, Khanya College is presented in-depth, and I am looking at the background and orientation of the College, as well as at its current programmes. Data from interviews with women activists, on their perceptions about possibilities of being active as women in social movements and CBOs is also presented in order to contextualise and assess the relevance and direction of Khanya College's intervention. From there, the chapter moves onto looking at how organisations like Khanya College, approaching political, economic and social justice through an analysis which privileges class as a key source of complex oppression, theorize their interventions for promoting gender equality in movements.

In *Chapter 5*, the gender dynamics within Khanya College itself are presented. Links between the internal change work for gender equality and the external empowerment programmes are introduced and problematized using data from interviews, internal documents, and

participatory observation in office meetings. The gendered conflict that has arisen in the organisation is described and analyzed against the theoretical framework of organisational change for gender equality (Rao and Kelleher, 2003, Rao, Kelleher and Stuart, 1999). A key aspect of the conflict within the College concerns contestations around the meaning of doing 'political' gender work, and the methodological implications of such work. This is discussed at length, pointing to the difficulties with, but also the necessity of 'walking the talk' while mainstreaming a gender perspective.

Chapter 6 investigates and analyzes the Gender Reference Group (GRG), one of Khanya College's key 'gender' interventions, aimed at empowering women activists in SMs and CBOs. Its goals are to strengthen the activists and empower them with voice to include their gendered/sexed experiences of poverty and oppression into the agenda of social justice. When investigating this empowerment process, participatory observation and activism has been used alongside with interviews with activists and Khanya College representatives, to explain, and evaluate the impact of the programme and its relevance. The research describes aspects of the process of the intervention in detail, and seeks to identify key moments of interaction with particular feminist ideas about the body, labour, sexuality and the "issues" which activists raise as part of their CBOs and SMs (such as policies on water privatization, or electricity provision). Conflicts that arise when women claim space and power in the context of a one week workshop, are described and problematized.

Lastly, in *Chapter 7*, the data is further analyzed against the conceptual framework summarized briefly in this Chapter, and conclusions are drawn out and presented. Finally, I make some suggestions to Khanya College for its continued work with incorporating 'gender' in a serious way into its internal and external activities.

Chapter 2: Methodology – Neither insider nor outsider

Summary of the Chapter:

The methodology used in this thesis can be described as a mix between interviews complemented with participatory observation, and self-reflexive feminist activism. While initially aiming to play a more traditional researcher role, I found myself increasingly drawn into the group under study as a feminist activist/participator, with a possibility to influence some of the developments.

In this chapter, I will argue that this flexible approach to research methodology has allowed me to come closer to the heart of the issues at stake, and to receive more honest accounts from the interviewees, than would have been possible had I taken on a conventional ‘disembodied’ researcher role.

Academic Feminism vs. Popular Education for women

Central to the academic feminist debate are epistemological questions around how and by whom knowledge can be produced and for what purpose. This debate is to a large extent taking place in a language and terminology that most people do not grasp, far removed from the lives of ordinary women trying to navigate and keep afloat in an increasingly complex world. Although feminist researchers are transcending the boundaries of academia, and producing new and valuable accounts of societal relations, their findings are often not transformed into ‘really useful knowledge’ for people gendered as women, who are living in the periphery of this same world, constantly contesting its boundaries. This can in itself seem contradictory since academic feminism historically has sought to place value on the knowledge produced by and for the ‘ordinary woman’ – the subject feminism questions, deconstructs and reconstructs, but at the same time keeps close to its heart.

In this context, popular education for grassroots women, where knowledge is produced and interpreted by women, aiming to understand and transform themselves and the world around them, is an interesting parallel to feminist studies. As Jean Barr points out, both feminism and (radical) adult education promote “learning which does not privilege expert academic knowledge or prize intellectual over emotional understanding” (Barr, 1999:77). Both concern themselves with deconstructing power, and imagining alternative ways of co-existing as men and women on this planet.

While radical adult and popular education have sprung out of Marxism, and a male working class tradition, feminist educators have adopted its methods and approaches to advance their

cause. In Britain, several academic Women and Gender Studies programmes in turn emerged out of feminist popular education initiatives (Barr, 1999). Feminist popular educators on the other hand draw upon feminist theory and research, and popularise it for educational purposes. In South Africa, academic institutions like CACE⁶ have since the early 1990s been involved in initiatives of developing gender awareness and analysis, and a feminist perspective among adult educators.

My decision to study how Khanya College, an NGO doing radical popular education, is trying to integrate gender into its work, and empower women grassroots activists, grew out of an interest in this relationship between transformative feminist popular education, and Gender and Women's studies as a transformative academic field. The research focus is also embedded in my long-standing interest in how radical organisations practically link class justice with gender justice, which I will elaborate further on in chapters 4 and 5.

Navigating through complex feminist epistemological questions

Before deciding to embark on this study, I did a lot of thinking about epistemological questions. Why am I doing research? For whom? How can I contribute to a democratic and truly feminist production of knowledge which is relevant to the contemporary South African context? How does such knowledge get distributed beyond the University library and a few fellow feminist researchers and practitioners? How do we link feminist theory with feminist practice, in a situation where immediate issues of socio-economic deprivation are having a devastating effect on the lives of the majority of South African women?

These questions almost paralysed me because of their complexities, and I spent a long time trying to decide on an approach and topic. I felt that as a feminist researcher, if I was to take these epistemological concerns seriously, I had more obligations to the people I was about to research, to the organization on which I wanted to focus, and to myself, than I had had as a student in the more mainstream academic fields of Journalism and Development Studies. Having spent the last five years outside of academia, working as a journalist and a development worker, with close links to development organizations in Southern Africa, I felt that any research I undertook must be practical in its focus, with a possibility to make an impact – be it on funding, the direction of programs, or simply through documenting interesting new feminist initiatives. I wanted to work closely with organisations or individuals who would find the study useful, to try and connect theory and academia with practical

⁶ The Centre for Adult and Continuing Education at the University of the Western Cape (Walters, 1996:24-25)

change work for gender equality. I also wanted to strengthen my own theoretical knowledge in the field of gender studies, whilst at the same time learning from the practical work of experienced feminists. The theoreticians who specifically interested me were, as identified in Chapter 1, South African feminist political scientists Shireen Hassim and Amanda Gouws, because of their theorizing around women's political organising, and citizenship (including participation and discourse), and Temma Kaplan, because of her theorizing of feminist consciousness raising among grass roots women activists. My methodology was thus constructed in relation to key questions which these researchers have formulated.

Grounding the research in my own experiences

During my time working for a Swedish solidarity organisation/small-scale donor in South Africa, I had come to identify with left-wing activism more intensely than in many years, as a consequence of transcending borders of race, class and locality on a daily basis, with eyes wide open, in a society where social injustice is so mind-blowing that keeping sane is a constant struggle. This lived experience taught me more than all development literature I had read, placing South Africa at the top of the unflattering list of the most unequal places on earth.⁷ Through my work and personal interest, I had been in close contact with several of the emerging and much publicised 'New' Social Movements (SM's), and with small community-based organisations (CBO's) in Gauteng and the Eastern Cape provinces. These organisations had caught my interest as possible agents of social change, claiming socio-economic rights from a 'moral' entitlement standpoint, a perspective which I sympathize with. But at the same time, the internal gender dynamics of the movements left me with an uneasy feeling. I had met sexist attitudes, disinterest in the gendered power dynamics within communities, and a striking absence of women in leadership positions. I felt that this was deplorable. It demonstrated clearly that different kinds of oppression were awarded different status; for me social justice and gender justice are non-separable struggles. The seeming discrepancy between the visible political agendas concerning class-based injustice in the post-1994 South African terrain and the invisibility of feminist agendas, long articulated through diverse platforms pre-1994, seemed a reflection of the hypocrisy surrounding gender work at the level of the state, where 'correct' laws and policies to safeguard gender equality and women's rights were not followed through and implemented, and had little impact on the lives of the majority of South African women (McEwan 2005:183-186). I had however come across some

⁷ See among others; South Africa Human Development Report (UNDP, 2003)

encouraging exceptions to the overall profile of “gender ignorance” in SMs and CBOs in the form of strong feminist activists, prepared to put their positions in organisations at stake and take action when male comrades were behaving unacceptably towards women. I had also attended the Winter School of Khanya College in Johannesburg in 2005, where gender was a central theme, women constituted the majority of participants, and heated discussions around sexuality and cultural rights were held on the same platform as talks on neoliberalism and solidarity amongst Southern African political activists.

While attending this course, I felt that the gender struggle within social movements of the poor would be an interesting topic for a thesis. Having followed the debates around the ‘new’ social movements in South Africa, I had noted that this was an under researched area and at the same time, I had read and heard some of the at times quite harsh attacks by male left-wing academics and activists towards (especially white) women trying to raise the issue of gender in these contexts (Desai and Pithouse, 2004; Pointer, 2004; ILRIG 2005a, 2005b; interview with Pointer, June 2). As a foreign, white feminist, I knew I was putting myself at risk trying to research such a sensitive topic. I feared that my findings were highly likely to be dismissed with reference to my background, irrespective of my political orientation and despite my attempts to follow and make contributions to these movements during the past few years as a development worker/journalist/activist in South Africa. The fact that I was doing my Masters degree within a South African research space, the African Gender Institute (AGI) at the University of Cape Town, was nothing I felt would mitigate this criticism. Speaking to (male) left wing academics and activists, it was clear to me that AGI was not only a suspicious academic home (because it is linked to a previously white, elite University), but also because it is a feminist project, and as such not seen to be ‘political’ enough. “Who are the people working there, and where do they stand politically?” were reoccurring questions.

All this pushed me in the direction of wishing to study a ‘positive example’; an intervention which had at least partly managed to incorporate an agenda of gender justice into the broader social justice struggle, within a social movement space.

Finding somewhere to begin

My interest in the link between feminist studies and popular education for women as a tool for social change, proved to be a possible entry point into the world of women activists in social movements and CBOs. It was also a link that allowed me to, at least in part, live up to the quite tough conditions I had set out for myself when taking on feminist research, relating to epistemological questions; making sure that the research was seen as a valuable process by

those participating in it, that the knowledge produced would be shared with other people and possibly influence future decision making and development, and that I could make some kind of contribution to the people and organisations sacrificing precious time to talk to me.

When I had decided to apply to the Masters Programme in Gender Studies at UCT, I met Nancy Castro, a Colombian left-wing feminist activist with extensive experience in working with different aspects of gender justice, such as sexual and reproductive health and rights, socio-economic rights and conflict resolution. Nancy Castro had been part of the advisory group for Khanya College's Winter School 2005, on 'Gender, Neoliberalism and Social Movements', and had just finished evaluating part of the College's work with CBOs and social movements from a gender perspective. When we met, she was about to be employed as the Khanya College gender coordinator. She offered assistance and I started to consider the College's emerging work with gender as a possible focus for my interest in the relationship between organizations with commitments to promoting social justice movements and the question of gender. I did not, however, know how to approach addressing my interests *in situ* or if the organisation would be willing to let me in. Through friends and contacts, I had learnt that organisations like the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) and the International Labour Resource and Information Group (ILRIG) had also recently embarked on more intense work around the empowerment of women activists, challenging the status quo within their own organisation, and/or other CBOs and SMs of men and women. I approached both TAC and ILRIG, and soon got a positive response from the management of ILRIG, who was also prepared to provide space for me to follow and research the organisation's activities. I never heard back from my contact at TAC, and eventually determined to focus on one organization, so that I had the opportunity to build the personal connections needed with staff, spend fruitful time participating in the gender empowerment initiatives, and contribute to the programme's development in any way appropriate.

Due to the richness of the material I was able to gather at Khanya College during my fieldwork, I decided to only follow the work of ILRIG in order to broaden my own background knowledge about women's experiences as activists in CBOs, SMs and trade unions. I thus participated in ILRIG's process for empowering female activists, called 'Building Women's Activism', and interviewed two staff members of the organisation as key informants on gender work with women activists in this period. I draw on some of this material in Chapter 4, to deepen my analysis of Khanya's current interest in the politics of gender.

Visiting Khanya College in April 2006, I met with Nancy Castro and her colleague Nina Benjamin, the coordinator of the College's Strategy Centre, which is the section of the organisation involved most directly with organisational development of CBOs and SMs. Nina Benjamin has a strong activism background from male-led organisations in the struggle against apartheid, as well as from social movements in the new democracy, and has over the past two years increasingly started seeing the need to radically challenge the gendered nature of activism and to transform the popular education methods of Khanya College accordingly. Nancy Castro and Nina Benjamin proved to be enthusiastic about my doing research on the Khanya College processes, and allowed me to choose the focus, and design the research in the way I saw most fitting. Using my epistemological concerns as the starting point, my methodology emerged iteratively, as I made deeper connections with people, projects and places through visits and networking, observation, conversation, note-taking, and discussions with Nina Benjamin and Nancy Castro about my own position and the ethical implications of my presence in the College space.

As had been pointed out in the *Khanya Journal* (Baldevu, 2005:6), the gender programme of Khanya College sought "to contribute to raising consciousness about gender inequality" and "developing approaches to overcome gender inequality within mass organisations and the social movements, and in the daily functioning of the College itself, including its various programmes." Chapter 4 further unpacks this programme, and its orientation. This ambitious approach, of transforming the external programmes as well as the internal dynamics, caught my interest since I believe that external initiatives on gender need to take into account the internal organisational dynamics in order to contribute to any real change (Rao and Kelleher, 1999:11). I felt that adopting a broad approach also for my study, looking at both the internal dynamics in the College and at a key external intervention, would allow me to present a fuller picture of the development in a social justice organisation attempting to 'take gender seriously'. So I chose to focus on why and how the College is intervening now to challenge gendered power relations in CBOs and SMs, and on how one specific arena for this work, the empowerment programme for women activists, the Gender Reference Group (GRG), impacts on participants. I also make explicit connection to the way such attempts are linked with efforts to transform the institutional culture within the College and challenge gendered power inequalities internally.

The approach however meant I had to cope with many challenges. Firstly, the amount of information I would need to gather and analyse would be extensive; including some background on women's experiences of activism in SMs and CBOs; Khanya College's

history and contemporary programmes; the theorisation of this recent focus on 'gender'; the Gender Reference Group as a specific intervention of the College; the women activists experiences of the programme in relation to the gendered nature of community organising; and the experiences of College staff in relation to the gender mainstreaming efforts. Secondly, while I initially focused on Khanya College as a good example of how a social justice NGO/popular education institution is starting to take gender seriously, I later faced difficulties when stark conflicts emerged in the organisation, attempts were made to discredit and possibly close down the gender programme, and several female (and some male) staff members resigned (see Chapter 5). All of this made it necessary to adjust the direction of my research, taking into account the risks and effects of the internal gender dynamics in my assessment of the external work to a greater extent. It also became clear that my research was likely to be politicised and interpreted as supporting one of the two 'camps' which had emerged within the organisation, exacerbated by the gender work. This impacted on the type of data I was able to gather, which increasingly came to focus on the conflicts inside the office, and on critique of, or support for, the empowerment initiative I had chosen to study. I experienced that my field of study constantly grew throughout the year, through unexpected developments in the Gender Reference Group, linked to the surfacing of sexual harassment issues, and the exacerbated conflict in the College, making it more and more difficult to manage the data, and to rely on the information I was presented with as being, at least subjectively, accurate. This is something I have sought to counter, primarily through using a combination of techniques, with a lot of focus on participatory and activist observation, which will be explained below.

In my first round of interviews, most people expressed a positive approach to the external interventions around gender, as well as the attempts of changing the gendered power dynamics inside the office, and the possible impact of these efforts. In my second round of interviews, the discussions with some of the interviewees came to increasingly revolve around the internal conflict and a critique of the College, possibly since I was seen as some one who was 'on their side'. Other interviewees were more unwilling to voice their opinion, and preferred to speak about gender work on a more conceptual and theoretical level, whereas a few of the people I had hoped to interview did not make time to meet with me.

Focusing the work

Since Khanya College is involved in a range of different activities, all of which are relevant for understanding its gender work, it was necessary for me to make decisions around which

activities to concentrate on. With the assistance of Nina Benjamin and Nancy Castro, I decided to look more in depth at the current programme for empowering women activists, the Gender Reference Group (GRG), since this is one of the longest-running, concrete interventions of the gender programme which is presently in place. In June/July, I attended a three day workshop of the GRG, where I familiarised myself with the activists and the working methods of Khanya College. After the workshop, I spent one week at the College's office, interviewing staff and activists from the GRG. I also accepted the offer to take part in the organisation's annual Winter School for Southern African activists in the beginning of July, as a participant observer, since this event is the "external face of Khanya College" and has a lot of potential impact on the community organisations and social movements which Khanya College works towards (interview with Nina Benjamin, June, 2006).

Within the College, I initially looked mainly on the activities of the Strategy Centre, the division of the college dealing directly with social movements and community organisations, since this is where the institutional change work for gender equality has taken off most extensively. Later on, when internal conflicts around the gender work started to emerge, I broadened my outlook to consider the cause and effect of these conflicts, since they impact both on the external and internal gender work.

During the whole research process, I was fortunate to have strong support from Nancy Castro and Nina Benjamin, the drivers of the gender programme, as well as other staff at Khanya College, who provided me with an opportunity to participate in many of the different events of the college, and facilitated my contacts with female activists. The support of Nina Benjamin and Nancy Castro was invaluable, and a condition for being able to do this work. But since they are strategic and experienced feminist educators, I also had to take into account their own intentions with allowing me to study their work. Besides the explicitly mentioned advantages with my study, such as the opportunity to document the work properly, gather reflections from the GRG participants and Khanya staff, and to get an outsider's opinion of the process, there were also other possible reasons for taking me aboard. These could include seeing my research as a way of stimulating internal debate and opening spaces for reflections within Khanya College, as well as to monitor the understanding of gender work amongst the staff. It could also include using my presence in the Gender Reference Group for educational purposes, for example by involving me in a support function in the process with the Winter School newsletter (see below). I was happy to fulfil all these roles, but when analyzing the results from interviews, I need to take my fairly close relationship with the process into account. Throughout the presentation of the data in Chapters 5 and 6, I

have attempted to do this by constantly reflecting on my own role and position as activist/researcher.

Defining my role as researcher/activist

My biggest concern throughout the research has been how to define my own role, and to know when I participate in events as a researcher, as a woman activist, as a feminist or as an outsider providing technical support, or in all those roles simultaneously. Using a feminist approach to research for me means being present throughout the process as an 'embodied citizen' with my gendered-, class-, ethnic- and geographical identity made visible, acknowledging that feelings, intuition and life experience are as vital to the decision-making process in the research as any guidance I might get from books on research methods.

While attending the first GRG meeting in June, I set out to participate as a researcher, listening to the contributions of female activists, but avoiding taking part in the discussions myself. I soon felt uncomfortable and alienated in this role, in a context where the women activists were opening the most sacred spaces of their hearts and sharing traumatic experiences. Although the group had agreed to my presence as a researcher, it felt unfair to take part without giving anything of myself. In the first interview I conducted, on the second day of the meeting, it was obvious that the two women I met with were not prepared to confide in me, and the interview therefore became flat and superficial, with little explanation and elaboration of the answers, and a glossing over of any problems within their organisation. This was also a result of my lack of knowledge in seSotho, and in this specific interview, I would have needed a translator. But apart from this, I sensed I needed to change my approach.

In the evening, after the workshop programme had ended for the day, the women activists had a long and intense discussion in seSotho. I could sense that the issues debated were serious, but since no one sat down next to me to offer brief summaries in English, which has often been my experience in the activism environment, I went to bed early. The following day, the women decided to share parts of the issues they had debated late into the night with the facilitators and me. The topic of their concerns should not have come as a surprise to any one in the room – but the Khanya College staff members that were present were quite taken aback when hearing about the actors involved: the women activists spoke out about sexual harassment, and challenged what they described as male staff members of the College using their power positions to try and persuade young women activists into having sex with them. One of the women told the group that she had been repeatedly sexually harassed by a Khanya

staff member, who was knocking at her door throughout the night during a residential workshop, trying for hours to talk her into having sex with him. Other incidents were reported through a third person, who related the previous night's discussion. We were told that young women had "given in" to such persuasion attempts by Khanya staff members, although they did not want to, since they felt "they could not go on saying no, no, no". Saying no was also seen as something which could hamper their chances of attending workshops and trips organised by the College in the future.

Although no one wanted to report on a specific case, or name any of the men who allegedly abused their power positions, they urged the facilitators to bring this up in the College, in order to find a solution to the problem. This was the start of a heated debate within the College, which came to have serious implications for how the Winter School was run, how the GRG was perceived from then onwards, and for the internal gender work. I will return to this in Chapter 5.

This serious debate unexpectedly opened an opportunity for me to participate in the Winter School in a somewhat different role. In order to make sure that the daily newsletter of the Winter School was representing gender issues, and that women who were participating in the process would not be harassed or bullied, Nancy Castro suggested that I participate in the media team, and put together daily articles together with the women in the GRG, using my experience as a journalist.

With this mandate, I came to be deeply involved in the media team, challenging the hierarchal, male-led approach to making newsletters which was suggested from the outset, encouraging more participation from, and influence by, the women media volunteers at the school (all from the GRG) and changing the content to include more coverage on the Children's School and on gender issues. By doing this, I once again placed myself in a vulnerable position. The newsletter, together with the GRG, became one of the most criticised and debated, as well as one of the more appreciated parts of the school (see Chapter 5).

My role as a sub-editor and coach to the women activists, who for the first time worked as co-editors and reporters, led me to actively participate in the debates during the plenary sessions, defending some of the decisions the media team had taken, and explaining the intentions behind some of the articles.

Working side by side with activists from the GRG in the media team, and increasingly making contributions in the GRG evening meetings during the Winter School, prompted a shift in my role as a researcher/feminist activist, and both Khanya College staff and women activists were becoming more open in the subsequent interviews, in a way which I do not

think would have been possible had I remained an outsider/researcher. By participating in the group discussions in the GRG meetings, I also gained knowledge and information which I would never have been able to gather in so much depth and detail in one-on-one interviews.

How was I perceived by the interviewees?

In order to analyze how my role in the GRG, the Winter School, and the media team was perceived, and how it impacted on my research, I asked some of the Khanya staff members, and one woman activist whom I interviewed for a second time in October 2006, to reflect on this. During the Winter School I had been very wary of my position as a white European, and I had, not surprisingly, heard through a friend that some male activists had been complaining about 'white foreigners' coming in and 'imposing' their feminism on black women (I was one of three 'white' women participating throughout the whole school). This 'brainwashed-by-outsiders' argument was also applied to the women whose work I was studying: Nancy Castro, as a Colombian, and Nina Benjamin, who is from Cape Town, and does not speak the main local languages in the Gauteng province (seSotho and isiZulu). The Khanya staff members I spoke to after the school claimed not to have shared this fear. Although I am aware that the people I interviewed might not have been willing to honestly share negative perceptions about the role I played, I still find their reflections useful for contextualising the research and its limitations.

"... you came in... firstly as some one not South African, but as an activist... who... understands the movements... which I think made a very big difference ... There is the thing of being white firstly... there is the thing of being from overseas... but... you... were very familiar with the South African context and with the... activism and with the dynamics". "In a sense... you were there as a participant... And that was, I think, a big thing... You... brought in important reflections... but it became part of the pool of what was there."

"I don't for a minute doubt that there is a perception that [the feminist ideas came from]... the whites from outside ... But the women [from the reference group] don't feel that way ... And that is the important thing"

All the people I spoke to commented spontaneously on my role in the Media Team, which was my major involvement in the Winter School. They saw this as a positive contribution.

“I think that at the Winter School you helped in a real way to keep that whole process of the newsletter together ... And people really felt that ... they ... were making the intervention ... they own it [the newsletter]”

“at this moment, your research ... makes an impact in my work too. And ... I agree with ... what you did ... And we discuss individually with ... some of the women, and they say ‘we learnt a lot’.”

For the woman activist I spoke to, it is clear that I was more of an outside supporter than an integral part of the GRG. She explained that she had been asked by other women in the group to elaborate on my research in isiZulu and seSotho, after my briefs in English, on questions which had been of concern to them, like the protection of their identity. In spite of these uncertainties, which she helped clarify, she reflected on my role in the newsletter process as having been useful and comfortable for her and the other women.

“... when you are dealing with women to women... it’s comfortable and... you had... experience from working in a newspaper before ... unlike for me it was just a challenge that I accepted without thinking twice about it at the time... so... you supported us.”

My relatively close relationship with, and participation as a woman/activist within the GRG, was viewed as having had a positive impact for my own research, and on the kind of information I was able to gather.

“I would never be telling you the things I am sharing with you now had you not been part of the activities in the ways that you were. In fact I might even have told you things that were not true” (Khanya staff member)⁸.

But this new role did not only bring advantages for my research. It also placed me somewhere in between a Khanya College staff member and a participant activist, in a way which could be confusing both to me and to the people around me. At times, I felt that I (willingly) became Nancy Castro’s and Nina Benjamin’s ‘eyes and ears’ in the group, especially around sensitive

³ Due to technical problems with the recordings of sections of two of the interviews I did, this quote is taken from my written interview notes, and not transcribed from the taped interview. All other quotes in this thesis, unless otherwise stated, are derived from recorded talks/interviews.

information that emerged on sexual harassment by Khanya male staff members, which Nancy Castro and Nina Benjamin were eager to know more about in order to address the issues with the severity that the situation called for. Other times, I felt that my presence in the role of researcher was forgotten, and that things that were said in group discussions were maybe not intended for my ears. I have tried to counter this by making sure that sensitive statements cannot be attached to any individual in the group. I also cross-checked at a follow-up meeting in November whether all participants were still happy with me documenting the work of the group and using it for my thesis. After receiving their go-ahead, I continued to use data from the participant observation sessions.

How did I gather the information?

As has been suggested above, I used a combination of techniques or research methods to gather data for this thesis. Besides participating and observing as a researcher/activist, I relied on semi-structured interviews, which I recorded and transcribed, and on document review for my information gathering. Reviewing documents such as minutes of meetings, funding proposals, articles in the Khanya Journal and workshop outlines, gave me a broad foundation of knowledge about the work, which I could complement with semi-structured interviews with staff members. In this way, I was able to gather information on what the interventions to strengthen women's activism look like, and how staff members link the struggle for gender equality with the broader goals of social justice at this point in time. This also served to deepen my understanding on how the link between internal and external change work for gender equality was perceived in the College.

The semi-structured interview format allowed me some extent of control of the topics covered, while also encouraging interaction with the interviewees and allowing for unexpected issues to emerge in the interaction. Further into my study, I stopped bringing the set of questions with me to interview sessions, since I knew which broad questions I needed answers to. I also wanted the interviewees to feel free to steer the interview in the direction they saw as most important at the time.

In total, I interviewed ten staff members of Khanya College, three of them twice or more, with a main focus on people who had been directly involved in external or internal interventions. I thus interviewed all the staff at the Strategy Centre, and all but one of the members of the internal steering committee of the college (Programme Coordinating Team, PCT), since I presumed that these key persons had enough knowledge about the programmes, and would be quite open to air their feelings, without being afraid of negative implications

from their unit coordinators or the College coordinator if they were critical to the organisation. Moreover, I interviewed two of the three female staff members who resigned in October 2006, since I wanted to find out if their reasons for resigning were linked to the gendered conflict within the College, which was emerging strongly at this point in time. I also conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with eight women activists, two of them twice, representing six different organisations in the GRG. These interviews solicited background information on women activists' perceptions of their possibilities to participate fully in their CBOs and SMs, how gender dynamics impact on their every day activism, and how they draw the link between women's strategic gender interests and the broader goals of the movements. The interviews also provided data on how the activists perceived the interventions by Khanya College, how these interventions relate to their own needs, and how they impact on the gender relations in their organisations.

When choosing which of the GRG activists to approach for interviews, I relied on recommendations from Nancy Castro and Nina Benjamin as to who would be open and willing to share their thoughts with me, and who had experiences that could be interesting for my research. I also approached women with whom I had developed good rapport during the meetings.

Analysis of the data

When analysing the material I gathered through the techniques described above, my first step was to break the data up "into manageable themes, patterns, trends and relationships" (Mouton 2001:108). These themes and patterns were derived both from my research questions and from the logic of the data itself, and included divisions into the different arenas of research (such as the Gender reference group, the College, the Winter school etc) and theoretical arenas (related to citizenship theory; theories on feminist consciousness-raising; the 'universe of political discourse' etc). To interpret the data, I referred back to the theoretical concepts which I briefly outlined in Chapter 1, and which will be further presented in Chapter 3, namely feminist theorizing on citizenship (Gouws, 2005, Jones 1990, and others), the universe of political discourse (Hassim, 2006 and others), critical consciousness raising, and the development of a feminist consciousness (Freire, 1996, Kaplan, 1999 and others), and theories on organisational change for gender equality (Rao, Kelleher and Stuart, 1999). This theoretical framework assisted me when investigating what meaning "women's empowerment programs", "political actors" and "political gender work", "participation" and "organisational change for gender equality" are given today inside Khanya College. While

not setting out to build a theory around women's empowerment programs in class based organisations in general in South Africa today, the study is too limited, and there is too little available research in the field which could be used to support such an attempt, the conclusions I have drawn from this analysis, which are presented in Chapter 7, may still be useful for researchers further investigating the area of women's empowerment within social justice organisations in South Africa in the future, and could support future theory building.

Does this constitute a research methodology?

My research project has made it necessary for me to constantly balance and make sense of opposing dynamics: the theoretical academic feminist world colliding with attempts to 'do feminism' in practice, the inspiring fights for social justice starkly contrasting with the downplayed harassment and silencing of women in the movements, the discourse on citizenship and human rights for women in post-apartheid South Africa versus the lived realities of the majority of women, the Khanya College rhetoric on gender justice contrasting at times with gendered power hierarchies within the institution, and my personal battles around my multiple roles as a researcher/activist/feminist. My approach to the study has been shaped by these contradictions, and I have made my choice of methods, and who to interview, in attempts to depict at least parts of these different sides to the story, while at the same time hearing the women, and trusting my own experiences as a participant observer, in making assumptions about the relevance of the methodology and focus.

So does the approach I have used constitute a research methodology which is sufficiently 'academic' for a Masters research project? Can it be classified in order to fit in with models on how to conduct research which influential thinkers on methodology have developed?

Looking at some of the feminist theorist literature, I would argue that at least the intent of the study fits well within the parameters of Olesen's broad definition of qualitative feminist research, which she sees as centring around and problematizing "women's diverse situations as well as the institutions that frame those situations" (2000:216). My research focus is however on change, and how change can be achieved within these institutions.

Though there are myriad feminist approaches to research, one of the main threads weaving feminist research epistemologies together is that of self-reflexivity; indicating that the identity and background, positionality and political aims of the researcher are of vital importance, and need to be visible throughout the research process (Mbilinyi, 1994). Adhering to this principle, I have strived to be open about, and consider the impact of my own background and politics, in order to allow the reader to interpret the data based on this self-reflexivity.

Thorough consideration has also been given to another factor highlighted as important by feminist theoreticians; the historical and contemporary context of the research (Bhavnani, 1994), which will be further outlined in Chapters 3 and 4. On the basis of these links with crucial aspects of feminist epistemological concerns, I would argue that my broad approach is consistent with the work of experienced feminist researchers. One of my underlying assumptions for the research has been that interaction with contemporary activism, and the sharing and joint production of knowledge is crucial for the relevance of feminist research. In the same way, I am arguing, that the interaction with research through knowledge building processes is essential in order for activism to continue being relevant, and choose the appropriate orientation and strategies.

When it comes to adhering to academic research procedures as they are described in mainstream literature, it is difficult to ground my study within one set methodology. The study has elements of a qualitative case study research, where the case itself has been my main interest, without my claiming to be able to generalize the Khanya College experience. While designing my study, I engaged with the writings of Robert E. Stake, who points out that a case study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of what problem or phenomena to study (Stake, 2000). It can be both quantitative and qualitative in its nature. A qualitative case study can be said to be “characterized by researchers spending extended time, on site, personally, in contact with activities and operations of the case, reflecting, revising meanings of what is going on.” (Stake, 2000:445). In my study, I used qualitative techniques, since the questions I sought to answer are exploratory and emerging (asking why and how something is happening), and the answers would not be possible to arrive at through quantitative methods like surveys. I also made use of some secondary data produced by the College, like the participant questionnaire Khanya College had put together to evaluate the Winter School 2006.

As in much qualitative research, the study was not guided by a pre-set hypothesis, although some underlying assumptions were made, such as the potential usefulness of empowerment programmes for raising feminist consciousness, and the close link between gender justice and social justice. Although the time I spent at Khanya College was limited due to costs of travelling between Cape Town and Johannesburg, I attended a wide range of different public and internal activities of the organisation both prior to starting my fieldwork, and during my fieldwork, visiting Khanya College in April, June/July, October and November 2006, and interviewing Khanya College staff during their visit in Cape Town in September 2006.

Stake points out that case studies draw from a wide range of different factors for considering the particulars of each case, including: 1) The nature of the case; 2) The case's historical background; 3) The physical setting; 4) Other contexts (economic, political, legal, and aesthetic); 5) Other cases through which this case is recognized; 6) Those informants through whom the case can be known (Stake, 2000:438). Most of these factors have been considered in my study, and they point to the need to use a combination of methods, in a similar way which I have done.

In order to broaden my understanding of the South African political context in which I was working, I reviewed the historical context of gender interventions in South Africa, including initiatives at the level of the state. This rich background literature formed a backdrop for the development of what Clifford Geertz (1973) calls 'thick description' of the specific case, Khanya College, bringing up conflicting perspectives and different aspects of the work of the organisation to be able to get as deep understanding of the processes as possible. The multitude of techniques I used to gather and cross-check data is a way of 'triangulating' the data, which serves to "clarify meaning by identifying different ways the phenomenon is being seen" (Stake, 2000:444).

Overall, in my work with Khanya College, I used what I would describe as self-reflexive feminist activist/researcher participation (during the Winter School and in the GRG meetings), semi-structured interviews with activists, Khanya staff and other key informants, and qualitative content analysis of available documents as methods for answering the questions of the study. My participation in activities allowed me to cross-check and get a deeper understanding of the rhetoric in training materials and interviews. It also provided further information on how the women activists participate in and make use of the interventions. According to Adler and Adler, observation means to gather "impressions of the surrounding world through all relevant human faculties", such as looking, feeling, listening and smelling. In qualitative research, they point out that the researcher as observer is free to search for "concepts or categories that appear meaningful to subjects" (1998:80), which relates well to the research approach I have used. As Adler and Adler have pointed out, observation in combination with other research methods, such as interviewing, "is the most powerful source of validation" (1998:105), and this applies to my research, where interviews were cross-checked through activist/researcher participation.

However, as pointed out above, I was not a mere participating researcher, but often more of a self-reflexive woman activist participating in and contributing to the sessions. This has meant

that I have influenced the actual events in deeper ways than a participant researcher would usually do, most visibly through the involvement with the Winter School newsletter. Also in the interviews, I at times took on the role of a dialogue partner, defending the approach of the Gender team at the Strategy Centre after conflicts had arisen, and providing different perspectives on how the link between gender and social justice can be seen, and in some cases implicitly or explicitly challenging my interviewees on the gap between the rhetoric of gender justice and the practice in the college.

Can it then be said that my use of observational techniques was a way of validating sources, when it in some ways changed the course of events? And is validation of sources without interference what I should have strived for? Attempting to respond to these questions, I may argue with Sandra Harding, that the self-reflexivity used throughout the research process, introducing the 'subjective' also in the analysis and presentation of data, "in fact increase the objectivity of the research and decreases the "objectivism" which hides this kind of evidence from the public". (Harding, 1987:9). I can furthermore claim to have largely adhered to the principles of research and made use of the research methods as described in mainstream literature.

But the discrepancies, and the involved participation I have used still raises questions around to what extent conventional research methods, mainly theorized within a white, Western context in previous decades, are still suitable for feminist research projects in a multicultural, postcolonial, globalising South Africa in 2006. Drawing from the experiences of this research project, I would argue that the complexities of present day South Africa require flexibility and adaptation in the research approach and techniques, in more extensive ways than what theorists generally describe. Contextualisation is crucial, and having personal experience from the researched area, and preferably a possibility to take part in the researched activities as a participant, will make it possible to produce more coherent findings. This is especially true when researching 'the other', since the understanding of cultural meanings, contemporary dynamics and the common narrative of the group under study is essential for being able to interpret the result in a relevant way. I thus argue on the basis of this study, that while it may be correct to start out by using conventional methods for qualitative research, it may be necessary to adapt, and to try getting to know the group under study in many different ways, in order to produce relevant findings. This is especially the case for methodological choices within the emerging and exploratory field of feminist qualitative research.

For feminist researchers, studies of (successful or failed) attempts to change gendered power relations are important since it gives us insight into the dynamics around efforts to do away

with sexism and patriarchy. But as feminists and researchers, we also live our activism, and adhere to the common, broad definition of feminists, i.e. people who recognise gendered power inequalities and take actions to change them. Therefore, I would argue that a mere outsider/observer approach is hard to stick to if we are committed to transformation, and to walking our talk in every aspect and part of our lives (although a less confrontational research methodology can be very useful, provided that the research is followed through with advocacy or other interventions). From a positivist point of view, our findings might then not be considered 'valid' since we 'tamper' with the data by trying to intervene for a gendered power change. But it is also common knowledge that any researcher, through participative observation, interviews or document review, will influence the data he or she set out to study to some extent (Adler & Adler, 1998). My relatively close relationship with Khanya staff members and women activists has allowed me to access more honest responses than what would have otherwise been possible, and to influence events in what I view as a positive way. Compared to a 'disembodied' approach to research, where I am not present as a feminist, female activist, but merely as an outsider/researcher, I argue that this technique has brought me closer to a 'true understanding' of the dynamics in Khanya Colleges internal and external work for gendered power change. I have sought to draw conclusions using my experiences as a feminist activist, as well as a researcher.

Chapter 3: Historical and contemporary context of the research

This chapter seeks to explain and contextualise how 'gender politics' is situated within the South African political landscape, shaped by 'globalisation' as well as the legacy of the struggle and the post-apartheid moment, and how this influences the emergence of 'gender' as a problematic yet inevitable tool for analyzing contemporary movement building, and empowerment initiatives for women activists. Literature covering the historical and contemporary context of women's activism within class-based organisations in South Africa, the changing composition of the working class, and the emergence of new working class-formations in townships and rural areas, in the form of social movements (SMs) and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) is reviewed. I also present theories on citizenship, and especially women's participation, and theories around the expression of strategic and practical gender interests within that activism.

Problematizing 'women's interests' in a South African context

Shireen Hassim and other feminist theorists have pointed out that it is not possible to crystallize 'gender identity' from race, class, sexuality, nationality and other markers of identity which shape women's different contexts and needs (Hassim, 2006:4, Mohanty, 2003:22-24). As a consequence, it is difficult to speak of a concept like 'women's interests', since women do not take action only based on their gendered/sexed identity, but also in relationship to the contemporary, contextual and localised cultural meaning of being gendered as 'woman' (Hassim, 2006:4-5). While the 'elimination of patriarchy' might have been the common goal of some Western women's movements, Chandra Mohanty and other postcolonial researchers have pointed out that solely focusing on patriarchy and ignoring experiences of class, race and colonial oppression privileges a Eurocentric and middle-class perspective (Mohanty, 2003).

In South Africa, any assumption of a historic 'universal sisterhood' is particularly unfitting, since the class and colour divides have kept women far apart since the arrival of European settlers (Walker, 1982). When white South African suffragettes fought for voting rights in the 1930's, black⁹ women were for example not included in their demands (Walker, 1982, Erlank, 2003, Hassim, 2005). Black South African women's autonomous struggles have

⁹ During apartheid, four 'races': African, Indian, Coloured and White, were created to maintain a division of labour facilitating apartheid capitalism. These concepts are still in use both in official and popular discourse to describe 'social categories'. 'Black' is sometimes also used to substitute 'African'. Throughout this thesis the term 'Black' includes all people of colour in South Africa unless otherwise specified in relation to a specific quote.

historically instead been focused mainly on survivalist issues, from 1930s and onwards concentrating on the lack of housing, the food prices, the right to brew and sell beer and resisting pass laws and other regulations forcing the majority of black women to remain in the deprived black 'homelands' where the socio-economic situation was appalling (Walker, 1982). It should not be assumed, however, that these local livelihoods struggles were synonymous with a silent acceptance of 'patriarchy'. Historian Helen Bradford has showed in her research on women's beer protests in Natal in 1929 that the beer-brewing women were acutely aware of their oppression on the basis of gender, and this influenced the ways in which they organised their actions (Bradford, 1987:294).

In order to conceptualize the different interests and needs around which women might unite in struggles, while avoiding to create a "false homogeneity" among women, Maxine Molyneaux has suggested a distinction between "strategic gender interests" and "practical gender interests" (Molyneaux, 1985:232-3). Gender interests, she notes, are interests which women (or men) develop "by virtue of their social positioning through gender attributes" (Molyneaux 1985:233). The strategic gender interests refer to the "formulation of strategic objectives to overcome women's subordination" (Molyneaux 1985:233), around issues like abolishing the sexual division of labour, putting an end to institutionalized gender discrimination and allowing women freedom of choice on whether to have children or not. The practical gender interests respond to concrete situations which women find themselves in as a result of the sexual division of labour, including meeting the basic needs of children and other family members, which is often seen as women's responsibility, by providing food, electricity and water and so on. These practical interests do generally not include a vision of emancipation or equality (Molyneaux 1985:233). The important point which Molyneaux makes, particularly in relation to women facing social and economic injustices, is that strategic gender interests should not be assumed to be prioritized by women whose practical gender interests or needs have not yet been met. Women can therefore not be expected to automatically unite over class and racial barriers under the banner of gender justice, fighting a commonly understood 'patriarchy'. These concepts are relevant when theorizing the apparent subordination of the "gender struggle" to national (and class) struggles during apartheid, and the nature of women activists' organising in unity with men, both historically and at present.

Women's involvement in resistance to apartheid

Taking into account the great disparities in living conditions between different groups of women along the colour lines, it is not surprising that broad-based women's activism in South

Africa historically has formed part of resistance to oppression on the basis of class and race, something which is also the case in most CBOs and SMs today. During colonialism and the apartheid era, men and women's common goal of resisting state oppression led to a hierarchy in the struggle, where political transformation was the first priority, the class struggle came thereafter, and gender equality was seen by many as either something that would be achieved automatically with political transition, or an issue that had to be dealt with at a later stage (Albertyn and Hassim, 2003, Benjamin, S, 2004, Geisler 2004, Gouws 2005, Hassim 2003, Meer, 2000, Walker, 1982). In order to understand women's' organising patterns then, and how it influences the ways in which women activists mobilise in CBOs and SMs today, I will briefly review literature on women's' involvement in four of the dominant sites of struggles during the apartheid era (the ANC, the trade unions, the United Democratic Front, UDF, and the Black Consciousness Movement) and in an influential but short-lived women's federation (FSAW), concentrating on some key examples which are useful for understanding the situation which has emerged in Khanya College, and its constituencies¹⁰.

The African National Congress (ANC), which was formed in 1912, was a strongly patriarchal organisation from its outset. Most early leading members belonged to a small, urban black bourgeoisie, and their value base rested firmly on Christian liberal-patriarchal grounds. Gender equality and women's rights were excluded from the organisations agenda or viewed with hostility, which resembled the colonial discourse at the time (Erlank, 2003). ANC member Selope Thema stated in the 1920s that any "claim to equality with men by Bantu women is at the root of the destruction of Bantu family life ... No community in which the men are without control over their women can hope to build up a healthy social system" (quoted in Erlank, 2003:656-7). Colonial discourse at the time depicted the black 'races' as less developed, comparable to children of white people in the Western metropolis. Contemporary artwork also feminized the African man, for example showing Zulu-men painted with exaggerated feminine features (McClintock, 1994). Black men were in this way 'degraded' to the levels of women and children, and the ANC leadership viewed this discourse as a threat to African masculinity, which they saw a need to reclaim (Erlank, 2003). The struggle for black people's rights to vote at the time was also essentially a fight for the black man's right to vote: women, with a few exceptions, were not regarded 'fit to vote' (Erlank, 2003). As Helen Bradford and others have pointed out, African men survived in the

¹⁰ There are several illuminating overviews over women's struggles in South Africa historically. To get a deeper understanding than I am able to provide here, see for example Hassim, 2006, Walker, 1982 and Geisler, 2004.

colony “partly by asserting their dominance over black women” (quoted in Erlank, 2003:665).

Women only gained the right to full membership in the ANC in 1943, the same year as the ANC Women’s League (ANCWL) was established¹¹ (Geisler, 2004, Walker, 1982). This decision was important in that it signified a move away from the more narrow discourse of nationalism prevailing in the early years of the party’s existence. But the separate women’s league was during its initial period mainly dealing with issues which did not break away from the stereotypes of ‘women’s’ and ‘men’s’ roles within the struggle. The ANC leadership referred to the league in a paternalistic way, at times commending the women for their contributions, but not viewing their contribution as equal to that of men (Erlank, 2003, Walker, 1982). It was only when the struggle against apartheid intensified, and the ANCWL leadership went into exile, that it moved away from dealing mainly with the social issues of the ANC, and became a more important vehicle for women’s mobilisation, which pushed the rest of the organisation to incorporate feminist values (Hassim, 2004).

Shireen Hassim has concluded that until this happened in the late 1980s, the dominant position within the ANC was that “the emancipation of women was secondary to and contingent upon national liberation” (Hassim, 2006:32). She argues that a collective agency of women was despite of this created through the nationalist struggle, but concludes that, unlike within feminism, “women’s identities are limited within nationalism and contingent on men, and women’s political agency is permitted to the extent that it enhances the popular base of the nationalist movement and signals its progressiveness” (Hassim, 2006:38-39). Examples of struggles which are not permitted within this framework are struggles around women’s bodily integrity and autonomy (Hassim, 2006:39).

Trade unions. In the 1950s, women were starting to take up paid jobs in greater numbers, and the influx to cities increased in spite of the government’s attempts to stem the tide of migration through the implementation of pass laws for (black) women. With more women becoming economically independent, the opportunities for women to organise politically increased (Walker, 1982:150). Many women workers joined the trade unions, which served as a “training ground for a new class of leader”, in the shape of women activists who climbed the hierarchies within their unions, and later on also joined political parties (Walker,

¹¹ With the establishment of the ‘Bantu Women’s League’ in 1918, women were allowed to become ‘auxiliary members’ in the organisation.

1982:57). Through their involvement in non-racial trade unions¹² many women gained organising skills and received political education for the first time, which led to these women union activists starting to articulate the link between oppression on the basis of class and gender oppression. By creating this opportunity, the trade union movement was vital for the emergence of the women's movement (Walker, 1982:57, Hassim, 2006:21). This indicates the value of women's mobilization within class based organisations for the articulation of goals expressing women's gender interests. Indeed, Shireen Hassim has argued that the lesson from South African history shows that nationalistic (or class based) struggles may be an even better breeding ground for attempts to improve women's lives than a narrowly defined feminism, since "... broader struggles against oppression may bring into play opportunities for mobilizing women's multiple identities in new ways, for example, by providing a basis for collective mobilization (Hassim, 2006:45)."

The Federation of South African Women (FSAW). During the late 1940s, women linked to the liberation movements and local women's organisations came together in the Federation for South African Women (FSAW), which was officially launched in 1954. The organisation orchestrated the famous women's march against pass laws, to the Union Buildings in Pretoria in 1956, thus far the biggest protest march to be held in South Africa, drawing somewhere between 10 000 and 20 000 participants. Although FSAW's membership came mainly from within the Congress Alliance (ANC, SACP and the trade unions) it could operate more independently than the women's wings of political parties, not having to wait for a go-ahead from the male leadership (Walker, 1982, Hassim, 2004). The organisation stopped functioning in the 1960s, with the banning of the ANC, but despite of its short existence, it managed to play an important role for women's political activism in South Africa, representing the first "serious attempt to incorporate women into the political programme of the national liberation movement on an equal footing with men" (Walker, 1982:275-276). In Gisela Geisler's analysis, the experiences in FSAW "laid the basis for the broad based mass women's movements affiliated to the United Democratic Front (UDF) in the 1980s and the Women's National Coalition (WNC) in the 1990s" (Geisler, 2004: 67). From its outset, FSAW drew on women's domestic role, and appealed to women's joint experiences of motherhood to recruit members, using similar rhetoric as the main liberation movements (Geisler, 2004:68). But the protest actions which FSAW became involved in allowed women

¹² Right-wing, whites only unions continued to exist, and white and black women in some industries organised separately.

to enter the politically charged public sphere, where they soon turned increasingly politicised and militant (Geisler, 2004:67, Walker, 1982:181). On some occasions, FSAW was more eager to engage in direct action than the male-dominated organisations in the Congress Alliance (Walker, 1982).

The FSAW leadership was in many ways ahead of its times. It raised controversial issues, for example calling for birth control clinics, which provoked a lot of debate around which issues are 'legitimate' within a political movement. "Sex and sexuality were not socially sanctioned topics for public discussion, and, in raising this issue at a public meeting, the FSAW was breaking new ground" within the liberation movement (Walker, 1982:183). By placing issues of sexual and reproductive health and rights on the agenda, women "were also questioning its normative assumptions about the nature of the family and the primacy of women's roles as wives and mothers" (Hassim, 2006:39). The federation challenged deeply rooted cultural interpretations of femininity and masculinity prevailing within the Congress Alliance. While formal objections to FSAW activities were few, women in the organisation felt that not every one was encouraging their work and facilitating cooperation, in spite of the credibility they had gained in the Congress Alliance through the militant protests against pass laws.

"Many men who are politically active and progressive in outlook still follow the tradition that women should take no part in politics and a great resentment exists towards women who seek independent activities or even when many of those in leading positions in the ANC appear to be co-operating with the Federation, it is sometimes difficult to avoid the conclusion that they would prefer to hinder the work of the Federation and to withdraw their own womenfolk from activities."

('Report to the WIDE', p 3, FSAW 6, quoted in Walker, 1982)¹³

Despite the unhappiness and disappointment with the reactions within the ANC to some of its actions, FSAW recognised the authority of the Congress Alliance and remained loyal to the national liberation discourse (Walker, 1982:222).

In the radical *Black Consciousness Movement (BCM)*, which started growing strong in the

¹³ Similar sentiments have been documented by Temma Kaplan (Kaplan, 1997, on women's organising in 'Crossroads', 1960-1980) where women organising for the rights to housing and against pass regulations at a grassroots level, testified how men tried to lay obstacles to their activities when the women became strong, and to stop them from having meetings.

1970s, women who tried to raise gender as a political issue (race and class were the dominant lenses through which oppression was theorized in BCM), quickly became unpopular (Geisler, 2004:69). Cheryl Carolus and other prominent ex-members of the movement have witnessed how black men, while reclaiming their blackness, also asserted their masculinity through oppressing and sexually harassing black women within the movement (Geisler, 2004:69). This indicates how “exclusionary power” (Rao, Stuart and Kelleher, 1999:6-10) was used to determine the political discourse, and exclude ‘women’s gender interests’ from the agenda.

The umbrella body of nearly 400 organisations fighting apartheid inside South Africa, The United Democratic Front (UDF) which was formed in 1983, harboured many strong grassroots women’s organisations and networks. These women’s organisations could be described as having opted for what Maxine Molyneux has called an ‘associational’ form of autonomy within the UDF, a strategy whose success rests on the organisations’ bargaining power within the broader movement, and the external environments readiness to adopt feminist values (Hassim, 2006:11). Although some women’s groups within and outside the UDF were challenging sexism and women’s oppression, former members have pointed out that feminism was not on the agenda of the predominately male leadership, and that the relationship between the ‘gender struggle’ and the ‘national struggle’ was one of constant tension, where ‘gender issues’ generally were subordinated to the broader struggles (Geisler, 2004:71). The concept ‘triple oppression’ was used to describe the situation for black, working class women at the time, which suggested a simple add-on perspective (race + class + gender) instead of problematizing the ways in which “different forms of cultural and economic oppression intersect” (Hassim, 2006:43).

Also within UDF, women were mobilized within a nationalist framework, as ‘mothers of the nation’, and seen as ‘bearers of culture’ rather than agents of change in their own right (Geisler, 2004, Gouws, 2005, Hassim, 2004 and 2006, McEwan, 2005). This nationalist framework denied differences between women involved in the struggle and resulted in “Issues of reproductive rights, bodily autonomy, and sexual choice” being “deemed apolitical by nationalists” in UDF, both women and men, since rethinking women’s traditional identities would mean undermining the rhetoric of the motherist politics (Hassim, 2006:77). Hassim however points out, that at grassroots level, women’s organizations affiliated to the UDF had more autonomy, enabling them to set their own agenda, joining visions of political, social and cultural transformation, and linking gender oppression in the private sphere with class and race oppression (Hassim, 2006:83-84).

The experiences of the difficulties with articulating women's gender interests within the nationalist struggle, points to the power of what Jane Jensen (quoted in Hassim, 2006:17-18) has called the “universe of political discourse”; comprising “beliefs about the ways politics should be conducted, and the kinds of conflicts resolvable through political processes”. The dominant discourse within popular organisations thus determines, or at least sets boundaries, to which issues can be raised, shaped by the contemporary South African theorization of ‘the gender struggle’ in relation to class-, and nationalist struggles.

Looking into historical and present strands of feminism in South Africa, Shireen Hassim has identified four dominant perspectives (Hassim, 2006:32-33). Besides the ANC perspective, in which women’s emancipation was dependent on, and an expected outcome of national liberation (Hassim labels this “The ‘Women Question’”) she highlights three other positions, namely “The Radical Feminist position” (Claiming that patriarchy is the main source of women’s oppression), “The ‘Workerist’ Position” (Rejecting nationalism, and any claims that there exist general women’s interests: only women’s class positions define their interests), and “The Socialist Feminist Position” (Women’s struggles should link to national and class struggles, but keep a relative autonomy).

These perspectives are relevant entry points when attempting to illuminate the deep divide between different groups of female and male activists in left-wing SMs and CBOs today, around how to approach issues of substantive gender equality – a struggle of defining the essence of the place of gender within ‘the political’.

Women’s gains and rights under the new democracy

The transition period, culminating with the first free elections in 1994, opened a space for the women’s movement to put women’s specific interests on the agenda for the first time, and ensure that democracy came with extra benefits for women as a category, in terms of advancing formal rights to gender equality. In this period, the ANCWL was driven by a group of strong young feminists, committed to change in gendered power relations, who were influential in ANC’s decision to incorporate gender equality into its agenda (Hassim, 2004, 2006).

“By 1990, the movement that had initially been hostile to the notion of feminism was able to declare that the emancipation of women had to be addressed ‘in its own right’, and that urgent consideration should be given to the formulation of policies that would ‘advance and ensure the emancipation of women’ (ANC 1990)” (Hassim, 2004:9).

The opportunity arising with the transition was grabbed by women activists, who united over the party lines, forming the Women's National Coalition (WNC), an effective lobby group for women's equal representation in decision-making bodies and for laws to guarantee gender equality (Gouws, 2005, Hassim, 2001, 2003).

In 1994, formal citizenship was granted to all South Africans, and women from different classes and ethnic groups entered parliament in large numbers. Laws and policies were adopted to strengthen the rights of women, gender was listed in the new constitution as one of the grounds on which no discrimination may take place, and a women's national machinery was established (Gouws 2005, Hassim, 2003, Manicom, 2005).

The expectations from grassroots women and men of what the new democracy would bring were high. Decent housing, jobs and access to basic services was on the election programme of the ANC, and these promises were expected to be fulfilled promptly. But the gains for women as a category in the new South Africa have so far mainly revolved around legal rights, in areas where women are addressed as a group, such as around abortion rights, maternity leave, the reformation of customary unions and violence against women.

Socio-economic rights for poor women, and transformation which would affect men's power and control over resources, such as women's land rights and inheritance rights under customary laws, have transformed in a much slower pace (Gouws, 2005:8, Hassim, 2004:19). This, combined with a lack of implementation of the new laws and policies, effectively means that the gains for 'women' under the new democracy have mainly benefited a group of vocal and resource-strong middle class women, while little has been done to change the gendered socio-economic and cultural inequalities creating conditions for oppression of the majority of women (Hassim, 2004:19).

Formally, all the bodies which implement law and policy and monitor that women's rights are realised are in place in South Africa. There are gender focal points in all the state departments, a multi-party women's caucus in parliament, the statutory body Commission for Gender Equality has been set up to monitor women's equality both within the state and the private sector, the Office of the Status of Women is responsible for the National Gender Policy, and the Joint Standing Committee on the Improvement of the Quality of Life and the Status of Women is overseeing the implementation of international treaties that South Africa is bound to, such as CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action (Gouws, 2005:10). The space that has been opened up for women's organisations through this 'state feminism' has allowed for a discursive engagement around gender rights, but it has also pushed the debate in

the direction of formal citizenship rights for women, excluding other discussions (Gouws, 2005). Feminist academics reflecting on the period of transition and the new democracy have raised concerns about the consequences of concentrating mainly on formal rights. Shamin Meer cautions that it “is as though leaders of the liberation movement having moved into the state have also moved the spotlight on to the state and anything outside this arena is devalued and/or invisible” (Meer, 2001:26). Linzi Manicom argues that the way in which gender issues have been taken up in South Africa to date has been too unquestioning, neglecting the fact that gender is something constructed, and contested. According to Manicom, gender in South African official discourse “becomes constructed in a way that represents women as lacking agency, as clients of social programmes or victims of political processes” (Manicom, 2001:9). Shireen Hassim furthermore speaks about the meaning of the increased representation of women within governing structures and the bureaucracy: while women are clearly present in greater numbers than ever before, it is more questionable whether they are able to represent the majority of poor women in South Africa (Hassim, 2004). The lack of expansion of socio-economic rights to the majority of women living in poverty, and the huge gap between good laws and policies and an appalling lack of implementation, real transformation and recognition of rights in the private sphere is a signal that women political leaders are not ‘hearing’ their sisters at the grassroots level (Hassim, 2004:20). Hassim and Albertyn points out that socio-cultural issues leading to women’s oppression, such as agency and bodily autonomy, have largely remained unchallenged in the new South Africa (Hassim and Albertyn, 2004:159). McEwan furthermore argues that there is an ongoing conflict over the control over women’s minds and bodies between “private and public patriarchies”, between “the bureaucrat and the male head-of-household” (McEwan, 2005:180). The discourse allows rural patriarchy to be “legitimized as tradition; so that, for example, attempts by the state to redistribute land to women is often depicted as a threat to tradition by imperialist feminism” (Walker 1994, quoted in McEwan, 2005:181).

Citizenship for women

The complexities of ‘black’ women’s political mobilization, which I have attempted to depict over the last few pages, ending with the contrast between formal equality guaranteed in the Constitution, and the de facto lack of substantive equality for the majority of women, has led to the emergence of debates on Citizenship for women. These debates are relevant for the key questions in my research, around gender relations in grassroots organising within Social movements and CBOs, since these formations grew out of an understanding that ‘flag-

democracy' has not translated into the alleviation of socio-economic (and racial) injustices and inclusion. I therefore move on to reviewing international and local feminist theorists' conceptualisation of citizenship, which highlights the complexities of viewing struggles for 'democracy' and 'social justice' through a gendered lens.

Feminist academics in the social sciences, such as Ruth Lister and Kathleen B Jones, have long been focusing on the gendered nature of citizenship, looking specifically at the exclusion of women from the traditional concept 'citizenship', in which the private sphere is not included (Gouws, 2005). Applying these theories to a South African context, Amanda Gouws has defined citizenship as both a status and a practice. She calls for a rethinking and extension of the concept, which should be made to include:

“status (ability to claim rights on all levels – political, social and civil), participation that would include activities in a number of arenas such as national and local government, civil society such as social movements and formal and informal organizations, and discourse (the discursive construction of citizenship), as well as locales (or sites of struggle)”

(Gouws, 2005:2-3).

Her definition draws on the thinking of Kathleen B Jones, who has pointed out that the conceptualisation of citizenship, which is derived from presumed activities that such a citizen undertakes, has been based on 'masculine' or 'male' characteristics, values and experiences. She has stressed the importance of including the body in political discourse on citizenship, and points out that citizens “act as embodied subjects whose interests reflect their biological and social reality” (Jones, 1990:786). For women, sexual harassment, reproductive rights and pornography are some of the constraints on their citizenship that may hinder full participation in the public sphere.

Although there is a danger with emphasizing the differences between women and men as political actors, and looking specifically at 'women's citizenship', since it can lead to essentialism (Manicom, 2005), ignoring existing differences may simply result in continued privileging of masculine/male experiences and needs. Jones has pointed out that “biological, social and discursively defined differences make the granting of the same rights to different persons more likely to sustain a hierarchy of rights than a uniformity in status” (Jones, 1990:795). The exclusion of the private sphere from 'the political' has meant that the site where both women's agency and women's oppression are mainly played out has been made invisible. Gouws therefore argues that this divide needs to be changed and the “fluidity of its

boundaries and the interconnectedness between the two spheres” be understood in order to make possible a more inclusive definition of citizenship (Gouws, 2005:5).

McEwan (2005) argues that the concept citizenship, and citizens’ rights, is still based on outdated and male-biased notions of the full-time, paid worker, which ignores much of the work that women do. It also does not correspond to the situation in present-day South Africa, with increased unemployment and casualisation of the labour market. The sexual division of labour within the family and the devaluing of unpaid care work, which is mainly carried out by women, are thus determining factors for women’s citizenship. This is something I will return to in-depth in the Chapters 4 and 6.

One of the cornerstones in Gouws’ notions of citizenship is the aspect of agency, or political participation. Participation in political processes is fundamental for overcoming inequalities cemented in a class, race and gender-divided society like South Africa. In terms of women’s presence in formal structures, South Africa is doing comparatively well, with 33 percent of the members of parliament, and 21 of 50 ministers and deputy ministers in the government being women, one of them in the position of Deputy President (www.gov.za, accessed Jan 19th, 2007). However, black women’s political activities often takes place outside of formal political organisations, and are exercised mainly at a local level (Hassim, 2004). Such participation is visible in SMs or CBOs fighting for rights of the poor. These kinds of organisations can put pressure on governments to account to citizens, even if the movements often are fluid, with varied intensity and nature of their work (Ballard et al, 2006).

From the rethought definitions of citizenship which I have just outlined, a few important points can be highlighted in relation to the research I have undertaken, providing a perspective on how to view women’s and men’s organizing in SMs and CBOs in South Africa at present. Firstly, if the aspect of citizenship concerning participation is crucial in overcoming inequalities, and if SMs and CBOs, a space where much of women’s participation is exercised, generally do not advocate for a change in unequal power relations between men and women (Hassim, 2004:16), then the nature of women’s participation in these organisations needs some further looking into. Here, the points made by Gouws and Jones, that incorporation of the ‘private sphere’, and of ‘bodies’ into the concept of citizenship is crucial for the inclusion of ‘women’, is important to note. This links with McEwan’s point about citizenship being based on an outdated, male-biased vision of a full-time paid worker (in the public sphere) which does not fit in with the reality in present day

South Africa. When assessing empowerment initiatives which seek to increase women's participation in SMs and CBOs, it can thus be argued that such initiatives should problematize the boundaries between the public and the private, that focus should shift from the vision of a full paid (and predominantly male) worker in the public sphere as symbolizing the working class, and that women's participation should be assessed in relation to the issues which CBOs and SMs advocate for.

International capitalist expansion and women's rights in South Africa

Social movements and CBOs questioning the post-1994 focus on collaboration between NGOs and the state, are generally seen to have emerged in response to the process of neoliberal globalised expansion (see next section). In order to enable an understanding of the context in which these organisations operate, I will therefore provide a brief overview of the processes of globalisation in South Africa in this section, using statistical information, and leaning on the writings of local feminist- and social movement researchers, as well as some of the most influential international theorists.

The word 'Globalisation' incorporates a range of different, interacting, and at times contradicting processes, which makes it difficult to define (Ballard et al, 2006:8). Left-wing sociologist Anthony Giddens has made an attempt to do so, conceptualising globalisation as "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice-versa" (Giddens, 1990, quoted in Ballard et al, 2006:9). This suggests that local politics may be a place where global processes can be countered, as the activism in social movements and CBOs has shown. Giddens has furthermore pointed out that globalisation is effecting our lives at all levels, socio-economically through the movement of international capital, as well as culturally through influences from media and corporations (Giddens, 1993). The destabilisation of the labour market, and the disruption of societal structures that follows in the wake of globalisation has led to a call for a 'return to family values' amongst neo-liberal thinkers all over the world, often equated with the return of women to the domestic sphere, where they can be deprived of political agency (Giddens, 1993).

Amanda Gouws, quoting Diane Elson, mentions but a few of the negative consequences of the continued neo-liberal global expansion for women: the commodification of basic services, which the poor (the majority of them being women) cannot afford to pay for, the shrinking space for governments to control their economies and limit the effects of recession (due to

which women lose their jobs faster than men), and the continued exclusion of un-paid care work (mainly carried out by women) as an asset in the market economy (Gouws, 2005:87). But globalisation has also had positive impacts, for example through the development and increased availability of communication technology, enabling links between activists in different parts of the world (Ballard et al, 2006:12).

Since South Africa's contacts with the outside world were constrained during the apartheid era, for example through boycotts and sanctions, globalisation processes rapidly intensified during the political transition period, when the new government was restoring South Africa's relations with the international community and its neighbour countries. Shameen Meer moreover points out that already at the dawn of the new democracy, the fear of investors pulling out of, or continuing to boycott, South Africa influenced the ANC government to take a de facto step away from anything resembling socialist policies of redistribution. The introduction of the home-grown neoliberal economic restructuring programme GEAR, in 1996, aimed at attracting foreign investors, has been followed by the closure of many industries traditionally employing women, such as the clothing and textile industry (Meer, 2001). This buying-in to global neo-liberal capitalism has thus impacted harder on women than on men, since the 'trickle-down' of wealth to the poor, favoured by the pro-capitalism lobby over more substantial redistribution, is generally even less likely to reach women than men. According to available statistics¹⁴, poverty in its narrow definition (looking solely at access to financial resources and if basic needs are being met) is wider spread in South Africa today than during apartheid. Between 1995 and 2002, the number of people living in absolute poverty (below one US\$ per day) increased from 3,7 to 4,7 million, in spite of the extension of pensions, child care- and disability grants (UNDP, 2003). The hardship of people living in poverty has also been exacerbated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, affecting families, the society and economy deeply, with 5,7 million people living with the virus in 2006 (Department of Health, 2006). The income inequality between people has also grown in the first decade of the new democracy, with black people and women being the groups which have lost out the most (UNDP, 2003). This is linked to the rapid increase in unemployment, from a rate of 23,9 percent (using a strict definition)¹⁵ in 1996, to 41,8 percent in 2002 (UNDP, 2003), figures

¹⁴ During the apartheid era, statistics was lacking, and the rising figures do not necessarily equate an equivalent rise in real terms.

¹⁵ The figures come from Statistics South Africa. The 'expanded' definition of unemployment includes people within the economically active population who did not work during the seven days prior to the interview, and who want to work and are available to start work within a week of the interview. This definition includes discouraged jobseekers, whereas the 'official' unemployment rate (just over 30 percent in 2002) requires that the unemployed have taken steps to look for jobs or started self-employment during the previous four weeks.

which do not take into account the vast number of people who are underemployed, underpaid, and unable to make ends meet.

In the 2000's, the labour market has disintegrated rapidly due to the increasingly competitive nature of the capitalist economy, where industrialists are focused on minimizing production costs, and constantly finding new ways of making profit. Casualisation of the labour market, self-employment and home-based industrial work are some of the characteristics of the labour market during the last decade, which has resulted in greater difficulties for workers to organise, and to safeguard that labour laws are implemented (Ballard et al, 2006:11-12). The labour market has also been 'feminised', where the presence of women in the industry has increased, since they are generally forced to accept lower salaries than men (see i.e. Casale and Posel, 2002).

Neoliberal globalisation has also impacted on the main South African trade union federation, COSATU, as a result of the decline in key industries, affecting its membership base (Habib and Valodia, 2006:231). Through its engagement with formal institutions, and the continued electoral alliance with the ANC and SACP, COSATU has changed its politics and ways of organising to adapt to the rightwards shift in the ANC post-1994 (Buhlungu, 2003:188). COSATU nowadays organises a majority of 'white collar workers' instead of the 'blue collar workers' which was its traditional base during the struggle era, and its members are relatively privileged in comparison with the majority of the unemployed or underemployed and underpaid working class (Makgetla, 2006). This is reflected in the latest Naledi survey, showing that COSATUs members earn an average of R3500 per month, whereas the median wage of non-unionised workers is about R1500 per month (Makgetla, 2006). Academics and activists have pointed out that COSATU has failed to respond to the shifts in the labour market by not managing the difficult task of organising casual workers, workers in vulnerable sectors such as domestic workers and farm workers, and informal traders in an effective way. This has meant that the response to a more fluid and uncertain situation on the labour market has been weak and fragmented (Makgetla, 2006, interviews with Ighsaan Schroeder 29/6 and with Leonard Gentle 13/10)¹⁶.

¹⁶ COSATUs opposition to the adoption of GEAR in 1996, its anti-privatisation stance, and its collaboration with the TAC in campaigns for treatment for people living with AIDS should however be noted.

Responses from below: organising in Social Movements

It is against the backdrop of neo-liberal globalisation, increased socio-economic inequalities, and lack of *de facto* citizenship in South Africa today that the development of new sites and forms of struggles, through the ‘new’ social movements which emerged in the end of the 1990s, should be seen. Since my research investigates women’s participation in these and other grass roots movements, and how empowerment initiatives can contribute to strengthen women’s participation, it is necessary to shed some light on the development and theorization of these movements. In this section, I will provide a brief overview over how these movements are theorized in the South African context, and how the composition and focus of these mass organisations have (or have not) been theorized through a gendered lens.

A vital body of South African research on social movements has been produced in the 2000s (Ballard et al, 2006, Bond, 2004, Desai, 2003, Habib, 2003, McKinley and Naidoo, 2004, McKinley and Veriava, 2005 and others). Some of the main theoretical aspects which these investigations build on are, according to Ballard et al, the *political opportunity structures* providing sparks and breeding ground for the movements, the available human and material resources in the form of *networks and structures* through which activists can be mobilised, and the *framing of a shared identity*, highlighting the importance of a “shared feeling of grievance” among activists (Ballard et al, 2006:3-8). Researchers commonly look into these three and other aspects, taking as their starting point the impact of neo-liberal globalisation, which was alluded to in the previous section of this chapter. Some of the common points in the research are that most of these movements are in fact ‘new’, the bulk of them emerging “surprisingly quickly” after the transition (Ballard et al, 2006:2). They are also analyzed as “products of the post-apartheid moment”, emerging in response to the economic difficulties and increased poverty, the introduction of cost-recovery schemes for basic services, and the adaptation of liberal policies shortly into the new dispensation (Ballard et al, 2006:398).

Though the political orientation and character of the movements differ, the majority of SMs are drawing broadly from class-based ideologies, with demands on the government to improve material living conditions for poor people as its core. Commented one academic/activist: “There can be no doubt that these struggles, even if they are defeated in the short term, herald a period of heightened *class* struggle” (Alexander, 2002:166).

The literature also describe and analyze how movements challenge government’s economic policies and failures of meeting basic needs, and their sense of exclusion and marginality through using innovative and often confrontational methods, resisting repression and enforcement of what are viewed as unjust policies (Ballard et al, 2006:2-3). Analysing the

political opportunity structures enabling the emergence of the movements, McKinley and Veriava, have pointed out that it is 'absolutely crucial' to take into account the results of the dominant liberation forces' adaptation of the concept National Democratic Revolution (NDR) (McKinley and Veriava, 2005). By using the two-fold NDR approach, where the first step was to claim power through the national struggle for racial equality and the second step to implement laws and policies creating a higher degree of socio-economic equality, the liberation movement down-played the class-struggle, the authors argue. The negotiated settlement which followed on the struggle led to a main focus on the two areas: 'political democratisation' and 'economic liberalisation' (Habib, 2003:16). This has cemented the social injustices along lines of class (and *de facto* also race) which are prevailing and in many ways also growing (see previous section), causing popular unrest, expressed through these movements. Interesting to note is the absence of the struggle for gender equality in this 'hierarchy of rights' (and in the theorizing of most social movement analysts).

The organising focus and strategies of the 'new' social movements which started emerging late 1990s have been influenced and inspired by past struggles in *networks and structures* in the liberation movement during the apartheid era (Ngwane, 2003:11). It is possible to capitalise on the culture of resistance from previous decades, which still lingers on in the townships, McKinley and Veriava argue, when political mobilisation and participation was high, visible for example through the successful campaigns to boycott the payment of fees for inadequate basic services, or resisting rent increases. The emergence of the new social movements in the late 1990s has by Patrick Bond been likened with the resurrection of the civics in a "new guise" (Bond, 2004:18). But in terms of leadership and institutions, there is little continuity, since leading networks during the struggle era, such as UDF, were disbanded, and many former struggle leaders moved into the arena of the state in the 1990s. The first five years of democracy was characterised by high hopes for change, close collaboration between state and civil society, and little results in terms of alleviating poverty (Ballard et al, 2006:15-16). Poor people were patient, although their social conditions continued being appalling or even worsened (Desai, 2002:1), and even if they had wanted to protest, there were no available structures through which to mobilise (Ballard et al, 2006:16). These experiences of continued poverty and exclusion is what frames *a shared identity* in the social movements, as Desai implies in the title to his book: 'We Are the Poores: Community Struggles in Post-Apartheid South Africa' (Desai, 2002).

When the new social movements, and a new kind of CBOs, daring to criticise the lack of real transformation and redistribution of resources, emerged a few years later, it was through this

shared identity which they mobilised. Speaking on behalf of ‘the poors’, they advocated for the right to treatment for people living with HIV and AIDS, opposition against evictions and the right to housing, the right to basic services such as water and electricity, the right to education and land etc; many of these rights which are guaranteed in the Constitution, but not implemented in practice (Ballard et al, 2006, Desai, 2002). Some of the most influential movements to be established were: The Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) 1998; Concerned Citizens Forum (CCF) 1999; Anti-Eviction Forum (AEC) and Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) 2000 and the Landless People’s Movement (LPM) 2001 (Ballard et al, 2006:17). In the following years, protest actions against lack of service delivery from local government were travelling like wild fire from township to township, mainly in the Free State, Gauteng and the Western Cape. These actions were some times spontaneous, some times organised by or linked to established SMs and CBOs, and they included blocking roads and occupying local government offices, often clashing with the representatives of the state. The actions were met with a lack of understanding by the government, with President Mbeki promising in his State of the Nation-address in February 2005 to clamp down on the protests with “the full force of the law”¹⁷. The following excerpt from a statement from the Orange Farm Water Crisis Committee is illustrative of the sentiments in these organisations of men and women, as expressed by the agenda setters of the movements:

“They told us to wait. So we waited. We saw apartheid criminals go free and men who called themselves leaders become rich. We saw them give up their red t-shirts for silk suits made in Italy. We watched as their bellies swelled and their voices thinned in their new accents of the market and the state. Still we waited. Fifteen years now we have been waiting, here in this place they call Orange Farm - a farm where nothing grows”

(Statement by the Orange Farm Water Crisis Committee, October 5, 2006).

The expectations on these new movements as possible vehicles for social change appear, in most social movement literature, to be enormous, which the following quotes illustrate:

“...social movements are our only hope for introducing substantive uncertainty¹⁸, and thereby facilitating the accountability of state elites to our citizenry” (Ballard et al, 2006:415). And “few observers on the South African scene would deny that social movements have

¹⁷ “Address of the President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, at the Second Joint sitting of the third Democratic Parliament, Cape Town” <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/speeches/2005/sp0211.html>, accessed Feb 4th, 2007

¹⁸ Substantive uncertainty, the part of political uncertainty which deals with political outcomes, concern the perception on the side of ruling political elites on whether they will be re-elected (Ballard et al, 2006:413)

contributed to the emergence of a political climate that encourages state elites to become more responsive to the country's most marginalised citizenry" (Ballard et al, 2006:415).

The gendered nature of the movements

Considering the attention given to, and hopes placed on, these movements, it is disturbing to note the almost complete absence of any analyses of the gendered nature of activism in SMs¹⁹. Most local research only vaguely mentions the fact that the leadership of the movements, and thus the spokespersons for 'the poor' are predominately (young) men, although the bulk of the rank-and-file members²⁰ (and indeed the most impoverished in South Africa today) are women (many of them older). Even less attention has been given to the nature of the issues which are raised by these movements, and if the demands for socio-economic rights include a vision of gender equality²¹.

A recent paper published by the think-tank Centre for Civil Society, CCS, (Xali, Davies-Van Es and Gentle, 2005) is an exception. Here the authors look into the presence of women within leadership structures in two broad based social movements in the Western Cape: AEC and TAC. The paper also tries to problematize the meaning of activism from a gender perspective. Other note-worthy attempts to investigate gender (and race) dynamics in the movements have been made by Saranel Benjamin (Benjamin, 2004) and by activist/researcher Rebecca Pointer, in her personal account of experiences of sexism in the AEC (Pointer, 2004). In the following section, I will briefly pull out some of the theoretical perspectives offered by these authors.

Basing their conclusions on anecdotal or empirical data, most writers aiming to provide a gender analysis of social movements confirm that women activists are in majority, and most active in protest marches, but the leadership structures are despite of this largely made up by men, who also set the agenda (Saranel Benjamin, 2004; Nina Benjamin, 2004; Xali, Davies-Van Es and Gentle, 2005). Different explanations are offered as to why this is the case. Saranel Benjamin argues that since it is issues of consumption or reproduction (housing, basic services, health care etc) that are under attack, and since these issues are closely related to the private sphere, traditionally seen as 'women's domain', it is to be expected that poor,

¹⁹ In the Introduction and Conclusion parts of "Voices of Protests: Social Movements in Post-Apartheid South Africa" (Ballard et al, 2006), no attempts are made to make sense of the gendered nature of these voices, or the gendered composition of movements.

²⁰ Membership is a difficult term to use, since membership fees, or registers over participation in meetings and rallies most often do not exist.

²¹ Internationally, there is a growing body of research looking at women's participation within social movements.

unemployed women are at the forefront of resistance organisations. When HIV and AIDS started taking its toll on already marginalised communities, women generally took charge of the response from below, providing care to family members and the community. Naidoo and Veriava (quoted in Xali, Davies-Van Es and Gentle, 2005) similarly argue that one of the effects of privatisation is increased domestic responsibilities for women, something which has pushed them into the struggle. Xali, Davies-Van Es and Gentle make an attempt to analyze this situation, by grounding their thinking in the sexual division of labour in the post-apartheid context. They furthermore point out that *“If anything they [social movements] appear to be movements of women rather than women’s movements, women in themselves rather than women for themselves”* (Xali, Davies-Van Es and Gentle, 2005:25), implying that SMs and CBOs are not places where women activists fight for greater gender equality or achieve a feminist consciousness.

Generally, discussions on issues such as gender-based violence, sexualities and reproductive rights continue to be muted and the participation of women and men as ‘embodied citizens’ in social movements and community-based organisations denied (Hassim, 2004:12). In Tanzanian academic/activist Marjorie Mbilinyi’s words, SMs are usually under “male charismatic leadership – the charismatic stars – backed up by hundreds if not thousands of women working at the grassroots level and behind the scenes in the headquarters” (Mbilinyi, 2003:59). This picture is confirmed by Rebecca Pointer, analyzing the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign (ANC), and its Mandela Park branch, revealing that male activists monopolized the leadership structures and that a culture of misogyny prevailed. She quotes a leading activist saying: “We don’t allow women to occupy positions in the Mandela Park campaign because women are just gossips” (Pointer, 2004:270). In her analysis, the attitudes expressed by some male activists are a main contributing factor to why women leave organisations instead of rising to leadership positions.

“The abuse against women is divisive. It drives women out of the organisations. That is why we don’t have a sustained struggle” (talk with Pointer, June 2nd, 2007).

In their analysis of the gendered nature of the movements, Xali, Davies-Van Es and Gentle make an attempt at analyzing the high presence of women among rank-and-file members, claiming that:

“Women are in the movements because it is “their spaces” which are under attack not because these spaces and roles are themselves being challenged. Because their (female) roles are under attack the defence of these roles (although necessary and progressive) reinforces

*gender stereotypes – that women are mistresses of the care-giving
and domestic spaces and men are “natural” leaders.”*

(Xali, Davies-Van Es and Gentle, 2005:33).

In their study of TAC, they found that gender relations in the organisation (or in the homes) are not problematized, and that attempts of building women leaders are theorized solely as responding to a need of giving women more skills and self-confidence. They furthermore point out that the organisational forms of SMs reproduce male leadership, something they see as “products of past struggles” and thus “the first port of call for emerging movements”, which have not yet started to think in new ways (Xali, Davies-Van Es and Gentle, 2005:35). The interaction between the rural areas and the urban townships, facilitated through the migrant labour system since the 1920s, has influenced the replication in urban townships of organising structures common in rural villages (i.e. stokvels and burial societies), Xali, Davies-Van Es and Gentle argue. Since the emerging movements consist mainly of people who have never been formally employed, they lack the experience of democratic organising which prevailed in the trade unions, and tend to fall back on these traditional structures and hierarchies “replicating traditions of chiefs and indunas who can pronounce on social issues on behalf of ‘their people’”: thus reproducing patriarchal dynamics. Xali, Davies-Van Es and Gentle propose that the new movements must learn from trade union organising (without problematizing the male dominance in these structures) and from the union’s experimentation with more member-controlled structures. They conclude with calling for greater institutional support to allow for a connection between struggles against class and gender oppression:

*“Women in struggle willing to stand the brutality of the police may make the link with
oppressive relationships at home but they need appropriate organisational
expressions of their struggles which allow this link to be facilitated”*

(Xali, Davies-Van Es and Gentle, 2005:38)

While this conclusion cannot be disputed, I would argue that their proposals for solving the problematic gender dynamics are insufficient. Lessons from trade unions can be important for social movements, especially where these have been successful, for instance around policy issues relating to sexual harassment, but with the problems of sexism and male leadership still prevailing in the union structures, surely it cannot be enough? The social composition of the working class involved in SMs and CBOs is also very different to that of trade unions, which

calls for a serious consideration of methodological questions. I would further argue that training and support organisations must dare to also tackle socio-cultural norms playing into this gendered oppression, something which the authors appear to shy away from.

Methods for empowering women in SMs and CBOs will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

The state of the contemporary women's movement

As Shireen Hassim and others have argued, the women's movement was a strong and important force during the transition to democracy in South Africa. It was formed by hundreds of organisations coming together around issues such as drafting a women's rights charter, and it lobbied effectively for gender equality to be high on the agenda of the new government (Hassim, 2006, Gouws, 2005). Today, however, most analysts see the women's movement in South Africa as weak and fragmented, consisting of organisations tackling mainly single (but highly complex) issues, like gender-based violence, livelihoods or home based care, most of them failing to challenge deep rooted value systems upholding gendered power inequalities (Albertyn and Hassim, 2003, Gouws, 2005, Hassim, 2004).

Contemporary women's organisations are often approaching the lack of service delivery from another angle than SMs and CBOs of men and women, whose tactics are often more confrontational and theorized as more 'radical'. By providing home based care, counselling for survivors of gender-based violence, establishing crèches in townships and so forth, women's organisations are providing a kind of 'emergency-relief' where crucial local government responsibilities remain unfulfilled. Government officials are quick to capitalize on initiatives like these, reviving indigenous concepts like 'ubuntu' to encourage (mainly) women's organising for betterment of their communities. The women involved in this kind of activism might receive a small stipend, or no monetary compensation at all for their efforts. Organisations of women (and some of men and women) often also attempt setting up income-generating projects with the aim of bettering the life for their families, but are rarely advocating for shared domestic responsibilities or for getting a proper salary for their unpaid care work (Hassim, 2004:14-16).

In many social movements and other organisations of the left in South Africa today, a clear hierarchy is visible, where struggles for rights directed against the state, the industry or financial institutions, often using confrontational tactics, are seen as more important than struggles to improve the life for poor people through projects and volunteerism (interview with Nina Benjamin, June 27, 2006). The organisations and movements involved in more

confrontational struggles often coincide with organisations that have a male leadership, and are generally seen as more important and truly 'political'. These are the organisations which Ballard and his colleagues refer to as having "contributed to the emergence of a political climate that encourages state elites to become more responsive to the country's most marginalized citizenry" (Ballard et al, 2006b:415). The practical action from women's organisations, in response to the concrete challenge of surviving poverty, are often seen as apolitical, and it is rarely recognised that these organisations led by women often act as the breeding ground for the more confrontational work in organisations for men and women, such as social movements (Kaplan, 1997, Hassim, 2004). However, as McEwan has pointed out, if the term 'political' includes any form of power relations, from the micro to the macro level, women's organisations are indeed political. It then "becomes evident that women have long been political actors and as such are critical in the construction and maintenance of participatory democracy and meaningful citizenship in South Africa" (McEwan 2005:190). Expanding the definition of what is 'political' would mean looking into other forms of organisations where women have come together in their communities, such as CBOs caring for the orphaned and the sick, as well as religious women's groups, stokvels and burial societies. Shireen Hassim argues with Temma Kaplan that "although the activities within these forms of organisations are 'unspectacular' and may seem politically insignificant, they can be important sources for the emergence of social movements (not only women's movements)" (Hassim, 2004:4).

In theorising political activity by women, Temma Kaplan coined the term 'female consciousness' to "characterize the state of mind exhibited by these women, who accept the division of labour by sex in their culture and historical period and sometimes demand privileges associated with fulfilling their responsibilities" (Kaplan, 1997:185). In her book "Crazy for democracy" she illustrates from different parts of the world how this practical engagement around a lack of rights to food and housing and so forth at times leads the women into more confrontational political activism, challenging the authorities, and the men in their own communities. According to Kaplan, the women developed a 'feminist consciousness' through these experiences. This teaches us to not dismiss the approach of organising around the provision of basic needs and services which many women's groups engage in as 'apolitical'. Their activities can quickly lead to uprisings if the political situation is volatile, and provide the flame for overthrowing of governments (Kaplan, 1997:185). In the context of Khanya College and other education and support organisations, it would be vital to better

theorize the organising around 'projects', and its links with the more confrontational struggles in the social movements and radical CBOs²².

Feminist debates and silences presently

2005 and 2006 have been years of intense political fights and rifts within the ruling Congress alliance, where debates around gender-based violence and rape and its link to culture and tradition have surfaced in uncomfortable ways. These burning issues were brought into the eye of the storm through the (ex-vice president) Jacob Zuma rape trial – a media drama in numerous acts, where the voices of the alleged victim, the alleged rapist, the conservative male judge and their various supporters were pitched against each other, sparing the media consumers no details. Jacob Zuma claimed that he only acted in accordance with culture when he concluded that the alleged victim's dress code (a kanga) was a clear invite to sex, which could not be declined by a Zulu man. His confession of having rounded off an unprotected intercourse with a shower to avoid contracting HIV gave birth to scores of protests, and added to the general confusion around risk taking and treatment of Aids that the South African government have been successfully fuelling over the past ten years. These life and death issues were sacrificed in the aftermaths of the trial, when the so-called left elements within the Tripartite Alliance were too busy propagating for their favoured candidate in the succession battle of the country to take sufficient note of 'apolitical women's issues' (Debate list, Vol 157, issues 161-163). Women's representation in formal structures has on the contrary been placed high up on the agenda, with President Thabo Mbeki implying that he wants the next president to be a woman.²³

So why are issues of rape, HIV and Aids and women's rights in the private sphere downplayed by the (male) bureaucracy, outside of law-making and policy debates? Sensitivities linked to negative colonial stereotyping of African people's cultures, bodies and sexuality (MacKinnon, 1994, Arnfred 2004) and repressive and discriminatory apartheid legislation and praxis around sexuality and reproductive rights, are most likely important factors contributing to this silence. The high-risk activity of discussing sexual violence can perhaps best be illustrated by the reactions of President Mbeki to Aids-activist Charlene Smiths writings on sexual violence and HIV/AIDS, subtly accusing her of being racist

²² This is something which the College Director, Oupa Lehulere, pointed out in an interview, see Chapter 4

²³ The picture painted by McEwan, about South African women being trapped in a conflict between the rural patriarch and the male bureaucrat (Chapter 3, page 11) can with ironic ease also be applied in the Zuma vs Mbeki fight.

(Smith, October 2005). Tension has also remained around the principle of gender equality and the status of women under African customary law, illustrating that a liberal and Western rights discourse is perceived as yet another interference with the 'African' way of co-existing (Manicom, 2005). Still, the need for addressing gender inequalities has been acknowledged in the public discourse through what has been described as a 'masculinities crisis', or a 'crisis in gender relations', or the 'gender order' (Connell 1995, Sideris, 2005, Walker, 2005), visualized through the alarmingly high levels of Gender Based Violence and the gendered impact of the HIV and Aids pandemic.

The huge challenges that the South African society is facing shortly into the new democracy has had a devastating effect on the lives of poor and working class women (and men) as described in this chapter. But it could also create momentum for change. Catheryn Albertyn has suggested that the current period of consolidation of the South African democracy, in combination with the social disruption that the HIV and Aids pandemic is causing, ironically enough might "create unique conditions in which to challenge deeply rooted gender relations" (Albertyn, 2003:612) Similar suggestions have been made by other authors, such as Shireen Hassim (2004:14), who points out that while "performing caring tasks for people dying of AIDS, women often have to cross cultural barriers of privacy and respect /.../ These cultural negotiations and re-definitions of social roles challenge that commonplace assumption that women are simply victims of the HIV/AIDS crisis". The risk however remains that this crisis instead will be used by conservative forces to assert their terrain and call for a return to 'family-values', often associated with pushing women back into the private sphere and depriving them of political and sexual agency.

It is in the context of this particular point in time in the history of South Africa, full of uncertainties, contradictions, silences and loud debates, that this study is set. As I have attempted to show in this chapter, a multitude of different factors contribute to the urgency of increasingly focusing on the 'integration of gender issues' onto the agenda of SMs and CBOs. These include the gendered impact of HIV and AIDS; the 'crisis in the gender order' in a post-apartheid South Africa 'shocking' with a neo-liberal global order, and the subsequent increased levels of gender-based violence; the changing composition of and conditions for the working class; poor women and men's lack of substantial and 'embodied' citizenship, and the sustained heightened attention given to social movements, which has led to some (although limited) debates around the gendered composition of these movements.

In the following Chapter, Khanya College staff members and other key informants will reflect on this increased focus on gender relations, and what it signifies for their priorities and methodology.

Chapter 4: Khanya College: an agent for change in gendered power relations?

In this Chapter, Khanya College's is introduced, through an overview of the organisations' history, mission and vision, programmes and position within South African debates around 'popular education'. The College's response to the changing context within which it works, forming a complex web of multilayered 'gender dynamics', are presented, and the leadership's theorizing of and plans for 'gender interventions' are presented and analyzed.

Several present day staff members of Khanya College commented in interviews that “*Khanya has... a very strong political face and voice*” or “*...if Khanya put something on the agenda, then the activists will pay attention*”. This is theorized in relationship to what is perceived as a consistency in the College's political position over the 20 years of its existence: when the dominant liberation forces or other NGOs shifted their orientation, and accepted ‘the language of the market’, Khanya College stood firm, and acted on the disappointment of working class people to the (largely) unfulfilled expectations of liberation. In contemporary literature on social movements, Khanya College PCT members or board members are regularly used as sources, and in an interview with researcher Sakhela Buhlungu, the present College director Oupa Lehulere argued that Khanya College:

“has been ‘at the coalface of the formation of all the new social movements’ and this includes providing a printing service for most of the movements and working with community organisations by providing infrastructure and education (Buhlungu, 2006:83).”

This central position vis-à-vis the new movements was an important factor when I choose the College as a ‘site’ for my research (See chapter 2).

In brief, Khanya College can be described as a non-governmental organisation (NGO) working with popular education, research, organisational development and networking support from a left-wing perspective, towards mass organisations such as Social Movements (SMs), Community-Based Organisations (CBOs), trade unions and other NGOs, in both urban and rural areas of South Africa. It is mainly funded by foreign development organisations, and occasionally foreign governments' development agencies, and by local foundations supportive of its political orientation. The College is nowadays based in central Johannesburg, and the bulk of its work is carried out in the Gauteng province. In the end of

2006, Khanya College had 15²⁴ employees, and it was operating 9 different programmes, which are elaborated on below. 2006 was a difficult financial year for the College, leaving the organisation few options but to withhold a percentage of the salaries each month, until the funding situation would improve. There was also a high turn-over of staff, with four people resigning without being replaced, and one person being suspended (see Chapters 5 and 6). In the midst of this, a gender programme with a new direction was introduced, which caused a lot of controversies.

In order to create an understanding of these developments, this chapter will contextualise Khanya College, by providing a brief overview of its history²⁵, its re-orientation in the late 1990's towards the new mass organisations, its current programmes and activities, the presence of 'gender work' within the College in relation to the context within which it works, and the theorization of its current gender interventions. The scope of this thesis does not however allow for a thorough investigation and analysis of the College's development and relation to 'gender work' during the last 20 years, and the following sections should be read as an attempt only to sketch some broad parameters. The main sources used to gather this information has been the booklet "Khanya College 1986-1996: Ten Years of Education for Liberation" (Khanya College, 1996) the Khanya College web page (accessed Dec 6th, 2006), articles in the Khanya Journal and interviews with staff members and other key informants.

The first decade of Khanya College

Khanya College's development is intricately linked with the development of South Africa. Being formed in 1986, at the height of the final push of the struggle against apartheid, the history of the College can be read as an indicator of the development in state-civil society relations in South Africa over the past 20 years. Khanya College was set up as a project run under the auspices of SACHED (the South African Committee for Higher Education) with offices in both Cape Town and Johannesburg. In the early years, it was providing so called 'bridging courses': alternative education oriented towards 'black' students who had gone through schooling in the inferior so called 'Bantu Education System'²⁶, and needed to undergo a qualifying course to be able to access tertiary education (Khanya College: 1996:4-

²⁴ Two additional persons were employed by a German Development Organisation to work at Khanya College during two years, making the total number of staff 17.

²⁵ Stake (2000:438) highlights the historical context as one important factor to be weighed into case study research.

²⁶ The Bantu Education Act of 1953 regulated education within the apartheid system, enforcing the separation of races in all institutions of learning, resulting in low quality education for 'African' students.

9). Initially, the selection of candidates rested both on their academic qualification and their knowledge of, and involvement in, community organising, but in the 1990s, the political awareness criterion was defused (Khanya College, 1996:6). Khanya College ran one-year courses from 1986-1996, for around 100 students yearly, the formal qualification given through the University of Indiana, after which the students could be accepted at Wits University and the University of Cape Town (Khanya College, 1996:6).

In this period, youth protesting against the Bantu Education system adopted the slogan 'Liberation first, education later', a demand which Khanya College and other education activists in the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC) responded to by calling for "People's education for peoples' power" (Khanya College, 1996:4). Neville Alexander, one of the key people in the formation of the College, in 1984 described his view on alternative education, which informed Khanya College's position, in this way:

"No project that is not conceived as part and parcel of the general struggle for national liberation and class emancipation can be said to be part of an alternative education (Khanya College, 1996:4)."

In an early planning document, the political goal of the College was described as:

"... to create a society where formal education will not be the prerogative of a privileged few and where informal education such as the experience of workers on the factory floor will not be frowned upon" (Khanya College, 1996:4).

These quotes demonstrate how firmly embedded the goal of class emancipation and workers rights has been in the College since its outset. However, although Khanya College was an alternative space for learning, it constantly battled with its aim to provide 'education for transformation'²⁷ and fulfilling the criteria of University accredited courses (Khanya College, 1996:5). Put differently: should the existing education system be reformed or completely recreated (Khanya College, 1996:6)?

Some of the characteristics of Khanya College's pedagogy included countering the Eurocentric focus prevailing in South African education by focusing on African and South African conditions, promoting cooperative learning through group work, and encouraging

²⁷ The goal of 'popular education' as articulated by Paulo Freire was to enable the development of a "critical consciousness" among learners, which would enable them to transform their immediate context.

critical thinking²⁸. The students were also required to volunteer at least half a day per week in a mass organisation or progressive community organisation (Khanya College, 1996:7-9). By 1992, the College leadership concluded that it needed to forge stronger links with progressive forces in the society, something which was not achieved through the 'bridging courses', where the selection of students was determined by academic merits, more than 'struggle credentials' (Khanya College, 1996:30). A Community Division of the College was set up, which initially ran training courses (in areas such as development theory, report writing, local government etc) for activists in the Civic Association of Johannesburg, an initiative which steered the college in the direction of 'Capacity building' for organisations (Khanya College, 1996:25-27). The 'bridging courses' were abandoned altogether in the mid-1990s, a move which allowed the College to maintain its political tradition, and not having to compromise with fulfilling formal academic requirements (Khanya College, 1996:30). In 1993, the Khanya College Johannesburg Trust was formed as an entity of its own, independent from SACHED and Khanya College Cape Town²⁹. The Johannesburg branch was transformed into a community college, offering a wide range of courses aimed at community advancement and development, targeting trade unions, community and student organisations, churches and the civics. The initial focus was on assisting organisations involved in the democratic transformation of South Africa, by strengthening their policy processes, and encouraging critical reflection on new laws and acts, and on ANC's 1994 election manifesto, the Reconstruction and Development Programme, RDP (Khanya College, 1986:26-27).

A re-orientation towards Social Movements

In the ten year celebration booklet, a few of the resolutions on People's Education adopted by the NECC, which were seen to be especially relevant for the College, are highlighted. One of them states that:

"Political education sees the linkage between education and politics and determines the two are inseparable if the struggle wants to achieve a non-racial democratic South Africa"³⁰
(Khanya College, 1986:5)."

²⁸ Critical thinking can be understood as "...a process that emphasizes a rational basis for beliefs and provides a set of standards and procedures for analysing, testing, and evaluating them" (Barry and Rudinow (1984:7).

²⁹ The Khanya College Cape Town branch was closed down in 1994.

³⁰ Non-sexism and non-classism has also always been emphasized by Khanya College.

This strong link between politics and education³¹ is still heralded in Khanya College today, and a political analysis of the contemporary context informs the College's educational and research programmes, and the choice of actors it orientates towards. As Oupa Lehulere points out, since its inception, the College has continued to "reposition itself as an institution dedicated to building the new social justice movement", in whatever form this movement has taken at the time; focusing on developing alternatives to apartheid, capitalism, neoliberalism or globalisation (Lehulere, 2006:7-9). The readiness to adapt to a rapidly changing context has influenced the three different phases which Lehulere has identified in the College's history: firstly the 'People's education for people's power' approach from 1986 to 1992-4, secondly the attempts to 'engage the state', through supporting policy development in mass organisations and creation of community colleges from 1994-1999 (both phases were described above) and thirdly, from 1999 until now, the repositioning towards re-building "a new social justice movement" (Lehulere, 2006:7).

Towards the end of the 1990s, it became clear for Khanya College and many other left-wing organisations which had supported the struggles of the Congress Alliance, that "the hopes and expectations unleashed by the first democratic elections were being betrayed" (Lehulere, 2006:7). The ANC-government had shifted away from RDP and its early social-democratic redistributive goals, and adopted a self-imposed structural adjustment programme, GEAR, in 1996, which focused on economic growth at the expense of any more redistributive goals (Lehulere, 2006:7). Budgets for housing, health care and education were subsequently cut to please presumptive foreign investors, and political activity in the trade unions declined (Interview with Ighsaan Schroeder, June 29, 2006). In this period, 'new' types of working class formations emerged in the township in the form of social movements and community-based organisations, through processes which have been described in Chapter 3. Khanya College's analysis was that the new movements entered the scene as the most credible contemporary agents for social change, and decided to re-orientate towards and forge close relationships with these organisations, developing programmes to support them (Interview with Ighsaan Schroeder 29/6). This new focus should also be seen in the light of the international developments at the time, with the birth of the new 'anti-globalisation movement', made visible through the street protests against the WTO meeting in Seattle in

³¹ Shirley Walters and Linzi Manicom point out that in popular education, the "pedagogical cannot be separated from the political, unless popular education is to be reduced to a series of formats, games and techniques" (Walters and Manicom, 1996:7)

1999, and the subsequent formation of the 'World Social Forum' (Lehulere, 2006:7). For Khanya College, which participates in these broad 'anti-globalisation' processes, the focus on developing alternatives to neoliberalism and globalisation represented a natural step away from its earlier focus, challenging the apartheid system, since the two former developments are "off-shoots" of the latter (Lehulere, 2006:9). In response to the increased social- political- and economic integration in the region, and to South Africa's new role as Africa's emerging 'super-power', which has followed on neo-liberal globalisation, an important part of the College's recent work is to strengthen solidarity links between social movements and mass organisations in the Southern Africa region (Lehulere, 2006:7-8).

Present-day structure, programmes and goals of Khanya College

In this section the current programmes, activities and objectives of Khanya College, designed to respond to the broad goals outlined above, will be briefly introduced. The background information, and direct quotes, have been gathered on the organisational web page (www.khanyacollege.org.za, accessed Dec 5th, 2006) unless otherwise stated.

Khanya College has a broad mission statement, allowing it to orient towards many different forms of organisations. It clarifies that the College should:

- *Provide education which is relevant for the needs of historically oppressed communities*
- *Contribute to the strengthening of community based organisations, trade unions and non-governmental organisations*
- *Contribute to a process of social change and development, especially in education*
- *Operate democratically, accountably and efficiently*

To realise this mission, Khanya College undertakes a range of different activities, including organising education and training workshops, seminars and conferences; conducting research; producing publications; and supporting mass movements in their organisational development and networking efforts, in campaigns and advocacy work and through providing infrastructure support such as meeting-spaces, printing and photo-copying.

In the educational work, the "facilitators will start with participants' knowledge and experience, bring that experience into a collective framework and add new information and

knowledge”. The knowledge building in community organisations also happens informally, through joint research processes, where community activists are involved in data gathering and processing (interview with Lebogang Mashile, October 26). The content of the educational programmes varies; from interventions which directly support organisation building to political/ideological support encouraging critical thinking, such as ‘economic literacy’ which interrogates concepts like neoliberalism, capitalism and globalisation, and its impact on impoverished communities (Lehulere, 2006:8). Through these activities, Khanya College seeks to fulfil three core objectives, namely:

- *To build the theoretical, analytical and conceptual capacity of activists so as to enhance their understanding of the world in which they live and act*
- *To enhance their organisational and mobilisation skills so as to improve their ability to organise for social change, and*
- *To promote an ethos and practice of solidarity and social justice among activists*

The approaches described above imply that the College draws on experiential learning³² and popular education theory and methodology for building the capacity and improving organising capabilities among social justice activists. Adult education theorist Jim Crowther sees popular education as something closely connected “with the politics of everyday life” encouraging people to analyze their own situation and take action to transform it (Crowther, 1999:34). If popular education seeks to “contribute to social change” it should be intricately linked to social movements or other “forces that move people to act” (Crowther, 1999:34), which points to the logic of the College’s orientation towards SMs and CBOs.

Since 1993, the College has been registered as a trust, and its highest decision making body is the Board of Trustees, currently made up of academics, and representatives from trade unions, CBO’s, NGO’s working in the same field as Khanya College, and social movements. Internally, the College Co-ordinator is responsible for the running of the operations, in collaboration with the Programme Coordinating Team (PCT) which is made up of all the heads of the different Programmes within Khanya. An ‘All-College meeting’, which all staff members attend, is the highest decision making body internally. The College moreover emphasizes a commitment to “a gender sensitive environment, fair and progressive labour

³² Kolb understands learning as ‘...the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience’ (Kolb 1984 cited in Thorpe 1993:155). In other words, learning is ‘experiential’, and builds on people’s lived reality. A whole body of theory looks into the concept ‘experiential learning’, see for example Boot and Reynolds (1983) and Warner and McGill (1989).

standards, and to a relatively flat wage structure”. Presently, Khanya College organises its work into nine different programmes, including these key programmes³³:

The Strategy Centre. In 2003, Khanya College established a Strategy Centre (SC) for the practice and theory of social movements. It was set up in response to the emergence of the new social movements, and the College’s strategic decision to re-orient its work to these and other community organisations, which are experimenting with different ways of organising and mobilizing under neoliberalism and globalisation. The primary aim of the Strategy Centre is to assist in the building of these movements “through processes of continuous mobilisation, conscientisation and organisation building”.

The Gender Programme of Khanya College is presently housed within the Strategy Centre. It is presented at length below.

The Khanya College Working Class History Programme seeks to document and share knowledge about the political, social and economic history of the working class in South Africa and internationally, and it targets trade unions and social movements.

The Centre for Labour Education and Organising works with education and awareness raising, research and organisational support to assist workers in sectors where trade unions presently are weak: farm work, domestic work and informal sector work.

The Southern Africa and Solidarity Centre is a response to the accelerated processes of regional and global economic and political integration, and the challenges it poses for regional solidarity. It facilitates links between SMs, CBOs, NGOs and trade unions in the region, and initiates and participates in advocacy and campaign work.

The Khanya Journal Project produces the quarterly publication ‘Khanya: a journal for activists’, as well as position papers and Study Notes, and organises conferences and seminars for grassroots movement activists. The aim is to provide a space for debating alternatives to the present global and social order.

³³ The other three programmes are: The ICTs and Community Empowerment Programme and the Administration, Resources and Infrastructure Building programmes, as well as the Khanya College Annual Winter School, the latter which will be described later in this Chapter, and in Chapter 6

As this brief overview suggests, the College has made efforts to re-orientate its goals and programmes in line with its analysis of the rapidly changing South African context; focusing on social movements and CBOs as the main agents for social change, reducing its work with trade unions drastically and concentrating only on workers in the most vulnerable sectors, placing a lot of effort on forging links with other organisations in the region, in response to neoliberal globalisation processes, and providing a space for debating new alternatives, as well as to learn from the past through documenting experiences from working class struggles. The educational focus is primarily orientated towards rational/theoretical learning processes, though it can be assumed that activists, though their involvement in mass movements, gain practical experience which they can reflect on in the Khanya College processes.

Introducing a backdrop to Khanya College's current work with Gender

Having sketched the overarching historical developments in the College, and the political analysis leading to the setting up of the current goals and present day programmes, I will now briefly put the spotlight on 'gender work' in the College historically and in 2005/6.

According to College Director Oupa Lehulere, the organisation's approach to gender equality and the building of a women's movement has been informed by the dictum "The degree of freedom in any society must be judged by the degree of emancipation of its women" (Lehulere, 2006:8). Methods used to address gendered power relations in the first decennium of the College included: Affirmative action privileging women in selection policies of students to 'bridging courses', inclusion of gender studies in the teaching, and promoting the College's "anti-sexist policy" (Khanya College, 1996:17). Former staff members and students later acknowledged the attempts to promote gender equality, but in interviews, they expressed different opinions about the success of the efforts.

"Gender relations have always been a problem. Participation was always dominated by male students. I think efforts should be made to bridge the gap."

(Former student, quoted in Khanya College, 1996:16-17)

"Most male students generally had sexist attitudes. As far as staff is concerned we had an unsuccessful experience..."

(Former staff member, quoted in Khanya College, 1996:16).

“Male staff members were very sensitive in their language ... There was no case where male lecturers took advantage of female students”

(Former staff member, quoted in Khanya College, 1996:16).

The difficulty with creating a gender sensitive space however has to be analyzed both in the context of gender relations in society at large, in which Khanya's influence is limited, and in engagement with the College's dominant analytic framework, privileging class relations (Khanya College, 1996:16-17). Conflicting approaches sometimes soured the relations between the Johannesburg and Cape Town branches of the College, giving some indications about the different cultures and views on gender work on the two campuses (Khanya College, 1996:5-6). A staff member in Johannesburg is quoted saying he considers the Cape Town campus to be overtly concerned with form, neglecting substance:

“At one point they put flower pots in the urinals in the name of gender equality ... they had a simple understanding of democracy. Everyone participated in everything”

(Khanya College, 1996:6).

This indicates that the view on how to do 'political' gender work might have been a source of disagreement also in the past (for present conflicts around this issue, see Chapter 5).

With the set-up of the Community Division in 1992, a specialised gender training programme was established, focusing on Women and Gender structures in mass organisations, especially trade unions, and on capacity building for a network of gender-focused NGOs, linked to the funding organisation Oxfam Canada (Khanya College, 1996:26). Towards the end of the 1990s, an extensive Gender Training Programme was developed together with the South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union, SACCAWU, which ran under several years. It was mainly focused on strengthening women shop stewards in the trade union, and on creating a better understanding of gender issues in general in the trade union. From then onwards, several different individuals (all women) have been employed in the position of gender coordinator, with one or two persons at the time functioning as 'gender trainers', mainly working with the SACCAWU programme. In 2002, a 'Basic Gender Training Manual' was developed jointly by Khanya College and SACCAWU, based on the experiences during workshops and discussions. The manual advocates for the advantages of Marxist feminism, and focuses mainly on how 'the bosses' benefit from the gender division between women and men and how women therefore "need to assert themselves ... and know

how they should respond to the challenges facing workers generally and women workers in particular ” (SACCAWU, 2002:1)”. Limited space is given to the gendered power inequalities in organisations and in the home. Although this programme is not assessed in my research, it can still be interesting to note Jim Crowther’s observation that “difference based, for instance, on gender, ‘race’, disability and sexuality are crucial aspects of popular experience which have been systematically marginalised or ignored in the traditional labour agenda” (Crowther, 1999:37).

From the completion of the SACCAWU programme in 2002, and until mid-2005, only limited work around gender was undertaken in the organisation, according to interviewees from the PCT (Lehulere, Oct 17, Benjamin, June 27, Schroeder, June 29 and Hlatshwayo, Sept 27). When asked how gender work was addressed by the College in the past few years, interviewees mention measures such as quotas to guarantee 50 percent women amongst participants, organising Women’s Days celebrations, highlighting women’s presence in spaces like the trade unions, and promoting good working conditions and anti-sexist practices inside the College. Says one PCT-member:

*“...at the moment what Khanya has done [as an employer] is...
maybe to be a little better than most...”*

The official approach to gender which has been informing the (limited) gender work after 2002 (which has partly been reinterpreted by the present gender coordinator in 2005 and 2006) is, according to the Khanya College web page, building on the experiences from the trade union work in the 1990s, and focusing on how neoliberal restructuring and globalisation impacts on women, and how women respond to these processes. As Chapter 5 will show, no agreement has however been reached around methodological approaches to the current gender work, and to what extent this should build on the SACCAWU experience. While re-orientating towards SMs and CBOs, the College has noted that patriarchal structures reproducing male power dominance, similar to those in society at large, are present also in these organisations;

“Given this context, Khanya College has recognised the importance of ... to include among its objectives the need to provide women activists with a space to reflect on their existing roles in the emerging social movements”

(www.khanyacollege.org.za, accessed Dec 5, 2006).

Amongst the numerous sub-goals of the gender programme which are listed on the web page, the following can be noted:

- *Developing both life and leadership skills amongst women active in the emerging social movements.*
- *Facilitating discussions and debates that will assist activists in developing approaches to dealing with gender oppression and inequality within organisations – in particular to develop organisational strategies aimed at advancing the struggle for gender equity.*
- *Assisting activists with analysing local and international experiences of struggles against gender oppression with a special emphasis on experiences in Southern Africa.*

This data gives some indication of how Khanya College's understanding of 'gender work' has shifted gradually over the last 20 years, from the equality-in-numbers focus in the early days, and a strict interpretation of capitalism as the main source of women's oppression, to an increased awareness that progressive forces also need to transform to allow for an equal participation of 'embodied' male and female activists, acknowledging the ways in which gendered power relations hinder women activists participation in the movements as a political problem which needs to be tackled. The contemporary approach also suggests that there is an explicit recognition of the impact of gender upon political consciousness, power, and subjectivity – the "individual woman" is acknowledged as a route towards transformation, and political alliance; which is a step away from more classic Marxist feminist theorizing, which appear to have been dominating the SACCAWU work, through which "women" seem to have been treated as a constituency, framed within class contexts.

The Winter School 2005 and beyond

In 2005, Khanya College decided to have Gender, Neoliberalism and Social Movements as the theme for its annual Winter School, a one-week gathering of 100-150 activists from social movements, CBOs, trade unions and (radical) NGOs in South Africa and the region. This was an important event with a rare focus in left-wing circles: looking at gender relations both on the individual level, in the home and in the organisations, as well as on the link between globalisation, neoliberalism and gender. In this process, two reference groups were set up to advise the College: one of professional and well-experienced women activists who gave input

on educational methods and content, and one of women activists in SMs and CBOs, giving input on the present state of gender relations in the movements, and assessing the relevance of the exercises and the school. Through choosing Gender, Neoliberalism and Social Movements as the theme for the Winter School 2005, Khanya College sent out a strong signal to the participants: Gender is a crucial issue, needing to be addressed within social movements, and it is just as political a topic as Neoliberalism. Says the present gender coordinator, Nancy Castro:

[It] showed the women that... their struggle like women and their situation like women... is a political issue too... If an institution like Khanya... decides like... one Winter School is to discuss that... is because it is important... And was not ... like before in... one session during... the workshops... to speak about gender [and] after [that] dealing with the real politics... That possibility make a big, big change... to broken with the idea... if I am speaking about feeling or sexuality... is not part... of the... political activism..."

The College became known in activist circles in the region as an organisation which is trying to tackle gender issues in a serious way, recalled one woman staff member:

"...When we went to Zim... [For the 2005 Southern Africa Social Forum] ... this guy from Zambia ... said to me: 'Are you from South Africa, and from Khanya?' And then I said yes. 'So you are the ones who are making all that noise about gender?' And I said 'YES, we ARE! We are still shouting' ... And then he just... moved away, he did not want to associate with Khanya now... That was quite good to see: 'Yes, at least some one has heard!'"

Later on the same year, Nancy Castro, who had been involved in the design and facilitation of the 2005 Winter School, was contracted to do an assessment of the Strategy Centre from a gender perspective (the findings from her evaluation are described in the next section). A few months later, in February 2006, she was hired full-time as the Gender Coordinator of Khanya College, based in the Strategy Centre. The major interventions she has initiated as part of the Gender Programme in 2006 are (interviews with Nancy Castro, June 26th and Oct 16th, 2006):

- The continued work with the Gender Reference Group (GRG) of women grassroots activists, building on the work done before, during and after the 2005 Winter School.

- Internal Change Work for Gender Equality in the College, using methods aimed at 'humanizing' the workplace, and sharing methodological knowledge with staff members, involving them in training workshops where a gender perspective has been mainstreamed.
- The integration of a strong gender perspective in a few piloted external capacity building workshops.
- Mainstreaming gender in the 2006 Winter School, including the introduction of a Winter School for Children, which ran parallel to, and interacted with, the adult Winter School (see Chapter 6)
- Taking the first steps towards the initiation of a home-based care programme in Orange Farm that involves the whole community, both men and women.
- Initiating the drafting of a gender policy and involvement in the process of drafting a code of conduct for Khanya College.
- A book project with four groups of girls and women activists and community members, from different areas in the Vaal triangle. The groups are involved in the joint production of a book about their lived experiences as grassroots girls and women, and their perceptions about the impact of neoliberal globalisation and NEPAD on their every day lives.

The approach of Nancy Castro has been to initially focus on empowering women individually as well as collectively and in relation to their activism, and as a second step, attempt at transforming institutions (including the College itself) to adapt to a changed gendered (and class) composition of the movements. Her techniques and orientation fits well in with common definitions of 'feminist popular education' (see further chapter 6), recognising gender as well as other social markers of identity (including class and race) as impacting on 'women's' conditions and positions, making a clear link between gender and power, and the impact of gender on participation and political consciousness, valorising 'local' knowledge, and seeing the importance of starting from the point of women's lived experiences, as well as recognising both the sexual division of labour, and sexualities as fundamental to upholding patriarchy.

The Internal Change work for Gender Equality, and the Gender Reference Group (the external intervention of Khanya College which I have chosen to assess; see Chapter 2), will be thoroughly introduced and analyzed in the coming two chapters. This material will include an assessment of the GRG participation during the Winter School 2006, where the group and

its stance on issues of 'sexual harassment', and the reaction by other activists and College staff members to the GRG, led to questions arising over which issues and which actors can be considered as 'political'. Data on women activists' experiences of involvement in class based formations of both women and men, and their perceptions about the gains and problems with the educational approach used in the GRG will be presented in Chapter 6.

How is the integration of a 'gender perspective' in movement building theorized?

By providing this brief overview of the history of Khanya College, its interaction with a rapidly changing South African context over the past 20 years, and the choices it has taken in terms of orientation and programmes (with a special focus on the area of gender interventions), I have attempted to construct a screen against which the work of Khanya College in 2006, and specifically key initiatives designed to transform oppressive gender dynamics as part of the work, can be viewed. As pointed out in Chapters 1 and 2, I approached this research after having observed (a real or perceived) increase in focus on interventions around women's participation in SMs and CBOs by support organisations, such as Khanya College, and a research and education organisation in Cape Town with a similar orientation, ILRIG, which has also recently started an empowerment programme for women activists. I had also noted while attending mass meetings and rallies, and through reading media reports, that TAC, one of the key new social movements, seemed to be giving more attention on issues of gender equality, gender based violence and sexualities than during previous years. In this section I will provide data from interviews while interrogating how this moment in time in South Africa's development, and the re-orientation towards SMs and CBOs has influenced how 'gender' as a category of analysis has emerged in spaces like Khanya College. I will first shortly summarize the reflections of representatives from Khanya College and other key informants around how 'gender' has surfaced in the context of neoliberal globalisation, and its impact on the South African working class (based on interviews with Benjamin June 27; Gentle Oct 13; Lehulere, Oct 17; and Schroeder, June 29, 2006).

A general agreement amongst the interviewees, Khanya College staff members and other key informants, seems to be that the changes which have been brought about by the intensified (neo-liberal) globalisation have affected the relations between working class women and men in a number of ways. Firstly, there is the global trend of a 'feminisation' of the labour

market³⁴, where industrialists increasingly seek to minimize their production costs by hiring women to industrial jobs, previously dominated by male workers. Secondly, female-dominated sectors of the industry in South Africa, such as the textile and clothing industry, are in a crisis, which can be linked to the opening up of the markets to competition from other countries, through international trade liberalization agreements. Against the backdrop of this crisis, industrialists have successfully argued and implemented a ‘casualisation’ of the labour market. Thirdly, the increased privatization and commercialisation of social services, such as health care, schooling, provision of basic commodities like water and sanitation and so forth, resulted in the shifting of increasing responsibilities to the ‘private sphere’, and particularly to women who are traditionally seen as its ‘custodians’, for finding solutions to tasks which governments previously catered for (see also chapter 3).

Khanya College’s re-orientation towards movements organising the vulnerable sectors of the working class: informal sector workers, casual workers and the unemployed, also meant a shift in the gendered composition of its target group, with a higher presence of women, and a higher focus on, and need to engage, the private sphere. The need to rethink the gender programme therefore emerged, reflected a Khanya College PCT member:

“Before, we worked with organised workers or students. The difference now is that we are largely working with the unemployed and women. Therefore... we needed a... clearer work, particularly with women”.

This decision was taken both against the external political factors, such as the development on the labour market and the commodification of basic services, and against an analysis of the composition of social movements and some radical CBOs, where women constitute the ‘foot soldiers’, often representing the vibrancy in actions and demonstrations (Interview with Gentle, 13/10), but rarely forming part of the leadership, or setting the agenda. According to the Khanya College PCT member, the latter realisation was “*a strong driving force*” in the decision to develop a separate gender programme.

Another PCT-member elaborates on the nature of organising in the new movements, and the dependency on survivalist projects amongst its members, as having influenced a rethinking of the methodology for gender work:

³⁴ See also Casale and Posel, 2002.

“The issue of the social composition within the movements obviously necessitated some... systematic theorization of what are the implications... for the way the movements would be built... And secondly... in the survivalist kind of... axis of... these movements... The fact that there were no jobs, and they [the activists] were trying to survive by projects... Again... it raised questions of what is the relationship between women building on the one hand, and the projects on the other ... Because it was clear that... it was not sufficient to... carry over... the kinds of [methods for women’s empowerment] ... from... ‘Women in the World of Work.’”

This data tells us that Khanya College’s theoretical base for its re-orientation was not to “look at women simply because they are women”, but an attempt to respond to the fact that women constitute the majority of people in the displaced, marginalized, and struggling constituencies from which the new movements were emerging. The history of gender activism around violence, sexual and reproductive health and rights or, indeed, political and economic rights does not seem to have influenced this shift in any real sense, possibly contributing to the College seemingly being quite unprepared to face the complexity entailed by deep gender analysis, which I will demonstrate in Chapter 5.

The timing of the work

Other external factors related to the gender discourse in South Africa today, bound to influence the direction of contemporary interventions around gender include: the high levels of gender based violence, the debates around rape and sexuality and the devastating effects of the HIV/AIDS- pandemic, which in South Africa is nearly exclusively transmitted via (hetero-sexual) sex, and thus intimately linked with gendered power relations (these topics have for example been raised by TAC in recent campaigns³⁵). In Leonard Gentle’s analysis, SMs and CBOs have already begun focusing increasingly on gender issues, influenced by their lived realities, and the responses from support organisations like Khanya College and ILRIG are late rather than early.

“I think there are real processes happening out there [which are] belatedly hitting us on the head. In the last five or six years when there is a bit of revival in the world, it’s...

³⁵ For further information on TAC and how the organisation links gender work with its campaigning work for access to treatment, see www.tac.org.za

coming from outside the mainstream... outside the old socialist parties... outside the trade unions... and also outside of male dominated zones. And I think... an ideal time has come... Nobody, I think on the left who takes seriously political struggle today, can't fail but to prioritize the issue of building and organising women's activism today.

It is not an idea that is too soon, I think... we are late."

The task of support organisations like ILRIG and Khanya College is, he argues, to “*give a language to social processes that are already under way*”, and which are not necessarily articulated in terms like ‘feminism’.

In the analysis of Anna Davies-Van Es, researcher/educator at ILRIG, working with the organisations ‘Building Women’s Activism’ programme, the timing of interventions around empowering women activists should also be seen in relation to the recent decline in social movement activity, providing a space for reflection.

“In 2001 we had the rise of the new social movements, and maybe it takes a few years for some of the... less happy, glowing, fuzzy feelings... to wear off”. [Also at the macro-level] “ten years... after this so called democracy, things are not better, women are being forced to act, and then... I would think it’s quite obvious there is going to be a reflection on the ways in which women... are part of organisations... for both men and women...”

Direct experiences of a ‘crisis in gender relations’ can also catalyze the taking up of gender issues, like in the case of ILRIG, where the organisation was confronted with what Anna Davies-Van Es describes as “blatant, in-your-face sexism” in a workshop they had organised for debating gender relations in social movements.

“[In this forum] a number of male activists... within supposedly progressive groups came out with very sexist statements... And so the women, who were in the minority... felt the need to defend themselves, which they then did, and the men responded aggressively”.

This event was “a big wake-up-call” for ILRIG, and caused a chain of reactions, from a debriefing meeting with women activists, to the issuing of a press statement harshly criticising the expressions of sexism in the meeting, and the development of a separate process to build women activists.

The Khanya College decision was according to my interviewees not directly sparked by a specific event, but arrived at through an analysis of the political context. Says one PCT member:

“At Khanya... we had... began... repositioning of all the various programmes... to... focus on the question of these new kinds of social forces ... It became clear that we... had not... clarified... strategically, theoretically and politically... what this means... about... gender and the position of women ... That was partly the motivation for... the... focus in the Winter School... on gender... Since [Khanya College’s] inception [there] has always been a certain level of consideration... in its composition of its leading bodies... in its staff... of creating a... relatively gender sensitive environment... But I think it was still clear that this needs to be taken a couple of steps further...”

Most Khanya College staff members who were interviewed for this research view their organisation as an important agenda setter in the world of SMs and CBOs in South Africa. When the College brings up gender issues in a serious way, like in the Winter School 2005, it is regarded as having a potentially strong impact on grassroots movements on the left.

“...if Khanya put something on the agenda, then the activists will pay attention. So I think that making gender central to ... our work is important... because basically we are a role model for other organisations”.

“Khanya have... for many... socialist organisations ... The power in the voice... Because along all the years [Khanya College] never, ever change... according with the benefits or whatever from the government. And that make a very strong ... political face... and voice... Khanya is giving like the... political line... And is coming with the important issues to discuss according with the global context. And giving in different ways... the training, the conceptual way, the readings... If this process come with a gender perspective... It is a strong, strong intervention”.

The Evaluation of the work of the College’s Strategy Centre from a Gender Perspective, which Nancy Castro conducted a few months after the Winter School 2005, showed a lot of positive results, but also pointed out that the ‘powerful voice’ often tended to speak for and with the male side of organisations, and groups using confrontational tactics, often coinciding

with having a predominately male leadership. When identifying 'peers' in communities, College staff members tended to connect with people who have a certain set of skills and knowledge privileging young men, one PCT member notes. The 'ideal peer' would be some one who is articulated in English, who is:

"...mobile ... who can meet with you, who can talk about ... GEAR and the economic situation... and in a way we ... can also build their power... because they become the connecting persons to the College and to the resources" ... It was quite a shock to see [in the evaluation] how we are perpetuating patriarchal roles and structures."

Other PCT-members emphasize the importance of judging Khanya College as a product of its context, which cannot be expected to exist and act outside of the contemporary socio-cultural norms:

"... there is no such a thing... as a... gender free... individual... in a gendered society... and therefore all individuals... reproduce the status quo... so... at one... gender level, Khanya ... obviously does..."

That privileging of 'masculine' and 'male' capabilities and actions had been prevalent in the College was highlighted in the evaluation of the Strategy Centre's work in the township Orange Farm, where the College had a long term cooperation with the Kganya Women's Consortium, a group of community service, income-generating projects, run mainly by women (Khanya College, 2006). When local authorities prepared to install pre-paid water metres in Orange Farm, a 'Crisis Committee' was set up by residents, including the consortium group people, to stop the metres. Says one PCT member:

"...we found ourselves working less and less with the actual consortium, and more and more with the Orange Farm Water Crisis Committee, without even thinking about it ... But it was clear that they appeared to be more important, because they were speaking about privatisation... broader political questions... And it took the evaluation process for us to realise the very important role that the consortium must play... Not only because it was women, but because in many ways it represented a model of some kind for other communities. [And]... that they actually were the energy for the crisis committee... That was lost in... our excitement of involving ourselves with the crisis

committee [which] ... fitted nicely with the big politics, or what was identified as people who were more conscious politically.”

“The real disturbing thing that came out of the evaluation was the... absence of any kind of gender work in what we were doing. I mean, we did not realise that... for example the groups ... who we worked with most consistently, who we defined as an activist... there were lots of discussions about the women, but ... In some ways we were undermining the possibilities of a gender analysis in ... what we thought were important, and what we valued.”

One important factor in any change work for gender equality is to liaison with powerful insiders (and others), who are prepared to push for a change (Rao, Stuart and Kelleher, 1999:21). Providing new insights for powerful people in the organisation, who in turn can exert pressure to place gender issues on the agenda, is thus an important technique used by ‘gender workers’. A PCT member reflects in the following way about her own transformation, which started with the Winter School in 2005, and since then continued to deepen, influencing her work, and energy to push for a change.

“...I also began to... have a clearer understanding of ... my own ... role in the College [in]... keeping up the patriarchal structure here ... I have been involved in politics for many years, and... through ... the processes of that ... I have learnt ... that very patriarchal approach to the politics... It is an unsettling experience...”

Other members of the Khanya internal leadership structure believe that more energy needs to be devoted to analysing and debating the issue of how to prioritize between project type work, often carried out by women led organisations, and what the organisation traditionally has labelled as ‘political work’, often associated with confrontational action against authorities, before any redirection of interventions take place. This PCT member calls for further clarification on many levels, for example around the meaning of gender as a method.

“This thing of a project is not an easy thing to make sense of... as a moment of social change... because all its exterior forms... are extremely traditional and... reinforce the worst kinds of division of labour in society... Women saw, women knit... So... yes there is the attraction of the ... militancy... but part of that attraction ... is that... it dreams of

things we know... People organize and they stop privatization... I think that it will be important that when we do tackle the question, we don't confuse it with... 'I am using the project to conscientize you so... that you can go and march for water... or... make you understand about gender'... Projects... are interesting to me... because they seem to suggest that with the decline of waged labour... they might again stand at that axis of... specific forms of social reproduction under... neoliberalism that is just fluctuating"

Khanya College, as well as other similar institutions, is, as has been shown in this section, experiencing that the timing is right to include a 'gender perspective' into the work in more serious ways than before, and that such action is urgent, especially because of the important political role which the College plays in relation to the emerging mass movements, The College is however grappling hard with (agreeing on) how to approach this work; whereas some staff members have recognised the need to re-evaluate the College discourse around who can be a political actor, and who to orientate towards in the new movements, others have not arrived at the same conclusion, and instead call for more theorization.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a background of Khanya College, its history and political orientation, and opened up a debate around the meaning of doing gender work within community organisations in contemporary South Africa. It ended with a discussion on the meaning of 'the political' in relation to gender work. This is something which will be further discussed in the next Chapter, looking more closely at the internal processes in Khanya College, and how they link with the outside context, and the decisions to take on an empowerment programme for women activists.

Chapter 5: The inside affecting the outside affecting the inside...

This chapter will explore the internal implications of Khanya College's efforts to mainstream gender in the external work, and empower women activists in CBOs and SMs, while simultaneously attempting to transform the College to a more gender sensitive work place. The tension around the meaning of doing 'political' gender work, the nature of the internal transformation efforts, and the emerging power struggles within the College will be examined and analyzed.

The gender programme of Khanya College was in an article in the Khanya Journal 2005 described to have the aim of “*developing approaches to overcome gender inequality within mass organisations and the social movements, and in the daily functioning of the College itself, including its various programmes* (Baldevu, 2005:6).” Despite the College's 20 years' history of interest in the meaning of gender within its programming, what this currently signifies in terms of direction, content and political strategies for the gender programme is still contested within the institution. As College Coordinator Oupa Lehulere pointed out in an interview (Oct 17, 2006):

“people might be thinking in... their own heads... and we are... obviously experimenting with various ways... but... There isn't a Khanya perspective on the issue”.

Since the College is operating numerous external programmes, and the work load is enormous, the attempts of responding to the urgency of 'overcoming gender inequality' in a rapidly changing context will have to happen in the form of 'trying and learning while doing'. While the Gender Programme Coordinator is clear about the methodological approach she wants to use, there is not yet a shared meaning of how to integrate 'gender' as an analytical category when designing educational interventions. There are debates as to how much the methodology will need to be changed, and where the College should look for inspiration in terms of developing both programmatic and organizational change initiatives; in feminist popular education, or from the experiences of working with trade unions? Oupa Lehulere continues his reflection (Oct 17, 2006):

“I think that... any methodology at the moment would be intuition... would be borrowing from... the past.”

As the first section of this chapter will show, the disagreements around methodology are linked to broader political questions around the meaning of 'political' work, which encompass concerns about what are 'political activities' and who can be a 'political activist'? South African political scientist Shireen Hassim has in her recent book "Women's Organizations and Democracy in South Africa" made use of Jane Jenson's concept 'the universe of political discourse' and Maxine Molyneux's theorizing around the issue of 'authority' as starting points for analyzing the possibilities for the South African women's movement to set its own agenda and priorities. Writes Hassim: "The universe of political discourse delineates what is considered to be "political" as opposed to private, religious, or economic ... it sets the boundaries for political action and identifies which actors in society are considered to be legitimate in particular settings" (Hassim, 2006:17). This same lens is valuable to use when studying the conflict around gender work in Khanya College, which emerged strongly during 2006. Although there was a general recognition that the changing composition of the working class, and the gendered dynamics in the CBOs and SMs which the College engages will require new ways of tackling 'gender work' (see Chapter 4) the attempts made to do so in the work with the group of around 20 women activists, the Gender Reference Group (GRG), and other external mainstreaming efforts were strongly questioned by several College employees as well as by some social movement activists. They criticised the work for not being 'political enough' or for using 'liberal feminist approaches', and the partial focus on women's individual experiences of oppression in the 'private sphere' was seen as unfitting for work in a left-wing organisation like Khanya College.

A key question emerging was if women in CBOs and SMs, and especially the women involved either in 'survival projects' or women focusing energy on raising issues of gender equality within movements can be considered to be "legitimate", or equal political "actors" to men involved in more confrontational struggles, challenging governments (Hassim, 2006:17). In the sections which follow, I will firstly try and explore these conflicting views on gender work and its link with the broader concept of 'social justice'. Further into the chapter, I will look at the methods and techniques used in attempts to transform the College into a more gender sensitive space, and at the internal power struggles and conflicts emerging during 2006, partly related to the gender work. Lastly, I will attempt to draw some conclusions around how the internal and external gender work and conflicts are interlinked.

Contesting ‘the political’ empowering of women

As pointed out above, at the time of the Winter School of 2005, there was a strong commitment, and general agreement in the College that gendered power relations were an important emerging focus in the work towards SMs and CBOs, for reasons which have been summarized in Chapter 4. Towards mid-2006, the attitudes towards the kind of ‘gender work’ initiated in the College had however soured markedly, and the interpretation of sexuality, socio-cultural issues, and dynamics within organisations or the private sphere as part of the ‘real’ political issues were openly questioned in the College. The strong presence of these issues in the GRG curricula was criticised by several members of the Programme Coordinating Team (PCT), implying that it did not fit in with the work of the College. When discussing practical examples, words such as ‘real’, ‘interesting’ and ‘important’ were used to describe the parts of the gender work which the majority in the College found acceptable (e.g. discussing the World Social Forum, or water privatisation) whereas ‘insular’, ‘individualistic’ and ‘liberal’ referred to other parts of the gender work, dealing with the private sphere, sexual harassment or sexuality.

Questioning the Gender Reference Group at the time of the 2006 Winter School could mean engaging in a risky business. As I will show in Chapter 6, the GRG women had prior to the Winter School brought to the attention of the College that in their analysis, male staff members had been abusing their power positions and sexually harassed young women activists connected with the College’s programmes. Criticising, or questioning the truth behind these claims would have been politically impossible for men defining themselves as ‘gender sensitive’, in a context where the engendering processes lead to an association of ‘feminized bodies’ with adjectives like ‘weak’ or ‘victims’ and ‘masculine bodies’ with ‘strong’ or ‘perpetrator’. A woman staff member however implied that the sexual harassment issue had indeed polarized the situation in the College, and that not every one agreed with the hard official position taken in an ‘All-College meeting’ in relation to the Winter School³⁶ (see Chapters 2 and 6).

“...I know with the sexual harassment thing ... some people... their support was out. What we were doing was a problem. And that was the main divider around the approach to that thing.”

³⁶ An ‘All-College meeting’ took a policy decision on the evening before the Winter School, stating that no Khanya College staff member should be allowed to engage in relationships with participants of the school, based on the information from the GRG June meeting.

So, while recognizing that the sexual harassment accusations may have fuelled the perceptions of the group as 'apolitical' and 'liberal', it was instead the content and focus of the programme during the GRG June meeting, which looked at gendered power relations and how they are played out in different arenas, including 'sexuality', which became the focus of the critique. This sequence (which has been substantially shortened) from an interview with a male PCT member illustrates the contradiction: when asked if Gender equality is a political issue, the interviewee says he believes it is, but certainly, issues relating to the private sphere and culture are not seen as correct entry points for politicising women, implying that these areas do not fit in with the discourse of the College.

"I didn't have ... a sense... of a ... more political discussion ... of issues.... The thing was always starting from... individuals... and I also had a sense that... there was a lot of emphasis on... sexuality discussions. I am not saying those are not... important issues... but... one would expect that... as comrades were preparing for the question of the... World Social Forum and the... solidarity... some discussion on why have we... not... seen a women's movement in... South Africa /.../ the questions of the... women's international ... Look at ... the more... political... focus." /.../

Q: "So is gender [equality] a political issue?"

A: "... I was saying that we didn't have more political content, I was talking about... issues... that... allow women ... to be... politicized... political subjects... making... women... to be seen as... social agents... I am not against people... looking at an individual... experience ... but... if the... individual is removed... from the social... context... that might be missing the... point ... I get a sense that... things are reduced... to that. Without... moving on... [to]... other critical issues, which... confront us... which would also... arm... women... when they go to the plenary session. They can contribute and bring in new knowledge ... In political debate with other [sic!] men."

These comments give an indication of which experiences of unequal gendered power relations and discrimination can be considered as 'political' within the College. While the World Social Forum is legitimate, women's lack of control over their bodies, and restricted sexual agency, where both their partners and the capitalist system exercise pressure, is outside of the boundaries of the 'political', and outside of the 'social context' - a strong critique since one of the basic principles for popular education practice is that it should be embedded within the social context of the target group (Walters and Manicom, 1996:6-7). The interviewee

furthermore suggests that the GRG should take another form than it does at present, and that the content of the workshops should look more at the macro level, at, for example, the development of women's movements. This suggestion is interesting to note, since such movements over the last centuries have tended to prioritize issues of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

"I mean women's ...organisations... in the theories of... feminism... Begin... to introduce... more interesting... questions... And then look at the current ... debates ... women's issues in the social movements and all... And then also... make it as a ... study group ... which is ... interventionist ... The critical thing is ... making sure that ... you have ... women comrades... who can debate ... from a small issue... to bigger..."

The kind of issues around which women engaged in the open debates in the school itself were also highlighted. This male PCT member implies that they engaged in debates only around 'the women issue' which was furthermore used as a critique of the GRG curricula.

"There is a dichotomy in the report between the presence of women and the content and topical questions around which they engaged. What is the dominant profile of the wider participation of women in the school? Were they discussing water?"

Might there be a ghettoising of the women's issue?

Are women's presence restricted to the women's issue?"

(Quote from my meeting notes).

Several male PCT members also commented on the need for empowering women with theoretical knowledge, and conduct more formal education around the theme for the Winter School; 'Building Solidarity Across Borders'. This was seen as a more valid starting point than for women to share and theorize their experiences of oppression in the movements and communities, specifically linked to their gendered identities.

"There was so much focus on the individual experience. Why do we not talk of the Women's International?"

"It is astonishing that you spent 30 minutes on the World Social Forum."

“What is the point of these person’s individual experiences if we cannot hear how these people collectively experience water privatisation?”

(Quotes from my meeting notes)

This relationship between the ‘grand narratives’ of global political processes, such as the development of international women’s movements, and the link with day-to-day experiences of oppression in the home, based on gender, class, race and other factors, is a key part of the conflict in the College a woman PCT member points out:

“... how these things are brought together ... that is the real tension ...”

For the gender coordinator, the sharing of daily life experiences of being a working class woman, mother/sister/daughter, and activist is the starting point from which women can analyze that the extra difficulties they face as women is not an individual, but a collective experience. She advocates that it is not primarily the ‘rational knowledge’, which formal learning processes can offer, that is needed to create this consciousness, but also other types of knowledge, achieved through what could be called ‘emotional’ and ‘spiritual’ learning. She describes her goal as:

“to empower the women to have the voice and a possibility to understand that it is not my own situation, my own lack of ability... It is a structural situation that make all the conditions for me to be a second layer in society” (From my meeting notes).

A fundamental question which the work to empower women activists poses is: should women be strengthened so as to cope with the current situation and be included in the movements in the form they have today, or is it also necessary to try and ‘change’ the movements, to make them a space for ‘embodied’ activists, gendered as both men and women? The gender coordinator’s educational framework suggests the latter: empowerment efforts should strengthen women activists such that they can contribute to transforming organisational culture instead of adapting to it.

“Comrades, the women know exactly how to read ... to analyze the different issues. They don’t have the confidence to do it, because it is not the cultural space for them. If we want women leaders, we need to start to read and criticise the patriarchal rules. If

we do not change, we will only have some women acting like a man. It doesn't matter if you are a woman or a man. In that way, you have to behave like a male ... This is the conceptual framework for the Reference Group and the gender work in Khanya. It is to work for a change of the rules. It is not... to give the possibility to women to be part of the ... [movements] without a possibility to change the structure."

(From my meeting notes)

This position, that it is organisational structures (as well as methodology) which needs to be changed to better fit with the gendered nature of the contemporary working class formations which the College targets, and how this should be done, is contested in the College. A male PCT member criticised the methods for mainstreaming gender in the design of the Winter School, which sought to highlight the diversified experiences of men, women, youth and children, saying:

"Why do women have to be privileged in the design of the Winter School?"

(From my meeting notes)

This statement can be read as a critique of a perceived 'essentialist' influence in the gender programme, through which working class women would be seen as people of a 'different nature' than men, needing a 'privileged treatment', a critique which would be partly supported by some of the comments from Gender Reference Group participants during the Winter School (see Chapter 6). But based on the nature and content of the continued discussion, I would however rather suggest a reading which implies that there is no need to change methodologies to adapt to a new situation in mass movements, where the bulk of the activists are women. This would assume either that female and male activists have the same educational needs, and that their lived experiences thus are identical, or that women should adapt to the educational needs of men.

Women's 'educational needs' as a site of struggle

So who should interpret the educational needs of 'women activists' and how their consciousness can be collectively raised, and used as an engine for transforming unequal gendered power relations? The over-all mantra of popular education in general and feminist popular education specifically is "that of starting from the lives and preoccupations of women themselves", where 'gender' is just one of the social categories which a feminist educator

must take into account (Walters and Manicom, 1996:12). Feminist popular educators often use sexuality and domestic violence as entry points for doing women empowerment work, not necessarily because these are the most important part of all women's lives, but because it can "provide a basis for understanding the relations of patriarchy", relevant to women of all classes (Walters and Manicom, 1996:12-13). Walters and Manicom furthermore point out that giving attention to "feelings and emotions of learners is perceived as critical in feminist popular education", something which was ignored in previous "gender-blind models for popular education" (Walters and Manicom, 1996:12). But the attention given to emotional and spiritual learning is precisely one of the central critiques to the GRG process. Says one male PCT-member:

"The thing... must be activist... driven... Rather than... more.... psychological... where you bring... people as if you are... counselling them, or something like that."

Amongst all interviewees, there appeared to be a shared meaning that any attempt to do critical gender work must start from the point of view of working class women, as representing the 'most oppressed' layer in society, who need to "struggle" against their oppression. But while encouraging more militancy among the women activists, some interviewees also cautioned that the group should be more patient and place more energy on 'engaging men'. While this might have some resonance with the Winter School process, where the situation became quite polarized, (see chapter 6), it is also contradictory that when a group of women activists adopt a more confrontational strategy, it is not accepted, but when male led groups express militancy, it is heralded. The difference naturally relates to who the militancy targets ('governments' and 'capitalists') or (partly, but not only, 'the patriarchal nature of organising in movements'). Says one male PCT member:

"I... get a sense that... when... people don't agree with us... we are quick to say... 'Ah... these are patriarchs'... And... as soon as you do this then... you are closing the room for... any form of engagement..."

This speaks to another note-worthy feature of the 'universe of political discourse': the boundaries it sets for who can be identified as a legitimate political actor in a certain setting (Hassim, 2006:17). The following excerpt from an interview with a male College staff

member, which on the surface revolves around organising 'women' and engaging 'gender' is illustrative in what it reveals of the legitimacy of 'political actors'.

"When Khanya define gender, they would say... it's about power relations between men and men, men and women, women and women ... So we exclude women from that because we consider women like a typical organising entity of its own, that has got it's own needs, it's own problems... We have got groups we work with who are just solely women... but... they come... because they want social developmental programmes ... in terms of survival projects... So they don't got anything to do with power relations, they are not interested in ... serious politics.

Q: "What is... serious politics?"

A: "Serious politics it's... when it comes to elections, when it comes to electing some body within your own organisation, they are not... more concerned with those. What they want to do is like to have small projects... It's more like survival issues.

Q: "Ok, and that's different from the political..."

A: "Yes..."

Q: "... serious politics?"

A: "Yes."

This rhetoric highlights what has been discussed previously in this chapter about the nature of political issues: the 'serious' ones (elections, water privatization and so forth) and the 'less serious' issues which women 'can manage on their own' such as issues dealing with survival, and the constrained, performative nature of gender (Butler, quoted in De Waal, 2006) where boundaries for men's and women's behaviours are set, but not visibly enforced by laws and prohibitions. It also suggest that certain formats for conducting politics are more serious than others; in the opinion of this interviewee elections and, less explicitly said, direct, confrontational action. This implies that women involved in survivalist projects are not considered to be 'political actors', an attitude which risks being reinforced amongst women activists themselves: their initiatives are less political and therefore less important for achieving social transformation than the actions which male led organisations carry out (see further Chapter 6, where women activists reflect on what is 'political').

It furthermore supports the rhetoric of the male PCT member questioning why women should be privileged (in the design of the Winter School). If the majority of women participants

cannot be considered as 'real' political subjects, then it is not sexist, but merely politically strategic to question why the school should be designed to better incorporate their needs. The cautioning of 'liberal' and 'individualistic' feminist approaches in gender work which have been highlighted so far in this Chapter holds a legitimacy given the historical background of struggles for women's rights in South Africa, and the separation between 'white feminists' and 'black working class women' (see further Chapter 3). How well the GRG work managed the interrelationship between 'gender' and other social categories like 'race', 'class', 'sexuality', 'disability' and so forth will be further looked into in the next chapter, when this specific intervention is assessed against the participants own perceptions of the relevance of the educational approach and content. One woman employee in the College who commented on the critique around the 'depoliticised' content of the GRG curricula however firmly stated that it

"... doesn't carry weight. It's another form of... men resisting..."

The internal change process

While the 'politics' of external interventions of the gender programme have been investigated in the previous section, indicating a deep divide between different staff members' analysis of what constitutes 'political gender work', primarily in relationship to the most contested 'zone' for this work, the Gender Reference Group, this section of the chapter will move on to investigate how this conflict affects the internal dynamics in the College, and how these internal dynamics in turn may facilitate or hinder external 'gender work'. The decision which the College leadership had taken in 2005, against a sense of urgency in responding to the gendered nature of the emerging working class formations, was to simultaneously start off interventions in the movements, and inside the College (Baldevu, 2005:6). As indicated in the opening paragraph of this chapter, no clear guideline has been agreed upon for the methodological approach of the re-focused gender work. The strategies used could thus be described as 'learning while doing' and, in Oupa Lehulere's words, 'intuition' in combination with 'borrowing from the past', while adhering to the main principles of 'popular education'. Since the 'internal' and 'external' processes are so intricately linked, it is not surprising that internal power dynamics were fuelling an escalating conflict towards the end of the year, coinciding with an increasing contestation over the GRG. This was nothing the gender coordinator had foreseen earlier in the year: reflecting on possible resistances which might

complicate the process of integrating a gender perspective in the external work, while simultaneously transforming the work place, she had said in April 2006 that:

“I don’t think there is a resistance to gender work within the organisation [Khanya College]. I think this is linked to that the work was not imposed by donors [but a result of an initiative the College had taken on its own]” (From my meeting notes).

In June, conflicts had however already started to emerge, most visibly around the attempts to integrate a gender perspective in the design of the programme for the Winter School. By October, the polarization in the College had increased even further. Many interviewees described the working environment as tough, pressurized, and “not nice”. Said one female staff member involved in the change process:

“It’s exhausting... you feel as if you are fighting on all levels now... but I think it is also very rewarding... And... a lot of patience is needed ... not to get angry all the time, because that is not working” [notes from informal meeting].

There was a fear now that the work with the GRG, as well as the internal work, might be put on hold, with lack of funding given as the official reason. This could have serious implications in the movements, causing a backlash also for initiatives to alter gendered power relations outside of Khanya College, a woman PCT member cautioned. In the section below, I will try to describe the developments that led to this rapid shift of opinions and approaches amongst the staff. Firstly, however, I will start by looking at gender and organisational development theorists Rao, Stuart and Kelleher’s concept ‘the deep structure’ of organisations, which may hinder the creation of a gender sensitive environment, and at the gender coordinator’s interaction with, and attempts to initiate a change within this structure.

Engaging the ‘deep structure’ of the College

Through indirect and informal interventions, which are difficult to pinpoint, the gender coordinator attempted to contribute to creating an increased awareness of gender issues inside the College, and change the nature of the work place in order for it to better suit the needs of an ‘embodied’ and diverse staff collective. Any attempt to do so literally means conducting a balancing act on a minefield. Officially, the College takes pride in having treated gender issues seriously since its inception, and as a workplace it has, according to the College

coordinator, “done better than most” other organisations in creating an egalitarian environment. Practically, gendered power hierarchies are visibly present, reflecting both the reality of South African work places today, and College specific dynamics.

The Gender Coordinator, Nancy Castro, had, when this research was conducted, not developed a strategy document for the internal change work, nor presented these ideas formally to the staff collective, and her plan was not to do so in a rush: she holds that this must wait until the impact of the work carried out so far is clearer (Interviews with Nancy Castro, June 26th and Oct 16th 2006).

This section of the Chapter should thus not be seen an attempt to assess these emerging internal interventions, but mainly as a way of highlighting some of the internal factors contributing to the political fights around the meaning of gender equality. It should be noted that the gender coordinators’ efforts did not occur in a ‘vacuum’: attempts to create a good working environment, and counter sex-stereotyping of jobs, had been underway long before she joined the College. Examples of this are the attempt to employ men to do what is traditionally seen as ‘women’s tasks’ (i.e. cleaning and washing-up), providing opportunities for staff development, and offering medical aid schemes to staff.³⁷

Initially, the Gender Coordinator has focused on changing working methods and staff relations within the ‘Strategy Centre’, where the Gender programme is based since the beginning of the year. Most interviewees from this section of the College, and other staff members who have been directly involved in the GRG work, claimed to have noted a significant change, both of themselves and of their colleagues, as a result both from informal interactions, from conducting workshops jointly with the gender coordinator, or through joint exercises of assessing workshop material from a gender perspective (see Chapter 4). In other sections of the College, Nancy Castro has so far only interacted with a few individuals, through actions such as conducting joint training programmes, where staff members have been introduced ‘in action’ to methodologies for feminist popular education.

“... We develop... a four days training... about administration... with the APF staff... Was to design ... the administration training with a gender perspective... and... was... to analyze the roles of the males and females under the administration... the value of the different skills... was to compare the... the power relations in the... home... in CBOs and then in the APF... We make an exercise analyzing APF administrative in this way...

³⁷ I have not attempted to trace the historical interventions around gender inside the College, since this would be too big a task, and these activities should simply be seen as some few out of a multitude of historical examples.

And do the same with Pick n' Pay... And the capitalism here... And the socialism here... analyzing ... the gender relations... the values, the roles... In the end was finish with... saying ... We are using exactly the same ways, it is nothing different ... That was with two persons from ... Khanya... They are very good trainers to teach the administration. But the other component, the gender component... was a new thing... And I think that is to touch... But is different if I... sit every one... [College staff members] and I give a training."

Gender and Organisational Development theorists Rao, Stuart and Kelleher have pinpointed four aspects of what they call the 'deep structure' of organisations, which cause the prevailing unequal gender relations in most work places. They call these aspects "the valuing of heroic individualism", "the split between family and work", "exclusionary power" and the "monoculture of instrumentality" (Rao, Stuart and Kelleher, 1999:2-11). Nancy Castro's analysis of Khanya College as a work place, and her attempts to intervene, relate quite closely to these aspects, and I will therefore try to explain the four aspects and link them to interventions within the College. This is also relevant in relation to the politics around the Gender Reference Group and other external Khanya interventions, since it shows how the gendered nature of the 'deep structure' of organisations in contemporary South Africa, can act as an obstacle for empowerment initiatives.

The first concept, "valuing of heroic individualism" acknowledges and values the 'lone hero' for his/her heroic ways of working '24-7' to solve a crisis in the organisation, resulting in a clear and visible output, whereas some one who manages the daily work effectively and avoids ending up in a difficult circumstance, or people working in the support side of the organisation remain unseen. In her work with Khanya College, Nancy Castro describes a similar situation, where the constant 'busy-ness', the long working days and after hour work contributed to making "cold relations" in the office, leaving support people feeling invisible, she claims. Trying to counter this culture, and encouraging others to do the same, has been part of her intervention.

"I stop, and I have got time ... to see to their eyes and say 'How are you? How do you feel?' And I have got the time to stand up from my desk and hug the people. And say it doesn't matter. And people feel like that action... is a normal action that you expect from whatever human being around you. If the person just spends whole day and whole

*weeks and whole months here, whole years... more time than with your family.
Minimally you expect that people hear me. But ... it is not a normal thing.
And [when] you do it, you start to be in a ... different role."*

“The split between family and work³⁸”, which can also be called the divide between “private and public” issues “is supported by the assumption that work is separate from the rest of the life, and that work has the first claim on the worker. From this is developed the notion of the ideal worker”, rarely including people who are gendered as women and fulfil the gendered expectations placed on them to “irrespective of their participation in the paid workforce [be] primarily responsible for family and reproductive activities” (Rao, Stuart and Kelleher, 1999:4-5). Providing an opportunity for staff to be present in the College space as ‘embodied’ persons (for definition of concepts, see chapter 3), and challenging the discourse of the ideal Khanya College employee, who should be available “24-7”³⁹, are some of the issues which Nancy Castro’s, so far quite small, interventions to change the internal culture of the organisation has centred around. Some of the ‘subversive’ tactics she has used in order to ‘humanise’ the office, and challenge the family/work place split, has been to bring some of her own private life into the College space, pasting pictures of her daughter and partner on the wall, and encouraging others to do the same. She brought along plants which she gave to every one to look after, and encouraged people to bring their children along to weekend workshops. This, she says, has made it more possible to express feelings within the College.

“... When the people are activists... political activists... one of the principal rules is your private life is your private life ... and is not part of the real ... struggles ... And in Khanya that was very strong.” /.../ “[Before] nobody spoke about feelings... was... that... schizophrenic imposition... The patriarchal way... Your private life... is what? ... It does not matter if you are a... profit institution or a non-profit institution ... When we start a process with gender... we start to include... your life... your individual ... People start to develop some... kind of relation with me...because I open the possibility to speak ... That make a ... comfortable feeling ... inside the office...”

³⁸ This split was created in the time of the industrial revolution, “when ‘the workplace’ moved out of the family, home and community – both literally and metaphorically (Rao, Stuart and Kelleher, 1999:4-5). Interesting to note is the recreation of the boundaries between the two spheres with the increase in home-based work: something which however has led to a devaluing of this work, both in status and monetary compensation.

³⁹ Several interviewees pointed out that this concept was used by the internal leadership to explain the commitment to the work place which employees are expected to have.

An example of when staff members' 'private lives' are taken into account by the organisation is when it comes to safety for (especially women) staff members commuting with public transport to work. It is acceptable to leave meetings early to avoid travelling by public transport after dark, but, two staff members point out, the meetings still carry on after some staff members have had to leave, signifying that the meeting culture has not been altered so as to allow for a full participation of every one.

The use of 'power'

'Exclusionary power' is the third of Rao, Stuart and Kelleher's aspects which hinders gender work. They note that the concept 'power' is value-neutral and 'omnipresent' and the effects of 'power' depend on how it is practiced. While inclusive power is conducive to an agenda of gender equality, exclusive power, exercised through rigid hierarchies which silence voice and disallows participation, is clearly not. They divide the concept 'power' in an organisational context into 'positional power', 'agenda setting power', 'hidden power', 'power of dialogue' and 'power of conflict' (Rao, Stuart and Kelleher, 1999:6-10).

It is interesting to take an extra look into the aspect of 'power' in the College, since it is so intricately linked with constructions of gender, as Joan Scott has pointed out. She conceptualises gender as a signifier of power, and as "a primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated" (Scott, 1992, quoted in Rao, Stuart and Kelleher, 1999:8). This is illustrated for example through the construction of 'masculine' as interconnected with 'authority', and 'feminine' as interconnected with 'weakness' (Rao, Stuart and Kelleher, 1999:8).

Khanya College, as a democratically operating organisation, upholds an egalitarian structure in its internal decision making body, the PCT, which consists of three women and four men, heading the different programmes in the College. But several interviewees, both male and female, claim that this structure still represents male dominance. Says one female employee:

"In terms of the power in the structures... It has got a very patriarchal feel still."

This is something the College leadership is aware of, but, as this male PCT-member explains, it is still difficult to tackle.

"... in staff meetings, depending on who says the thing, the position will be accepted. And we are quite clear that we have a strong patriarchal history in the College. The

more experienced comrades are men. And if they take a position ... even if the other comrade says exactly the same thing, it just carries much more weight if there is a man saying it. And it is not an easy thing to address... but it is there."

Says a woman staff member:

"...at times you find that we ... have meetings, we speak, but ... sometimes it seems like when we have those meetings ... decisions have already been made."

Several interviewees point out that a small group of people hold the power and the knowledge in the College, making it difficult, especially for new staff members to participate fully in strategic decisions. The few women who talk in the meetings are almost exclusively part of the management committee. Information being controlled by powerful individuals, temporary staff or volunteers being disempowered through exclusion from staff meetings, and agenda-setting power rigorously limiting who can say what in meetings are in interviews pointed out as negative aspects of power in the College. Says a woman staff member:

"...in most cases it is the male comrades who are very vocal in the meetings. And then it's only few female comrades who are...vocal and open... In most cases you would find that... they are in the management committee. They are not just... ordinary staff."

She continues:

*"People... when they are quiet, it doesn't mean that... they don't have... something to say. So it is like a matter of... some times... they would feel... intimidated in the... meeting. Because... outside of the meeting then you would hear that people say... 'So and so was not right' ...Those kind of issues... were going to be... more constructive if they were raised... in the context of the meeting.
Unlike when they are raised ... in the corridor."*

The use of certain words, the way people express themselves, or the nature of their inputs have caused responses in the meetings which several staff members refer to as 'bullying'. Some interviewees say that it is futile to make suggestions and inputs in meetings, since they do not belong to the clique that holds strong 'positional power', and point out that information is not adequately shared within the College.

When investigating how power is at interplay in meeting settings, it can be useful to look at what Norwegian Social Psychologist Berit Ås in 1976 dubbed the 'Master Suppression Techniques', commonly used by powerful groups to dominate the less powerful. Her theory was constructed in a Norwegian political meeting setting, looking at how 'men', as a powerful group, are disempowering 'women'. She noted the following commonly used techniques: 'Making Invisible', 'Ridiculing', 'Withholding Information', 'Damned If You Do And Damned If You Don't' (Also called double punishment - where a woman have to choose between two options, both of which she will be criticised), 'Heaping Blame and Putting to Shame' (When women, often in combination with ridiculing and double punishment, are told that they are not 'good enough') (Ås, 1976).⁴⁰ Says a woman staff member:

"There is ... this tendency that some of the... members of the management committee... when other staff members... raise serious issues ... they would just turn the issue into a joke. Or, sometimes... they just laugh... at... other people's ideas, and then... this is also demotivating ... What is the point of talking, because, you know at the end of the day they just... laugh at my idea? But if... this person is a part of the management... no one is... going to make jokes out of... the ideas... So at times... maybe you will find that... even before the person has spoken they are already laughing... And its worse that... the leadership is the one who is doing... this laughing... So what kind of a message ...are they... passing to the people? At the end of the day, people end up going to the meeting to... just listen..."

A male PCT member points out that every one is aware on some level that ordinary staff members do not speak as much as the 'power holders' in the meetings. He finds this problematic, and not consistent with the kind of practices the College seeks to adhere to, but says that time pressure is the main factor behind this.

"So in the meeting... what we try to do is that we keep quiet. And when the chairperson says: 'Any comment on this?' we are not the first hand up. You allow other comrades to speak first. [And] even though you might have a direct opposed position ... the way you introduce it might be... without being in any way patronizing, condescending and say, look, I can see that, but maybe you can approach it like this...[But] there is a fine line

⁴⁰ A short summary of the theory is available in English at kilden.forskningsradet.no/c16881/artikkel/vis.html?tid=35123)

some times between... not undermining the comrades confidence and being condescending... But more likely than not, when we sit in those meetings, you are there, and you don't even have time to be in that meeting. You know you have got a thousand other things... you want to get this meeting done... and you speak. And that can sometimes act as a bit of a block... Once a certain comrade has spoken, that's the end of the issue ... Even for people who are relatively gender sensitive and supportive of women. It is not easy when you are working in a very pressured environment."

This quote indicates that there is a will to act in a way which is more sensitive to gendered power relations, but combined with the previous quote, which illustrates how, according to the woman interviewee, 'Master Suppression Techniques' (Ås, 1976)⁴¹ are simultaneously in use to suppress any debate, the real life action of the powerful clique appears to contradict with the rhetoric.

The relationship described in the end of the quote, between 'power' and 'time pressure', and how the use of time is prioritized, links with the fourth concept which Rao, Stuart and Kelleher have identified: the 'Monoculture of instrumentality'. The word combination builds on what Vandana Shiva has called the "monocultures of the mind", and this 'instrumentality', among other things, downplays issues such as organizational health and equity, privileging the fulfilment of "quantitative targets to which managers (and the organisation) are held accountable" – in NGO settings often donor-demands on producing certain outcomes within a set time frame (Rao, Stuart and Kelleher 1999:10). While good working conditions is one thing which Khanya College prides itself of having offered its employees, several staff members however claim that this is more 'talk than action', that the rhetoric of workers rights in the College is not consistent with the treatment. These perceptions are undoubtedly linked to the withholding of parts of the salaries during the year, because of the financial difficulties the institution was facing, and the disappointment and anxiety it has created among staff, affecting precisely the organizational health and equity (see below).

Responses to the gender coordinator's informal interventions in the College

Some time after Nancy Castro joined the College full time in February 2006, it appeared as though her interventions were having rapid effect. She experienced some resistance but still managed to get major interventions accepted, such as the running of a Children's Winter School parallel with the Winter School for grown-ups, aimed at increasing interaction over

⁴¹ Ibid

age groups, and create an understanding inside and outside of the College that ‘children’ should be included into the notion of a ‘conscious activist’. She ascribes the successful start mainly to the positive attitude to gender work at the beginning of the year, when the initiative still came from the formal and informal power holders in the College. But she also thinks that her personal features, coming from another country in the Global South (Colombia), made it easier to accept her unfamiliar interventions – such as the plants or the photos or the other efforts to move away from the ‘valuing of heroic individualism’ and the ‘monoculture of instrumentality’. She was informally playing the role of a counsellor in the office, since many staff members started approaching her to talk about their problems, both at work and at home.

“...all of these things, in another context, or for another person maybe ... don’t read like part of the steps in the... gender training ... For me is clear.”

Towards the middle of the year, conflicts however started to cloud the successes of her small internal interventions. Firstly, the disagreements in the Design Team over the methodological choices for the Winter School, and the long and heated contestation over the Children’s Winter School, contributed to placing people in two camps: proponents and opponents of the methodology which Nancy Castro had initiated. The Sexual harassment issue was the next blow, and after the Winter School, the external programmes became heavily questioned. What was actually the intention with the Gender Reference Group? And why were they making so much noise around the abuse of women in the movements? Are there not other more ‘political’ questions to engage with? Nancy Castro reflects on the resistance to her work in the following way:

“ ... I don’t think it is only a concrete event (that sparked the resistance). I think it is a process too... The issue of develop the job... in a ... gender way... and not in the political patriarchal way... is making a... noise... This kind of process with women... need to be... slowly... You can’t change... feelings... you can’t change culture... with... workshop 8 to 5 ... Is a real process. That is different if you are getting skills... that don’t touch your individuality... and... your identity like male or female... You can say:’ I can teach how is the law in the labour ... From 8 to here...’ That came... perfectly under the rules of the... patriarchalism. But this kind of work, not...”

Another woman staff member noted that:

“I have seen some sort of movement, sort of a resistance, ever since ... Nancy came. It is like she is a strong person who is saying... ‘No, no, no’ ... She will argue, she will debate issues... but I feel like it is not taken that much serious as other things.”

By winter time, the resistance reappeared in another shape, through questioning the political credibility of Nancy Castro, Nina Benjamin and other people involved in the gender process. Gossip and rumours flourished, and the pressure was felt both inside the College and outside in the movements. The critique of the focus on individualism, and the claims that this bordered on liberal feminist methods was something Nancy Castro interpreted as resistance to the whole intention of the programme. No one said straight out that they thought the Gender Programme in its current form must stop. Other means were used instead – like the starting of a discussion group on gender and patriarchy for the Khanya Journal, using old methodologies and material, without informing her. Nancy Castro reflected on this as being linked to the sense of ‘losing’ power:

“One moment start to move something, immediately the uncomfortableness is there... In this environment it is difficult to stop and analyse the situation. It is like the enemy. You try to destroy physically. Is to isolate you. That is the thing that is happening [but I] understand it is part of the process. It is one of the normal reactions. But it really put me a little bit out of the role. The reaction I expected was strong words, but a possibility to confront not me, but what I am doing ... It is a way to deal with resistance. Conceptually and politically it is impossible to do it.”

Nancy Castro’s approach of initiating internal change work through informal processes, allowing people to see and experience her way of doing ‘political work’ with gender before creating a conceptual document or a policy for the College, was given a blow at the end of the year. She was then instructed to write a document outlining the theoretical framework and methodology for the gender work, formulated according to the College culture. She agreed to do so to mitigate the conflict, but expressed doubts that it would make any difference:

“To change culture is impossible... under the normal tool... of the patriarchalism... [It] needs to be something like you breath... and you feel... and you... live... If we start... with conceptual thing... I am sure ... nobody going to discuss, to disagree...”

because conceptually it is very easy to... agree ... with the gender position ...

[It is] different when you start to touch the individual."

As have been illustrated in this section, a mix of techniques have been used by Nancy Castro in her efforts to enhance not only the conceptual understanding of 'gender equality', but also to promote 'emotional' and 'spiritual' learning about doing gender work in practice. I would argue, both on the basis of interviews with Nancy Castro, and other employees, and through observing meetings and joint events, that the 'mixed' strategies consist of pressure and confrontation, dialogue and alliance building with insiders who possess different kinds of power. While analysing different choices of tactics, Rao, Stuart and Kelleher argue that it is not possible to choose between conflict and compromise, since "Both are needed to make change happen". The long-term successes of the programme initiated at Khanya College will however not only be determined through the 'right mix' and smart use of these tactics. Outside developments, like the difficult financial situation, risk exacerbating the conflict. To really understand the power at play, it is therefore also necessary to look at other developments within the College more closely.

Escalation of the internal conflicts

The financial problem in the College has been a main contributing factor to the conflict, the decline in the atmosphere, and an increased tiredness amongst staff members. During several months in 2006, salaries were not forthcoming, and towards the end of the year, an agreement was reached that only 48 percent of the salaries would be paid out until things change, something which was expected to take time. This created a lot of tension, and criticism arose around how this decision was taken and communicated. Several interviewees point out that there has not been a culture of discussion around the salary cuts. Raising concern about finances has been seen as lack of commitment, or a lack of political conviction, which has a gendered and class impact. Said female staff members in interviews:

"Some of the reactions were that: "we are all middle-class here... our constituency [is not]... And therefore you don't have a right to feel... unhappy... or feel that this is a difficult situation... And that created a lot of tension."

"It's aggravating and affecting relations... because there is no transparency... you are never actually told the truth... you just hear there is no money, there is no money... And

it is impacting on people, because we have financial obligations /.../

We drag ourselves to work.”

This situation severely impacted on the atmosphere in the College, several interviewees, including this female staff member, point out.

“On a general level I would say that ... excluding now the management committee ... there is a lot of unhappiness amongst... staff... One... is the issue of finances, and then... two... is ... the issue of how... staff relates to the management... Most people... feel that ... they are not treated with respect... their work is not valued ... And... they are not properly consulted.”

On top of this, a major conflict arose in October, around a bus trip for activists, which the College was organising to Malawi and the Southern Africa Social Forum. This annual meeting is a major event on the activism calendar, and for the second year in a row, Khanya College was enabling activists from South Africa to travel to the forum. This year, the College was hoping to raise funds for two busses, and up until a few days before departure, it was still uncertain if there would be one or two busses, and how many College staff members should go. The ways in which this matter was handled culminated in the resignation of a female employee. She says:

“I got an sms [during the weekend] telling me that I was not going anymore... and I was fine with that. Even though I felt like ... it was not the right way to do things... Then on Monday I came to work... I found again there was a ... staff meeting... And ... I hear now... that all of a sudden I am going to Malawi again... ‘Tomorrow at 8 o’clock you are on the bus’ ... They should have at least called me again to say: ‘You are on the bus again’! Instead of being told... in a meeting... It seems as if ... you don’t have a life of your own...”

The same person was also uncomfortable that leaving with such short notice would not allow her to start taking the malaria prophylaxis on time, since this should be done a week in advance. She describes her reactions during the meeting in the following way:

“So now when I asked... I was told that ... you get the pills when you get to the Malawi border. Or you can just drink tonic water... nothing will happen to you... So for me...”

that was a bit emotional... because... I am told to risk my life... Secondly I don't have a medical aid... Thirdly when I have... problems, medical... no one wants to help me ... After the meeting I went to my desk... I typed the letter [of resignation]... Because I just felt like... if these people don't care about my life, then... why should I be here?"

Several other female interviewees also echo the disappointment around how this issue was handled in the College, and what it reveals of gendered power relations, since initially five female staff members had been assigned to go on the bus.

"...this thing of saying that people will get their pills when they get to the border... I feel like if it was some one else they wouldn't... have said the same thing. They were going to be extra careful and just make sure that people are fine..."

The woman who resigned analyzed the conflicts leading to this decision as clearly linked to her being gendered as woman. Her unwillingness to live up to the 'gendered expectations' on her: to not publicly object to men in power positions; and the expectations placed on the 'ideal worker' in the College: to "minimize obligations apart from the job" (Rao, Stuart and Kelleher, 1999:5) had a clear gendered nature, she insists.

"...what irritated me most was... the fact that ... these things were done to me because I am female... Because I am female ... I am supposed to say yes ... to everything".

The conditions on the bus to Malawi, the safety for women activists and staff members, and issues around sexual harassment were brought up in interviews by women staff members as problematic. The following quote illustrates the problems which can arise when the needs of 'embodied' activists and staff members are not taken into account in the planning process.

"... The bus, to start with, didn't have toilets. The stopping station was... an open veld... places that we were not sure of our safety, especially at night... Women had to squat... So we were not catered for. Because they [the male activists] didn't want to stop at garages ... And it was a problem, I had to stand up and take the mike and plead with comrades... And actually explain that some of us... are at their monthly periods... I had to emphasize that we need a bathroom, we need privacy... And then in the bus, obviously, some women are taken advantage of..."

The gendered conflicts which surfaced against the back drop of the Malawi trip are linked to a range of the different aspects of working conditions and programmes in the College: the meaning of 'being a worker'; health and safety; travel; and communication – all raised in a context of financial difficulties where staff did not receive full salaries.

During a couple of weeks in October 2006, three female staff members resigned, almost at the same time (one of the cases being triggered by the Malawi trip as described above). Although the resignations were not necessarily linked, I decided it was important for my research to try and speak to the people leaving the College, and hear their versions of the gendered power conflict in the workplace. Two of the women who had resigned agreed to be interviewed, and several staff members who stayed on also chose to comment on the resignations. The reason for all the resignations was commonly seen to have been the salary issue: the people resigning could no longer cope financially. Although this was in some ways a common denominating factor, there were other and some times stronger reasons for the resignations. Stress, objection to unfair treatment, and for one person, the lack of career opportunities in the College were brought up in the interviews. Class background also featured as an element making it more difficult for some to sustain a life on half of the expected salary.

“... the common element within... the resignations [are] ... the issues of salaries.... We come from different backgrounds... Some we have got more responsibilities at home... Others they have got some partners, who can... provide for the family when you don't have an income for that month... or for some months...”

(One of the women who resigned)

Two of the employees who resigned did not have another job to go to, reflecting the degree of discontent and the stress in the College.

“I think some of the comrades felt that... their concerns were not being taken into account... and there was then an exchange... which had a similar tone: 'They are interested in themselves, and... they don't see themselves as part of the constituency'... And that is the thread running throughout... all the tensions that are there... Then if you find that... there are other things that have been happening... the way you have been treated... this kind of a situation just arises.

I think... it just... becomes ... a trigger.”

(Woman who resigned)

The gendered consequence of the conflict, and the way the College was ‘speaking with a split tongue’, was harshly criticised by this woman employee claiming that:

“The public relations ... of Khanya is different compared to the internal public relations... And for me... it is false advert... I would rather be a capitalist and be ... in ... the corporate world, then to be a hypocrite here...”

This data shows that the climate deteriorated rapidly inside the College towards year end. The last comment clearly indicates a risk that more staff members might be resigning within short. Generally, it appears as if the salary issue (quite expectedly) is the main contributing factor to the stress and the conflict. But the other influences should not be ignored, such as the lack of communication, and the way some staff members have felt mistreated. These issues might have been causing discontent in the College for a long time (my study only looks at the past year), and it seems likely, from the methodology used by Nancy Castro, and the reactions she has received, that opening up spaces for staff members to speak, and to be ‘embodied’, might also have contributed to creating a channel through which this critique could be communicated, and possibly empowering some staff members with the voice to dare expressing concerns which they had held for some time already.

The inside affects the outside, which affects the inside...

The link between the external and the internal work became very obvious in relation to the contestation over the meaning of the political, who is a ‘political actor’, and the debate around sexual harassment and other issues in the Winter School. As Rao, Stuart and Kelleher argue, “an organisation that is gender-biased on the inside is incapable of producing gender-equitable outcomes” (Rao, Stuart and Kelleher, 1999). The successes in the external educational programmes will thus be dependent on what happens inside the College, a perspective which was also confirmed by a staff member.

“We have two faces to our constituency... The two are going to come into conflict with each other. There is a block inside and outside Khanya. What happens in the College is going to strengthen what happens outside of the College.”

Nancy Castro conceded in October that the situation inside the College most likely had been further polarized through the speed of the external process, which developed much faster than the process of transforming the institution internally, and because of this “clashed” with power structures in the College.

“... I am re-evaluating... not the methodology [but]... the different steps in the methodology.”

Her focus in the near future will be on ‘making things balance’ by spending more energy on the internal work, while at the same time carrying on with the GRG, and also starting off a similar process with a group of male activists who have approached the College and asked for assistance in setting up a group discussing gender issues.

Another woman staff member involved in the process reflected on the fight as playing into a patriarchal pattern, and was hoping to find new ways of approaching the conflict.

“...if you can find a way of not focusing on who is winning. For me I think that is the... one way of testing out this thing. That your main thought is not just to try and prove that you are right ... And let it speak for itself ... let the process speak for itself.”

A perception shared by several interviewees is that the success of the College’s gender work, both the internal and the external, is intricately linked with larger societal processes in contemporary South Africa. Indeed, development worker and theorist Caroline Sweetman has pointed out that “every organisation has an underlying culture which reflects power relations in surrounding society. Organisational transformation depends upon realising this and challenging it in every way possible” (Sweetman, 2004:8). But although it is crucial to analyze external factors when assessing processes of addressing gendered power relations, this should however not paralyse attempts of trying. Some interviewees appear to downplay any possibility of a strong change inside the College: this will anyway be “insular”, and reversed again as soon as some staff members leave, if it does not happen simultaneously with a big societal upheaval. Although in many ways reasonable, it can also be a way of defending a lack of action, or, put in stronger words, of resisting change. Says male PCT members:

“... like other things in Khanya... it will stop-start. ... That is partly probably the nature of the period... If there were intense battles, struggles taking place outside I think it would have a strong impact on Khanya ..., elevating it to the kind of status it deserves in Khanya. The fact that that is not happening and the fact that we then ... struggle along with our own sort of institutional stresses and issues, means that it will be very much a stop-start kind of thing.”

“... It's not an individual thing, it's a deep structural problem in society, and my sense is... the extent to which we are able to resolve it in Khanya is not just a Khanya thing... It would be made much easier if there was a sort of emerging voice of women in the movements, or ultimately a strong women's movement.”

Although several interviewees expressed fear that the process might be stopped, other staff members were more ambivalent, or slightly positive that the fight for gender equality in the College was moving forward.

“I don't know what will happen inside Khanya quite honestly ... I don't think there is going to be a space to reflect on the internal dynamics...”

“I think we are finding our way... And there is unfortunately a lot of causalities in the process... I think it is a very good thing if people publicly know that... there is difficulties in Khanya. Because... they need to understand that we are a reflection of many of the things out there, we are not the organisation with all the answers. And that we are trying to find the answers internally as well.”

“In terms of change... there is no yes or no whether it is moving or not... because it is more like an amoeba ... It moves ... then if there is a danger, it repels back, and take another form, and changes but it knows where it goes. It's... going.”

It should be noted in relation to the analysis I have attempted to construct in the last sections, that I entered the College as a researcher in a period when the internal gendered power dynamics had not yet started to be so visibly polarized. Some of the interviews on which this material is based were made in times when there was ‘calm’ in the conflicts, others were made just after some very contagious developments, such

as the Malawi trip and the resignations. And all were exacerbated by the money issue. With time, the heated sentiments expressed in some of the quotes I have presented, would likely have calmed down. But since I am researching the process as it unfolds, the analysis should be read as an attempt to make sense of the developments within the College through a series of snap-shots from a short period in a long process of institutional change work for gender equality.

Conclusion:

This Chapter has attempted to describe and analyze different aspects of contemporary conflicts within Khanya College, concerning the meaning of 'political' gender work, the nature of a 'political actor', methodological approaches to empowering women, and gendered work place conflicts. It has also presented an overview of the 'deep structure' in the College, which may prevent internal and external efforts of changing gendered power relations, and introduced the methods used by the Gender Coordinator to transform the College as a work place. In the next chapter, the practice of Khanya College's effort to empower women activists will be discussed and exemplified through the most contested arena of this work: the Gender Reference Group.

Chapter 6: Empowering women activists: Creating a Monster

“For once they are talking about us because we are resisting. I walk tall, and I feel good.”

(Woman GRG member)

This chapter investigates and analyzes one of Khanya College’s external interventions to empower women activists in SMs and CBOs – the Gender Reference Group. Participatory observation in the group is used alongside with interviews with women activists and Khanya College representatives, to describe, and analyze the impact of the programme and its relevance. The chapter looks at the conflicts arising when women claim space and power, and how these conflicts are handled by the College in the context of a one-week workshop, the Khanya College annual Winter School, for activists in South Africa and the region.

As described in Chapter 2, I was given the opportunity to participate during 2006 in a powerful and uplifting, but also highly provocative and questioned, empowerment process for women activists in social movements (SMs) and community-based organisations (CBOs), called the Gender Reference Group (GRG), initiated by Khanya College. The GRG had been set up by Khanya College the previous year, in the run-up to the 2005 Winter School, which had the overall theme “Gender, Neoliberalism and Social Movements”. The group’s initial mandate was to give input into the planning processes of the 2005 school, and during the school week assist the College in assessing the relevance of the methodology, and the theoretical content of the school from their own experiences as women grassroots activists. After the Winter School, a decision was taken to continue working with the group, to further the efforts to empower the individual activists with knowledge and voice, and also to encourage them to ‘plough back’ into their organisations. The group⁴² consisted of between 15 (July 2005) and 23 (July 2006) women activists (youth, young adults and middle-aged women) from urban townships around Johannesburg, Pretoria, Durban and Cape Town, as well as from a rural area in the Limpopo province. Two female Khanya staff members were also present in the group as participants. A number of criteria were set up while recruiting women activists to the group: they should be active in fairly developed organisations with a long term working relationship with the Khanya College Strategy Centre; they should preferably hold some position in their organisation; and in the group finally chosen, a mix of ages was required. The result was a vibrant and vocal group, where 70 percent had been

⁴² The data about the group is based on Khanya College’s internal report for the Winter School evaluation process.

elected to leadership positions in their organisations. The CBOs and SM⁴³s which the women represented have different organising patterns and levels of militancy and tackle a range of issues, including advocacy against the commodification of basic services and for land rights, community development through income generating projects, issues of unemployment, and the right to quality education. These organisations have a mixed sex membership, although two 'women's organisations' were also represented, The Kganya Women's Consortium,⁴⁴ which is women-led but accepts male members, and in the last workshop of the year; Lungelo Women's Organisation. The GRG members reflect quite well the constituency of Khanya College in terms of their backgrounds; the majority are unemployed or involved in income-generating projects, and others occupy part time or casual jobs, or are studying. Their level of education is however slightly higher than among the average activists whom the College engages: two-thirds have completed Secondary education or matriculated, and one third holds a Technical or a University degree. They all belong to (different sections of) the broad South African working class; representing different family conditions (married women, single mothers, women with no children, women living with their partners, or with family members), and speaking seSotho, isiZulu or isiXhosa as their first languages. Throughout the year, some women reported that they had initiated, or were under way to set up women's groups within their organisation or community (most organisations were represented by two or more women).

The overall objective of the group is to: "develop a process that engages the women from the reference group in ongoing analysis, reading and writing of their experiences as women in the home, in the community and as activists in the social movements."⁴⁵ But the broad vision is bigger than this: "to understand the strength of collective responses to [gender-based] oppression", and in the long run encourage the development of such responses⁴⁶.

In 2005, when my research had not yet started, I was present during the Winter School as an ordinary participant. There, I was intrigued by the strong presence of women, who outnumbered men, and were very active in many sessions in the big plenary and in small-

43 Seeking to protect the anonymity of the interviewees from the Gender Reference Group, I have chosen not to list the names and organisational affiliation of the eight members in the group which I have interviewed (two of them twice). I will however list all organisations which are represented in the group to give an indication of the nature of the activism which the women speak of. The organisations are: South Africa Unemployed Youth Forum, Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF), Evaton West Crisis Committee, Kganya Women's Consortium, Batlhabinne Rural Development Trust (BRDT), Environmental Networking Forum, Landless People's Movement, Soshanguve Community Development Forum, Lungelo Women's Organisation, Bophelong Community Service Forum (BOCOSFO) and Alexandra Concerned Residents.

44 The Consortium participates in the Orange Farm Crisis Committee, which is affiliated to the APF.

45 Quote from the Gender Reference Group workshop Report, June 2006 (Internal Khanya College document)

46 Ibid

group discussions. During the 2005 Winter School week, the GRG group did not stand out from the mass of women (and some men) raising issues of gender inequalities in the movements and in the home. But in the 2006 Winter School, the sentiments of male activists towards what was then the GRG⁴⁷ had changed quite dramatically. This time, it was clear that Khanya College through the reference group had (in Nancy Castro's words) created a 'monster', and the women participants in the group came to personify this creature, which, as I will show in this Chapter, posed such a threat to many men that they tried by all means to bring it into disrepute and find ways of stopping it. It was now not so much Khanya College itself, but rather the individuals in the College working with the gender programme, and the individual women participants in the GRG who were critiqued. The group came to be associated with a decision by Khanya College, forbidding its staff members to engage in relationships with participants during the Winter School, and a general hardened stance against sexual harassment, and were subsequently labelled the 'sex police'.

The process of these dynamics, and their emergence through the efforts of empowering the women activists constituting the Gender Reference Group before, during and after the 2006 Winter School, will be explored in the chapter. The key aim of the chapter is the description of a complex set of micro-events, which animated the roll out of a targeted feminist education initiative, as material grounding reflection on the meaning of engaging with gender dynamics within an organizational programme.

Problematizing the stereotype: men lead and women follow

Before describing these micro-events developing during 2006 in and around the Gender Reference Group, it is necessary to give an introduction to the GRG members lived experiences of being women activists in grassroots CBOs and SMs of both men and women, in South Africa, at this point in time. In order to provide such an insight, I have interviewed eight of the activists in the group, representing six of the different participating CBOs and SMs, but most of them also drawing on experiences they have from activism in other SMs and CBOs over the years. I have furthermore utilised data emerging in the discussions during the GRG meetings, where I participated as an activist/researcher⁴⁸ (see further Chapter 2). This section seeks to contextualise the specific Khanya College intervention which the

⁴⁷ 44% of the participants in 2006 had attended the 2005 Winter School. Most of the 56% who were not part of the 2005 Winter School did form part of a post winter school reference group workshop in November 2005.

⁴⁸ When quotes have been taken from meeting notes, I will point this out specifically. When there are no references given, the quote comes from a recorded and transcribed interview.

Gender Reference Group forms. For my own background comments and analysis, I have drawn on material from other meetings I have attended, and from published research reports.

As was noted in Chapter 3, in the (limited) South African literature available on gender relations in SMs, some general patterns emerge. They include findings that; the membership in SMs is dominated by women, many of them older; that men, and particularly young men dominate leadership structures and hold the agenda-setting power; that women often experience being strengthened through their activism in SMs, but also feel discriminated upon, and at times harassed by their male comrades; and that the issues which these new mass movements organise around (i.e. service provision in the form of housing, water, electricity and so on) are closely related to the private sphere, and to what is socio-culturally understood to be 'women's tasks'. Still, the fights of the movements rarely include goals of gender equality (Benjamin, S., 2004, Xali, Davies-van Es and Gentle, 2005).

The women interviewees from the GRG largely confirm the male dominated organising pattern described above, although a couple of them also have other experiences: from a youth organisation where most members as well as leaders are girls and young women, and from a women's consortium, where men over time have been allowed to join, but women remain in control of the leadership positions. The personal experiences of how patriarchal power structures in CBOs and SMs serve to preserve patterns where men and masculine experiences are privileged vary among the interviewees:

"It is still a long way to transformation. We [women activists] always need to discuss what we are ledged to discuss. If we don't, we are... sidelined. Like me, I am very opinionated, so ... I did not attend the BGM and many other important meetings... When men see... you challenge their decisions, you question them, you want them to substantiate... You become a threat, and they think you want to take their positions. So if there is an important decision that would need the constituency to take a vote or make a decision, it is better if you are not in that meeting."

"In... terms of decision making... we would discuss something together... as an organisation, and then... suggest... ways of going about... the issue. But at the end, they [the male activists] would... come up with their... own... strategy... [And]... have the power to implement it and... push for it to happen in the way they wanted".

Expressions of power, and male activists' eagerness to hold onto leadership positions, are other problematic issues mentioned by the interviewees. This was explained in socio-cultural terms, often linking the problem to men in 'our culture', rather than to a global patriarchal pattern, influenced by capitalism and affecting women all over the world.

"If you are in leadership, there are men that feel... you are undermining them. They have to be the ones that are... on the seats."

"...we would come across with the old men... and usually the Xhosa male, they don't want to be undermined by... their... young ones, or more especially the woman. So, if then we are in a meeting... and... You argue with that old man. Totally, you are wrong. So... that thing of... gender equality, a woman becoming... a leader, in a position... they don't ... understand it."

Even where there are good policies in place, or a conceptual understanding amongst the leadership that gender equality is an important political issue, the gap between theory and practice, is described as being wide.

"When I was still involved with [her ex-organisation]... the men were more... vocal... and they were... occupying the... leadership positions ... The gender issues were like... the buzz word, but in... practice things were not... balancing."

"...even in the same organisation that are saying they are bringing upliftment and development, you find that the gender stereotypes are still there ... though they have brilliant profiles saying that they have equity, they have got women in leadership."

"...they [male activists] speak about gender equality and all those things... but when it all comes to practice, it is difficult for them... And I don't blame them because even our government... in the constitution there is a policy around that. But... they don't follow it. And then if they... don't practice what they preach... then... people won't follow it."

Amongst women who have made it to leadership positions, some reflect crudely on the reasons for their election as an attempt by the male-dominated leadership structure to pay tribute to gender equality on a token level.

“You see... they are using us... more like statues... being put there so people... can see that this is a woman. But nothing is being done to empower you as a woman. To give you what you need to have... as a woman leader”

“You are sometimes elected to a position just to be the piecemeal for the men. If you are not towing the line, he will expose you, that you do not have enough skills for your position.” (from GRG meeting notes)

When it comes to organisational annual meetings, and elections for positions, many of the women who do get elected feel it is difficult to convince other women to stand as candidates.

“I am the only one woman [elected to the board] because... when coming to elections... Some of our women, they denied ourselves. They don't want to be inside because they don't know nothing...”

A woman activist from the same organisation adds:

“I don't think they don't know nothing... they don't know what they know that they know.”

A woman activist from another organisation reflects in a similar way about elections.

“Even if women caucus and say we are going to elect so-and-so... but come elections, I don't know, something changes. I think they go out maybe and influence other women to vote for the males.”

Several of the interviewees show negative sentiments towards women in their organisations who do not commit themselves, and say that men are the one's who are more active. They see the reasons for inequality being women's lack of abilities and devotion, and do not reflect on the power of socialisation.

“Some time people say: men are oppressed us. Sometimes it is us... who don't care about anything... In our organisation there is too much woman, but...They don't commit themselves. I think that... they don't know what they want in their lives. They just come to

the organisation... to add... the number ... It's an oppression in... other side because... the mens [sic!] always want to oppress us. They think that they are leaders, they can... manage to do everything, because they have that power doing that."

Other activists reflect on the organisational culture in organisations of both men and women as something which hinders their and other women's participation.

"I don't attend a lot of their meetings [of one of the organisations she belongs to]; because these men all make a noise at the same time ... And the small thing... is blown out of proportion... even a simple issue on the agenda about the date of a meeting."

"[Male activists] talk all these terms: 'its irrelevant'... 'out of order'... 'point of exigency' ... At first we used to just look and listen. So I took a book in the library on how to run a meeting, [and] I realised, oh, these are just synonyms for simple terms!"

"They [male activists] are used to discriminate each other... finding faults... from each other ... So if you are a woman and... you start participating... you think that: 'Eish.. I won't take it... I have better stay where I am ... because ... if they... speak like this to me, I am going to feel offended."

Some of the women talk about the stress they are subjected to in leadership positions, and how that can be a factor which drives women away from activism, especially being part of the leadership structures.

"In our culture.... we must respect older people. So some one would take advantage; Because I am old... you are meant to do this... Even the young people they expect you to be a... super woman. Even though you feel that this is shit and I can be angry, you need to be calm... you need to submit, and ... give them respect..."

Reflecting on how it is like trying to be heard as a woman activist in organisations of men and women, some interviewees refer to the difficulties inherited through the socialisation processes.

“It depends to... how empowered are you.... For me I don’t see any challenge, because I know where I... stand... [but] for most women... because of that system which have oppressed... Most women they are... not good enough... to stand up and... play... a major role in the organisation with... men and women.”

“The way we are socialised... I was not used in leading discussions or... taking part in discussions ... It might have been... the reason why the men decided: ok, this is how we are going to approach this... Few of the women are... putting their inputs... [and when they do] they are kind of not regarded as... heavy... or... strong inputs. ... I... could see... [also] other women were not well... equipped to... take part in the discussions.”

Abusive words and lack of gender equality policies as well as lack of gender equality in practice are touched upon by most of the interviewees.

“Male comrades are rude to women... they are abusive... When women state issues that... affect them directly, they [the men] don’t regard it as important...”

“You will hear... male comrades... when they want their transport money... if the money is not there, they shout and say all bad things...”

Feelings and everyday problems that activists face, are rarely made part of the work or the meetings. One woman says these issues are *“our own personal issue and not part of the political work”*. This divide between the personal life at home and the activist work in the organisations often impacts harder on women due to the often very high expectations on the women to ‘run’ the home, several interviewees point out.

“I am trying to be involved... whenever I have time, like... over the weekends. But... I have a baby so... when I am... at home over the weekend, I have to do the laundry... and... other things that I cannot do during the week. So... those things are... keeping me away. I mean, you have to earn money to support your family”

The divide between the public and the private also spills over onto the kind of questions which SMs and CBOs organise around, and in what way. A common rhetoric that is used in organisations on the left is that certain issues are political, like issues around the

commodification of basic services, whereas other issues, like gender based violence, or sexual discrimination of women in the movements is not seen as a 'real political' issue (see chapter 5). Says one woman activist about the organisation which she used to be active in:

"We were... dealing with 'political' kind of issues ...Which you would find... somehow... they are... not... close to your heart. But if you are talking about issues that affect people in the community, you find people... taking... part... in discussing the issue."

She makes the division between 'the activism world', and what she calls 'my world'.

"...what I...always find difficult is the thing that you go... to a march, you go to a campaign...and... you fight for the rights of every one. And then come back to your problems... the fact that you are not working, and you have kids... And you have family that is looking after you. And then those things are still... there. Looking at you... when you were out there, fighting. So... there is that world and your world..."

The material just presented gives some indication of the similarities of the gendered nature of activism in the SMs and CBOs which women participating in the Gender Reference Group represent. Although the interpretations differ around what certain patterns and developments signify, and although there are some organisations and individuals deviating from the stereotypical 'norm': men lead and women follow, it is clear that realities of organisations privileging male experiences, concerns and issues, where male leaders elect other men, of exclusion, bullying, socio-cultural pressure on women to follow decisions of men without questioning, and the pressing responsibilities at home – making participation difficult – are perceived similarly by many women. In relationship to the specific experiences of activism, this material indicates that it is possible to speak of a 'constituency' of women activists, with shared experiences, and to some extent 'shared interests'. For Khanya College this shared reality provides a foundation for working with feminist popular education methods, starting from 'women's lived experiences' of gendered power inequalities in their organisations, communities and homes.

Introducing the framework for the Gender Reference Group

In June 2006, the Gender Reference Group held its first gathering of the year, and its fourth meeting altogether, counting the Winter School week of 2005 as a single event. Although the June meeting was officially a pre-Winter School gathering, the objectives of coming together went beyond simply ensuring a certain level of participation of women in the School, and to assess the process of the School from a Gender perspective, as the following sections will show. Initially the GRG had been set up as a response to the limited participation of women in previous Winter Schools. In 2004, 70 percent of the delegates were men, and 30 percent women. The following year, when the theme was Gender, Neoliberalism and Social Movements, the numbers were shifted around, to 70 percent women and 30 percent men, due to the fact that gender is still often seen by SMs and CBOs as a 'Women's issue', but also as a consequence of Khanya College's active intervention to encourage participation of women (Nina Benjamin, June 22, from my workshop notes). Now, in 2006, the College sought to have equal numbers of male and female participants in the school, with equal and active participation in discussions and debates. Through the pre-gatherings, the women in the GRG were expected to gain knowledge and confidence which would enable them to claim space in the school, and contribute a body of actively participating women.

The overall objective of the GRG was however formulated more broadly:

"To develop a process that engages the women from the reference group in ongoing analysis, reading and writing of their experiences as women in the home, in the community and as activists in the social movements"⁴⁹.

Out of the three specific objectives of the GRG, objective number two related directly to the June gathering, according to the planning document.

- 1. To analyse my individual experience as a woman within the norms, values and expectations under a patriarchal/capitalist society.*
- 2. To analyse that my own experience as a woman is not an individual but a collective reality for women under a patriarchal/capitalist society.*
- 3. To understand that only collectively can women struggle for a position of equal social value to men in society⁵⁰*

⁴⁹ Quoted from: Gender Reference Group Workshop Report June 2006 (internal Khanya College document)

The third 'specific objective' - understanding the need for a collective struggle – gives a clear indication of in which direction the initiators dream that the process will go – creating enabling conditions for the development of a women's social movement, or for a struggle for gender equality within movements of women and men.

The theoretical base for this empowerment programme appears, from my point of view as a feminist researcher, to constitute a mix between the 'workerist' and 'feminist' traditions of popular education. It links to key concepts of popular education developed by Paulo Freire, and which Khanya College draws on: "conscientização"⁵¹ and "transformation". It aims to stimulate learners' own development of a 'critical consciousness' and furthermore encourages 'collective action' as a way to respond to, and transform unequal gendered power relations. In the theorization of the intervention, the pedagogical and the political aspects are interlinked, as in all popular education, and the initiative appears to be both popular and feminist in that it is "oriented towards transforming gendered power relations and shares the basic methodological principle of valorising, and building analytically and practically upon, the experiential knowledge of learners themselves" (Walters and Manicom, 1996:2, 7). It also challenges the "notion of disembodied knowledge" which is a key feminist issue (Haraway, 1989, quoted in Barr 1999:73).

The approach furthermore appears to build on an understanding that both personal and social empowerment of the women activists is needed, it gives attention to both feelings and emotions, sexuality and gender-based violence as specific parts of women's embodiment, and it engages not only gender but also other social categories such as race, class and sexuality – all ingredients which Walters and Manicom list as important in their understanding of 'feminist popular education' (Walters and Manicom, 1996:1-22).

In the Winter School of 2006, the GRG participants had the intention to utilize the analytical tools which they had been familiarized with in previous GRG workshops, in order to attempt to read the space and interpret events through a gendered lens. The plan was also to start imagining and plan for alternative ways of changing the behaviours and practices of male and female activists, so as to out root gendered power inequalities⁵².

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Paulo Freire uses the Portuguese term "Conscientização" which refers to "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality", which can then lead to transformation of the reality (Freire, 1996:17)

⁵² Source: Gender Reference Group Workshop Report June 2006 (internal Khanya College document)

The GRG June 2006 meeting

“The boys called me this morning. They asked: ‘What is going on here? What are we talking about with Nina?’ They said: ‘We are going to have a meeting when you are back’.”

Already from the outset of the first Gender Reference Group (GRG) meeting of the year, held from June 21-23 in Germiston, Johannesburg, signs were starting to show that the GRG and its participation in the Winter School 2006 was going to be contested.

At the start of the June meeting, the first frustration was brought forward by two women activists to Nina Benjamin and Nancy Castro, the facilitators of the process, with me as the audience. The women would no longer be able to come both of them to the Winter School two weeks later, they explained, since the men in their organisation had decided to change the participant quotas to three men and one woman. Khanya College had required that all organisations should have at least 50 percent women amongst their delegates in the Winter School, and all women who participated in the GRG had to be among those delegates. This slight problem was quickly solved by a phone call from Nina Benjamin, who clarified Khanya College’s requirements. After the phone call, the women were reprimanded by their male comrades who questioned what was happening in the GRG and told them: *“We are going to have a meeting when you are back”*. But with the support of Khanya College the women claimed not to be concerned anymore: *“there is nothing they [the men] can do”*. The incident still highlighted two aspects of the resistance against the group, which by the time of the Winter School had grown strong; that around quotas – why should the College reserve spaces for women?; and the anxiety about what was actually being discussed in the GRG, which might be read as a fear of women organizing separately from men.

The pedagogy used in the workshop can be described, as pointed out in the previous section, as ‘feminist popular education’, working with rational as well as emotional and spiritual methods for learning. The June workshop started out with a strong and emotionally straining intervention, aimed at building trust, and a sense of shared experiences in the group. The 23 participants (I include myself as one) were asked to write down our most painful memory on a piece of paper. In my field notes from that same evening, I wrote:

“Already in the main hall, where all of us are quietly writing on that piece of paper, tears are starting to roll down the cheeks of some of us. When every one is done, we go out on the yard, lighting candles. Sitting there together, arms crossed over our chests,

or comforting each other, freezing in the cold June weather, we use the candles to burn the pieces we have written, in silence and with sincerity. Nancy opens the floor for any one wanting to share their stories, and slowly, some of the women start to speak. Memories of poverty, sexual violence, lack of respect from parents and other struggles are shared. When no one else wishes to speak, we end with singing a song to clear the pain. The atmosphere for the rest of the day is low, but carries a sense of respect and vulnerability.”

Subsequent sessions are designed to share theoretical knowledge around gender, such as the difference between gender and sex, on power relations, on the difference and interconnectedness between women’s practical and strategic gender interests and needs, and on sexuality, looking at who controls women’s bodies in the society, and on sexual practices, if they are used as a tool of domination or for the pleasure of both women and men. Only one session (of less than an hour; the limited time being a key point in the critique by College staff members as expressed in chapter 5), focused on the World Social Forum (WSF) process, the topic for the upcoming Winter School. The WSF was analyzed from a gender perspective, highlighting the lack of space given in the forum to grassroots women’s organizations, the low status of the feminist track, the under representation of women on all levels from debaters to the leadership of the forum, and the lack of safety from sexual harassment and abuse which women have experienced during past Forum processes, raising questions about the level of ‘progressiveness’ in terms of gender relations in the ‘Alternative World’ which the forum dreams of. In the discussions, participants were encouraged to draw links to their lived experiences, contributing to a climate where participation was not the premise only of a few vocal women; every one spoke at some point during the workshop. Some women however spoke much more than others, and to fully incorporate a feminist pedagogy, this imbalance within the group would need to be considered.

But it was the first exercise, the sharing of painful memories, the opening up of secret spaces and the trust that that requires which laid the foundation, and seemingly enabled all the other exercises to go deep. In my interviews with women from the reference group, the following things were said about trust in the group.

“[Speaking out in the group] ... was a healing process for me ... The nice part was that no one came to me to ask after the meeting. It was just something that happened on that

room. And we did not speak about it after. And that... made me feel comfortable.

Like... this kind of support... that these people are going to provide.”

“I think we are building the friendship between the comrades. Because... we have to trust each other, and we have to share... so that we can work together. Because you cannot work with some one... whom you don't know.”

The development of this trust and voice had an unexpected side effect, leading to revelations which came to taint the impression and understanding of the group during the whole Winter School. The evening after the emotional exercise, a long and deep discussion erupted amongst most of the women, where issues which had been embedded in silence for a long time were surfaced. It concerned sexual harassment, and the alleged involvement of Khanya College staff members in harassing and demanding sex from young women activists. When the story was retold in the big group the following morning no names were mentioned, either of the College staff members or of the women who had experienced harassment. Only one woman related an incident which happened to her directly, describing how a Khanya staff member had been knocking at her door throughout the night during a residential workshop, trying for hours to talk her into having sex with him, making her feel very uncomfortable. Other incidents were related through a third person, who summarized parts of the discussion from the previous night. In my field notes, I wrote:

“One of the older women, with a lot of power in the group, tells us that some young women last night said that they had felt pressured into having sex with male Khanya College staff members although they did not really want to. They felt they ‘could not keep on saying no, no, no’. They also thought that saying no to such advances might deprive them of chances to participate in Khanya activities in the future...”

No one wanted to report on a specific case, or name any individual staff member – instead, the intention with bringing the topic up was for the College to be aware of the problem, and find a way to discourage such behaviour by staff. It was also raised in order to shed some light on the sexual harassment and persuasion regularly taking place during residential workshops, including at the annual Winter School. Thus, the reason for speaking out can also be closely linked to the partial goal with the gathering – that of preparing for the 2006 Winter School. Although it was expected that such preparation should happen against the background

of the World Social Forum, this was the issue which women themselves brought up, based on their lived experiences. Said one of the participants:

“We as a reference group have to sit down and talk about these things and see how they happen in the Winter School. These people have got a chance now. There is a vulnerability of women in the Winter School”.

Surfacing sexual harassment and abuse, as the group decided to do, is a brave and dangerous step in any organizational or institutional setting: and maybe a better theoretical preparation for the verbal, physical and intellectual objections which quickly followed on, could have assisted in mitigating some of the difficulties women experienced during the Winter School. As Professor Jane Bennett has shown in her research on attempts at challenging sexual harassment and sexual violence in Southern African academic spaces; activists and academics involved in processes of surfacing such phenomenon’s are likely to be met with hostility.

“Not only was sexual harassment and sexual violence prevalent, but the articulation of protest, analysis, and demand for change encountered an arsenal of “erasers”: the facts of sexual harassment and sexual violence were threatened by political arguments on appropriate struggles, socio-anthropological claims about gender-identity, academic trivialization, physical and verbal bullying, economic predictions about the value of those who insisted on taking gender discrimination seriously, and personalized vitriol”:

Replace some of the ‘academic’ context to that of ‘activism’, and the developments in the Winter School 2006, where women in the group were seriously scrutinized and labeled ‘sex police’, and the resemblance is strong. I will return to this in the next section of this Chapter. The other knowledge-sharing parts of the workshop threw up some familiar issues, often in an interesting light. While discussing gender and sex, the importance of socio-cultural norms surfaced. A participant stressed the need to ‘show respect’, something which every one first seemed to agree upon, until the meaning of the word was problematized by one participant.

“‘Respect is the same as submission’, she said.

‘And what signifies submission?’ Nancy Castro asked.

‘Submission is when you do things you do not want to do’

(From my workshop notes)

The dialogue moved inwards and out in the different sessions, from individual women activists, to families, organizations, churches and society at large – and back again to the individual level. Says one participant:

*“It is not the financial situation anymore [that gives men power over women].
It is in the mind. This makes women submissive”.*

The inputs made were generally strong and showed a high level of conceptual and practical understanding around gendered power inequalities, and the roles that both women and men play to uphold patriarchal structures. Reflected one woman:

“We [women activists] encourage sexist behavior. A boy in your organization has three girl friends, and then he says to you: your thighs are fresh – and you giggle!”

The link between class and gender was drawn by participants on several occasions while discussing issues like women’s space of action, and control over their own bodies, sexuality and reproduction. One woman reflected on a job-interview, in which she was told she would get the job if she slept with the interviewer. She declined, and safeguarded her personal integrity, but is still unemployed and struggling to make a living. This and other similar inputs contradict the criticism of the curricula of the June gathering, which was explained at length in Chapter 5: that women were “removed from their social context”. The focus on sex and sexuality in the workshop was explained in the following way by Nina Benjamin:

“The idea is to look at different forms of control over us as women... Sex is an important form of control ... The purpose is to speak about individual experiences, and understand how this affects also others ... For us it is not easy to speak in meetings some times. The real things of everyday life become unimportant in meetings. What is important is if we can speak about a big economic theory... We want to break the idea that if I speak about myself and how I feel it is not political”

(from my workshop notes).

Participants’ comments on the relevance of the workshop topics, expressed both during the workshop and in subsequent interviews, were largely very positive. Said one woman activist in the workshop:

“This is the first time since I am in the struggle that we talk about this ... For the first time, we are not talking about men, we are talking about me. We are comrades, but we are women first ... We hear people saying: ‘We don’t want to hear your problems - this is the struggle.’ But you have your own struggle in your heart too.”

One of the few concerns which women raised in the workshops and subsequent interviews was around what might happen when they return home with their newly gained knowledge. If they started practicing for example what they have learnt about women’s right to enjoy sexual pleasure, and demand changes in the relationship with their partners, how would the men react? Although support was given in the form of discussion around these topics, the strategies chosen were individual. Said one woman:

“[During the first GRG meeting I attended] I was a bit uncomfortable with this issue about sexuality... and socialisation... I felt, no man, they want us to be disrespectful.

And this is our culture, this is something that has been happening for years, why change it now? ... Women are taught to be humble, to submit to their husband... Even though submission has never been easy, but I always believed it was a necessary evil... but with time, it slowly dawned, no man, things are not meant to be like this.”

Connecting discussions on sexuality, socialisation and other topics from the GRG meetings with their own struggles in their organisations, was something most women felt positive about, although they sometimes found it difficult to see the link between the private and the public spheres. Said one interviewee:

“I am struggling with it, because in a... way there is no link ... There is a tendency of like divorcing the... outside world with... us ... But... if you... look at... what you are doing, you find that they... are very much linked. Because it is not only about being an activist... and... the things happening out there, but within that... there is you...

Because... all my characteristics... are... kind of... woven into whatever is happening within the organisation.”

Added another interviewee:

“In fact [the issues discussed in the GRG] are more than relevant to our structures; they are relevant to our lives, to ourselves ... So, you first find yourself, find who you are... and then it will be easier maybe to understand... who [some one else] is... I mean it is difficult to understand some one else while you don't understand yourself.”

Opening of the Winter School 2006

The Khanya College annual Winter School is a one week gathering of around 150 male and female activists from CBOs, SMs, trade unions and NGOs in South Africa and the region. It is a week of political education, knowledge sharing and networking – stimulating debate about topical issues and facilitating solidarity links across national and regional borders. In 2005, the theme was ‘Gender, Neoliberalism and Social Movements’, and in 2006: ‘Building Solidarity Across Borders’, with a strong focus on preparing for the ‘World Social Forum’ in Kenya 2007 (See also Chapter 4). Since the previous year’s school had had gender issues as a strong focus, it was important for the Gender Coordinator to show a continuation in terms of mainstreaming gender in this years programme (Interview with Nancy Castro, June 26). The perceptions on how this should be done however differed starkly within the College and within the Programme Design Team for the School, as was described in Chapter 5.

Although this research is concentrating on the Gender Reference Group and its interaction with the school, I will briefly introduce some of the techniques used to integrate a gender perspective in the school, involving both male and female activists. A main aim of the Gender Coordinator was to introduce something new in the Winter School of 2006, “to move the positions forward” in terms of gender issues (Interview with Nancy Castro, June 26, 2006). To allow participants to ‘hear’ groups whose voices are normally silenced in activist spaces, and contribute to the (gendered) debate around whose knowledge is important, and who can be a ‘real’ activist, or knower, Nancy Castro therefore proposed a Children’s Winter School⁵³, to run parallel to, and interact with, the Winter School for youth and grown-ups. Through joint exercises between the two schools, men and women activists would be involved in processes of spiritual and emotional learning, and encouraged to express feelings and use their creativity – an attempt which proved very appreciated during the School week, and led to the integration of children being listed in the Winter School evaluation as a very positive experience for the majority of participants. A ‘mainstreaming’ of gender issues was also

⁵³ After heated debates inside the College, where financial concerns were raised as the core argument against the Children’s School, it was finally agreed that a 3-days Children’s Winter School be organised, with 20 children, aged between 8 and 12, from a primary school in a part of the Vaal triangle where Khanya College is active.

visible in the programme, for example through the different divisions into sub-groups, some times thematic ones, and some times according to gender and age, which were designed to enable a fuller understanding of the gendered impact of processes like globalisation and solidarity building.

But the most high-profile presence of 'gender' during the school however came in the shape of a specific part of gender relations, namely sexual harassment. This was not the result of a consciously planned process in Khanya College, but a response to the issue being surfaced during the GRG June gathering, as described in the previous section. In an All-College meeting on the eve of the Winter School, three radical measures were decided on, in order to limit sexual harassment during the school week: Firstly, two counsellors participating in the school would be available during the week in case women wanted to report on, or discuss sexual harassment. Secondly, it was decided that members of staff should not propose, or accept proposals for sexual relations with participants of the school during the week⁵⁴. And thirdly, it was decided that the GRG would be a space open for all women participants in the school.

The first morning of the Winter School 2006, this sensitive topic, and the decision that staff should refrain from relationships during the school week, was introduced to the participants by one female and one male PCT member of Khanya College. Said the female PCT member:

“We want to raise an issue which is not on the agenda. We all here see ourselves as social justice activists, fighting oppression. The oppression of women is one of the major forms of oppression ... A place like the Winter School is also a place where oppression happens, especially sexual harassment ... We have to face this head on ... When it comes to the safety of the female comrades here; we have to take a collective responsibility ... We need to do something concrete, we need to create a space where women who feel harassed can go and speak to some one ... [introduces three counsellors from Women’s Support organisations who are present as participants]... We also have a Gender Reference Group, which was formed last year. The women who are part of it have begun a process of doing [gender] analysis of their organisations, of the Winter School and of their own lives ... Any other female comrades who want to participate in a discussion can join us ...”

⁵⁴ This policy would be in place until the organisation develops a code of conduct, where expectations on members of staff can be clearly defined

The male PCT member proceeded with introducing the Khanya College decision:

“As the Khanya staff members, we have had discussions last night on the question of sexual harassment. The issue came out after a discussion held by the Gender Reference Group a week ago. They raised different concerns, showing that Khanya College is not immune to those kinds of practices. ... Khanya male comrades tend to abuse their position of power, leading to sexual harassment ... As Khanya ... we understand that we are in a position of power ... We are the facilitators and we are also the hosts ... We are able to determine who can come to the school ... We are responsible for the allocation of rooms and resources during the school ... So even if we say it is consensual, these relationships are not equal. We are saying we will not as Khanya staffs make any love proposals ... Even if the female comrade goes to a Khanya comrade, this Khanya comrade must just run away. [The last thing is said in a joking way, and many in the audience burst into laughter]. On a more serious note, this is an internal position taken during the duration of the Winter School ... During this school, any comrade who has a blue name tag [staff member] and approaches you with a love proposal, must be reported to the comrades responsible for sexual harassment at the school.”

This strong position against College staff members engaging in love relationships of any form during the duration of the school did not provoke a lot of debate in the audience. When the floor was opened for questions, only a couple of very telling comments were made. Said a male participant from an NGO:

“You spoke about love relationships. This is the least of my concerns. My concern is the issue of the ... type of accommodation we are subjected to.”

A woman participant from a social movement then raised her hand:

“In Brazil at the World Social Forum, there was a problem where female counterparts harassed the male counterparts ... Where are they [the males] going to run away?”

This comment was followed by laughter and applause by male participants, who made a howling sound in a loud choir. These comments and reactions indicate how silenced,

unimportant, 'apolitical', taboo and threatening a topic such as 'sexual harassment' is considered to be in an activist space like the Winter School. As I will show in the following section, this unplanned intervention around sexual harassment, raised out of necessity after women in the GRG had voiced their concerns, came to be seen as the 'flagship' of the College's external gender work, and was interpreted as the sole topic around which the GRG engaged. This was partly a result of the way in which the topic was introduced in the plenary, linking it explicitly to revelations in the GRG, as the quotes above have shown. While focusing my research on the GRG processes throughout the year, where 'sexual harassment' was just one thread in a much larger 'gender-web', the group's interaction with the College, and with the Winter School, during which they were seen to 'police' against sexual harassment, made it necessary to allow the issue of sexual harassment to emerge as a distinct sub-theme in my research. Another development which became closely connected with the GRG was the Winter School daily newsletter, which through circumstances ended up being mainly run by GRG women, and thus seen as the groups' 'mouth piece', which the next section will show.

The newsletter team

Since the 2004 Winter School, Khanya College had been producing a daily newsletter for the duration of the school. The production of the simple publication was a joint responsibility of a few designated College staff members, and volunteering activists. In 2005, the editorial team was largely made up of young women, a few of them from the GRG. In 2006, the College staff member responsible for the newsletter hoped to recruit more reporters from the GRG, and visited the June meeting with that goal in mind. But the circumstances were difficult— he entered the class room straight after the tense discussion on sexual harassment, when few participants were in the mood for volunteering. Instead of shattering hopes for assistance, Nancy Castro made a suggestion which the group accepted: that the GRG should produce one or two pages daily, and that I should be requested to summarize and put together articles in collaboration with the women. As explained in Chapter 2, this threw my research in an unplanned for direction, where the newsletter production suddenly became a valid arena for my research of the GRG interaction with the Winter School process.

In the end, seven GRG women (including one College staff member and me) joined the team, which met on the evening before the School was to start. Unequal gendered power relations were visible in the media team from the outset: the structure and the design of the newsletter appeared to be preset, there seemed to be little room for debate on which different sections it

should contain, and the agreement on a page per day set aside for the GRG had been forgotten. The only male volunteer in the team was presented as an experienced resource person, and the underlying message in the discussions was that the main decisions would be taken care of by male team members: the College employee responsible for the production, a male consultant assisting with the layout, the male volunteer/resource person, and another male College employee responsible for the camera. I intervened, together with other women in the team, to change the proposed structure, and after a long discussion, agreements were reached on a number of issues. It was agreed that all members of the team were to jointly decide on the format and layout for the newsletter, one page would be set aside daily for the GRG, and one page for children's issues for the duration of the Children's Winter School. Two women GRG members were elected as co-editors, committed not only to token but real power over the editing of texts, and the content of the newsletter. We ended up working until 2 in the morning – exemplifying how time consuming and strenuous attempts to ensure that gender issues are mainstreamed in an activism space can be⁵⁵. In my field notes I wrote:

“My participation clearly contributes to changing the reality ... In the GRG meeting the following evening, I stress that women activists have the power in the media team, that we control the most important positions; as editors, sub-editors (myself and a female Khanya College staff member volunteered to these positions) and photographer (a woman Khanya staff member volunteered). At times, I feel myself becoming too pushy, dragging the process, taking initiatives for meetings, reminding people of work that needs to be done, and pressure the editors to stay up late or get up early in the morning to cross-check the content of the newsletter.”

The newsletter, Imbila Yesu (Our News), was published from Monday to Friday, and consisted of 4 to 8 pages, covering news from the previous day, portraits of participating individuals and organisations, debates and opinion, culture and poetry, humour, 'gender issues' and children's issues. The newsletter became a training intervention in writing and editing, an exercise in participatory democracy, and an organ for debate, reflection and clarification, and an attempt at mainstreaming 'gender' and highlighting the experiences of both male and female activists. It also quickly became connected with the GRG, and seen by

⁵⁵ After a full day of classes, the GRG meeting started straight after dinner, and lasted an hour, or more. For the GRG women participating in the media team, the evening then continued with the newsletter production, often only starting around 9 or 10 at night.

some as the ‘mouthpiece’ of the group. In an attempt to explain the purpose and role of the GRG, and counter misconceptions, a jointly written article was produced and published in Imbila Yesu. A debate article which reached the newsletter desk on Thursday night, however threw up further questions. In the piece, the writer started out by describing his impression of the GRG in the following way:

“I arrived today by road from Harare and by supertime, I had heard of a structure called the Gender Reference Group (GRG). It sounded more like a Stalinist watchdog. Indeed one of the participants called the GRG the “constables of the Winter School”. ”

He continues: “Having a GRG is old-fashioned thinking that equates gender with women. If gender is about men and women, then we have to seriously address the male side of the gender equation ... Let us have a gender reference group that deals very objectively and strongly with the men who have led this shameless structure being set up to “police those of us men who see ourselves as “amacomrades”.”

(Imbila Yesu 2006, day 5, page 5)

The author appears to believe that the GRG was set up with the sole purpose of monitoring issues of sexual harassment in the school, and to ‘name and shame’ the ‘bad elements’ among the male participants, without challenging the structural power relations between men and women in societies and movements. If his interpretation is representative of a larger group of male participants’, then it is obvious that the public relations of the group have failed. To understand how these misconceptions around the purpose and actions of the GRG developed, it is necessary to look more in detail at the gap between the content and the perceived content of the newsletter. Looking at the kind of the material published in Imbila Yesu, it can be noted that 19 articles and poems dealt directly with either: explaining the GRG, sexual harassment and gender based violence, women’s organisations, women’s rights and LGBT-issues. 43 articles and poems looked at other issues, such as the World Social Forum, youth and children’s issues, the land issue, the Zimbabwe situation, HIV and Aids etc – in some of these articles, a gender perspective was integrated, through including reflections on how certain issues affect men, women and children differently – in other articles a gender perspective was absent. Just over 40 percent of the pictures portrayed mainly male activists, the rest predominately portrayed women. In the participants’ evaluation report, however, the newsletter was described as having mainly covered women and gender issues and sexual harassment, and sometimes ridiculing, or stigmatizing men. Imbila Yesu was also seen as the

voice of the reference group. The discrepancy between ‘real’ and ‘perceived’ space taken up by issues of women’s gender interests can contribute to the understanding of why the GRG became so criticised during the school: it was sensational for women to claim half, or slightly more than half of the space, in an activist publication. The following comments can be noted from the evaluation (Quoted in the Khanya College internal Winter School evaluation report):

“Imbila Yesu was mainly on women and sexual abuse. I think it is also important to put more political issues in the news”

“The newsletter had been dominated by people with a particular area of interest. They hijacked a good forum for clarity and discussion and turned it into a self styled gender mouthpiece”

“Bad, very bad. When you check the photos it is like there was an agreement on Gender balance but you know that you were stealing the footage when there is a man. Your newsletter was representing women’s reference group (Police forum) and this causes gender divisions”

A Khanya staff member echoed similar sentiments when we bumped into each other during a tea break: *“You must make space in the newsletter also for other, real issues”*, indicating that ‘political’ or ‘real’ issues were perceived to have been left out of the newsletter, and replaced with issues of women’s strategic gender interests, which are neither real, nor political. Similar opinions were also raised on a couple of occasions in the plenary, where one of the men said:

”How can we bring this newsletter back to our countries, when there is so much things on this issue of sexual harassment. They will ask us: what did you really discuss at this Winter School?”

Other participants saw the newsletter as a good forum for debate and a training ground for newsletter production, sometimes commenting specifically on the incorporation of gender issues, which was seen as satisfactory:

“It was good as it encouraged interaction and gave practical basic journalism. It encouraged me to see how we can follow the example to start our own newsletter”

“I think it is the best thing that has ever happened because we have seen women who are from communities without any academic, media or writing skills. But they were given a chance to write and publish stories and also everybody was allowed to write their own stories”

To fully understand the participants’ comments in the evaluation report, and the kind of reactions it represents, it is however necessary to rewind, and return to the first few days of the Winter School.

The first Winter School days and GRG evening meetings⁵⁶

As pointed out earlier, the Gender Reference Group met every evening during the school, with the aim to discuss the proceedings of the day, analyze the content and discussions from a gender perspective, support each other, and be able to substantiate on issues debated during the day, in what has been described as ‘a safe space’. But the sexual harassment issue, and the way it was brought up the first day, linking it to information which had surfaced in the group, contributed to a shift in discussions, making this years process very different from the one in 2005. The GRG had now come to be seen as people monitoring male and female interaction in the school, as the “sex police”, which the material in this section will further illustrate. The subsequent ostracising of GRG women, combined with experiences of sexual harassment in the school, and misogynist comments, also shifted the focus more onto solidarity building within the group, and how to cope with being a person gendered as woman in the Winter School space. The decision taken by the College, which was endorsed by the GRG, to open up the space to any woman wishing to participate, also created a slightly different atmosphere, with more debates around the purpose of the group, and elaborations on the benefits of being part of the group, than what would have otherwise been the case. The link with the theme of this year’s Winter School – Building Solidarity Across Borders – was as a result created more through concrete actions of solidarity building between women, than in the form of theoretical discussions on the World Social Forum, or network building.

⁵⁶ All the quotes in this section originate from my field notes, and are thus not recorded on tape, unless otherwise stated.

Firstly, this section will look at the experiences of harassment and threats which were retold in the evening discussions of the school. After the GRG women had created a space for talking about sexual harassment (through the June meeting), stories were told openly in the evening gatherings of the Winter School, indicating a culture of very unequal gendered power relations, and of harassment. The younger women were especially targeted:

*“[An older man harassing me said]: ‘In my area I am a chief.
You must come with me’.”*

*“This other guy said to us: You can take my key and in 10 minutes,
I will find you in my room. We just ran away.”*

Negative and sexist attitudes by men were also coupled with complaints about the reference group, the women explained. Some men expressed sentiments of having been deprived of their rights when so many women chose to focus their energy on participation in the GRG:

*“... this one guy asked: ‘When did you get this pimple?’ I said: ‘On Monday.’
Then he said: ‘You must resign from this reference group, and come with me -
then this pimple will go away’.*

*“I heard some one saying today: Is it not possible to make a separate colour name tag
for those reference group women?”*

*“We met a male during lunchtime. He said he is depressed. This Winter School is not
like the other ones where there was a lot of fun. Now there is not too much to look
forward too. He said: ‘It is painful, because we men are sort of targets now’.*

Also in the plenary discussions, and in the group work, sexist, homophobic or anti-feminist sentiments were at times expressed. A woman presenting on women and feminist networks in Africa quoted a male participant, whom she called ‘an expert on gender issues’, saying, in dead earnest:

“Women are inherently sexist. They blame the men for every problem they have”.

On the other hand, female participants countered with essentialist comments, describing men as violent or unable to show emotions, without trying to distinguish between 'men' and expectations on people gendered as male to perform certain masculine roles. Similarly, some men used generalizations to criticise the behaviour of women activists:

"Women, when they talk on the podium, they speak some things, but at home, they ... do exactly the same things as they are condemning on those platforms. Women need to be true to themselves."

For the women in the reference group, the experience during the Winter School was one of having been ostracised. Several women reported experiencing that discussions suddenly stopped when they got close to groups of other women and men. In Nancy Castro's words, the reference group had in the eyes of many men turned into 'a monster'. In order to cope with this experience, women shared their reflections on having been shut out or avoided, or threatened by males in the school:

"Some male comrades said: 'We are even afraid to say hi to you now, because you will think it is harassment'."

"They think the whole forum: we are now abusing them here, depriving them of their rights, depriving them sexually."

"I was [verbally] attacked during supper by some men. They feel we are here to mobilize against them. In the future, when they are invited to a meeting by Khanya, they say that they will first ask if the reference group will be there. If it is there, they will not come."

"[I was told]: 'Women will not be leading anything when they go back to their organisations. Wait until you come home, you will have another thing coming'."

The women in the group were split over how this avoidance and back-talking affected them. While it is not nice to be ostracised, to note how discussions stop when one enters a room, the strength of the group was also emphasized. Most claimed that they saw the reactions from

some male activists as a sign of the strength and power of the group. Having been made ‘a monster’ actually made some of the women feel good.

*“For once they are talking about us because we are resisting.
I walk tall, and I feel good”.*

“I feel noticed and at the same time more protected.”

*“The men won’t do whatever in front of me. Because they know, that one, she speaks.
People can move away because of a strong comment you made.”*

“They are afraid of us now. They fear us now.”

*“They are used to meet partners here ... Now, there are those barriers.
They say: you seem to have turned yourselves into nuns.”*

*“... they are still shocked by now... [but] they get used to it... that women... are here to
stand up to fight for their rights...” (From recorded interview).*

*“...being a monster it’s one of the things I enjoy most.... And with...
the threats that I pose to... a massive group like this one... I actually pet my
shoulders... I did it again... as a woman...” (From recorded interview).*

This strong sense of belonging to a supportive group of women, involved in a joint struggle against gender oppression, was something most of the participants commented on both during the GRG evening meetings in the school, and in previous and subsequent interviews. Apart from feeling noticed – as individuals and emerging gender activists – the sense of having a common struggle as woman activists from CBOs and SMs also appeared to have grown strong.

*“This is giving us the opportunity to meet as women and discuss our problems.
Some of these problems are caused by men. In meetings they talk unnecessary
things and steal our time. So far, I am comfortable meeting as women only.”*

“We do not owe anybody an explanation. For how long have we been oppressed without people being apologetic? ... This is a good group. These are women sharing ideas.”

“After every accident, there is usually a trauma. This is like an accident to men. We just have to be calm about how we explain to them about why the reference group was started. They will get over it.”

“Instead of this group breaking down, it is growing.”

During the Winter School meetings, the GRG participants also reflected on the role they themselves had played during the day. The need for the group to be cautious, and not see men as enemies was emphasized, and several women kept on reminding the group of the importance of analysing individual male behaviour in the light of the patriarchal structures of their organisations and society at large. Women pointed out on several occasions that “we love the men” and “we need them”.

“We must be clear as the reference group: we don’t want to intimidate them. When you apply general rules, it also affects those who are innocent.”

At the same time, some members in the group continued to highlight the need to critically examine male behaviour in the school: When male activists displayed a lot of emotions, in relation to drama performances by children – was it in fact an act? Were the men simply “trying to shift tactics” to regain the trust of the women? This suggests a high level of ‘conflict awareness’ and critical thinking in the group.

Concerns were also raised around how women’s inputs were received in the plenary, illustrated by an incident when the facilitator had to intervene after a male participant had tried to physically hinder one of the GRG women from speaking. She was objecting to the ways in which issues of culture and tradition were used by some participants to blatantly display homophobia, something which several GRG members reacted badly to:

“I actually feel very disappointed on the way culture and tradition is starting to be raised. I am appealing to women to say: how culture and tradition shape our daily life.”

Although some women in the GRG were very open-minded in discussions around 'taboo' topics such as sexualities, one of the critical issues for the group was indeed the some times moralistic, judgemental and essentialist tendencies some women expressed. This could easily have fuelled the perception of the GRG women playing the role of 'sex police' during the Winter School, and led some men to question if the sexual harassment testimonies really were true. Were (some of) the Khanya men criticised only because their behaviour could not be accepted according to Christian socio-cultural moral norms (such as having extra-marital sex)? And were women seen as victims although the relationships might have been consensual? Although misconceptions about GRG women seeing themselves as 'the moral examples' of the school were countered (i.e. in articles the group put together jointly for the newsletter) individual GRG members did send out conflicting messages. This opinion piece in the newsletter illustrates how women in the group might have contributed to creating a perception of the group as the 'sex police'.

"...we have to be resilient as women and really say no to such advances by male comrades who are always after women. The primary objective of coming to a workshop is to learn and exchange ideas ... Ladies should therefore abstain totally from this because it will do damage to our reputation as women ..."

(GRG participant, Imbila Yesu nr 3, 2006).

In making such statements, women put themselves in the spotlight and under pressure, claiming to rise above temptations, and confirming stereotypes of how a 'good woman' should behave. Two GRG-participants cautioned about the effects that these 'moralistic tendencies' could have on the group, in interviews made outside of the GRG space:

"There was an incident today that one of the women who is in the group... was... caught in a very bad situation ... I think, they were doing something with the boyfriend... And, I didn't like the way it came across to say: '... this reference group... they complain to the staff to say they are abused... but we see them doing the very same thing that they are saying: men should not do'. ... I feel like now, the message that has been put across, even within ourselves, it is like we are supposed to be this good example, we should not make mistakes ... Some people would rather miss the sessions during the day, to be with the boyfriends, because at night,

that is when they think people are watching.”

“And we had ... matured women... in the group ... They were also strict that: ‘No sex before marriage’ ... It was... kind of a... difficult situation, because they were not guiding as... activists... They need to be... able to sit with the young kids... and... close the gap. Because you find that between mothers and daughters, there is a huge gap.”

Several GRG members however refused to conform to the cultural expectations on them as black, African, and gendered as women. One of the strong, young women in the group was visibly pregnant during the Winter School, and her determination to be proud and claim space, instead of hiding her situation, which is culturally expected of unmarried pregnant women, seemed to be encouraging also for others. In the last GRG meeting of the year, three of the visibly pregnant young women showed their status in a relaxed way, and joked about themselves, calling their group of three the ‘maternity ward’. In the exercises they spoke quite freely about their pregnancy, and the expectations of becoming a mother. The differences within the Reference Group were increasingly evident towards the end of the year. Noted one woman, in a comment which was echoed by several others in the group:

“I am not sure we always think the same... but we are here to share”.

The strength of the group, and the fact that it contributed to bringing gender issues onto the agenda of the Winter School, apparently caused many men to feel threatened. They reacted to this new situation in different ways. For example, one group of men held a separate meeting, and called in a Khanya College representative to answer questions about the origins and legitimacy of the GRG as a separate formation. These men felt that women had become more confrontational since they joined the reference group, and expressed concern over this [Interview with Khanya College staff member, September 2006]. Several demands were made that the group should be forbidden unless it was open to both men and women, or at least that its minutes should be made public. Only a few comments were however made openly in the plenary.

“Although there were interesting developments yesterday around the reference group, the reference group is a good initiative in Khanya College .. We do not know what you discuss in that network, but we hope it is something good.”

As Nina Benjamin put it, instead of men confronting the GRG directly, *“the resistance seems to have gone underground”*. The women reflected on this in different ways:

“Men feel threatened when they do not know what is going on here.”

[One woman was confronted by a man who said]: “we want minutes from your meetings. We want to know what you are saying’...”

“There is an element of saying that female [Khanya College] colleagues have personal problems: ‘Now, they are trying to use your agenda on you’. They are now coming up with tricks to break us apart.”

“Some of the negative responses we are getting now are from the Khanya staff, both men and women. It is serious now.”

Nancy Castro pointed out that these reactions are to be expected in a new situation which male activists are unsure of how to handle. *“Men are losing the control of everything. The control of the newsletter, the control of the discussions, the control in the bedroom...”* she said, predicting that the uneasy feelings would blow over. But the conflict between some men and the GRG women led to a confrontation following an incident towards the end of the week. During a shopping excursion, a male staff member of Khanya College allegedly verbally abused and sexually harassed one young woman activist in very harsh words, referring to her private parts and perceived lack of education. He was also reported to have threatened both her and other women in the GRG. In the evening, rumours circulated that he had disappeared from the hostel in ‘an angry state’, and the College had to take measures to guarantee the safety of the woman he had confronted, until he could be sent home the following morning⁵⁷.

After Thursday night’s incidence, which several people over heard, the feelings towards the GRG seemed to be changing slightly. Some male participants approached College staff members to say that they wanted a public announcement to be made over the incidence. Other participants suspected that the man had been falsely accused by the GRG and the College.

⁵⁷ The staff member was subsequently suspended from his position in the College.

Towards the end of the school, and afterwards, two groups of men, one of youth and the other of grown-ups, approached Khanya College in order to get assistance with setting up men's forums, similar to the GRG.

In the overall evaluation of the Winter School 2006, gender issues and the reference group, together with the newsletter, caused a lot of strong feelings. The most positive experience for some participants in the school was around gender issues and the GRG.

"I enjoyed how in each discussion the gender issues came through."

"Reference group because there were lots of saying from male comrades about the reference group. It was interesting to know that we as females we can stand for ourselves."

For others, GRG and the way gender issues were present, were the things that they disliked the most.

"Gender, gender was not balanced. Women were oppressing men and Nina was a dictator not a facilitator. Reference group was oppressing men, instead of building they were criticising"

[The structure of the School was] *"Female dominant"*

"Female gender reference group [was] trying to be the people representing the views of all the women which is wrong. That is inequality".

This section, and the previous section on the Newsletter, show in a clear way how central and contested the Gender Reference Group's presence was in the Winter School 2006; closely linked to the group having challenged the discursive space in an activism environment through surfacing 'silenced' issues of sexual harassment. The individual women activists in the group, as well as the Khanya College staff members involved in the process became ostracised, harassed, questioned and challenged around a number of issues, including the 'political value' of the issues which were brought up in the (GRG-dominated) newsletter (and specifically those relating to women's strategic gender interests); the formalities of how the group was formed: (is it allowed to have separate meetings without producing an agenda

which can be known also to others?); the intellectual capacity of GRG-members (are they brain washed by outsiders?) and their bodily integrity (can they decide on their own where and with whom they want to spend their evenings?). The questioning and harassment did however contribute to glue the women together – most GRG members claimed that belonging to the group made them feel ‘noticed’, ‘protected’ and ‘proud’, also in their interactions with the larger collective of Winter School participants. But as has been explained, the group as such was not entirely unproblematic: moralistic tendencies surfaced both in evening discussions and in articles published in the newsletter, and this may have contributed to the group being labelled the ‘sex police’; fuelling insinuations that its accusations of sexual harassment were not grounded in reality, but merely a moral standpoint against extra-marital sexual relationships of any kind.

The post-Winter School process and the last GRG gathering in 2006

The period between the Winter School and the last GRG workshop in 2006 was difficult for some of the women who had been visible and outspoken in the Winter School. They felt especially targeted, both during the school and afterwards in their organisations, and in some cases said that they lost friends and comrades, who moved away from them. Coming back to their own organisations was a tense experience. Explained one GRG participant:

“... I would say after the Winter School I [had]... mixed feelings as to... what have I gotten myself into? With all the attack and... for ... the first two weeks, I was frustrated... and angry and... feeling that... do I really have to get into this? But after then I realised that... change is difficult. And when change comes people will resist and fight it so... I spoke to some of the ladies from the Gender Reference Group, and they really encouraged me and comforted me ... So I feel stronger now and... I also comforted myself by saying that... I must not fight at them men but at the system... the patriarchal system...”

“... I think that even within the process we are going to lose... other members... or members will come to the gender reference group but... they camouflage because I am sure that some of them they are afraid to just leave it now ... because people have been attacked. I don't know how many of them can handle the insults and attacks... as I do... But the process will continue.”

Others did not experience this kind of questioning from their comrades.

“For me it was ok... every time when something new comes up... people feel different... You have to make that space... to explain to them... what is taking place... It didn't have that impact... on my side”

Apart from this, the last GRG meeting of the year showed progress as well as regression in terms of the understanding of gender issues. The strong bond between the women appeared to have weakened somewhat. There were many discussions during breaks and also in the meeting sessions about the fact that male activists seemed to know exactly what had been said during GRG meetings. The fear was that some women were sharing what was discussed in the meetings with the men, acting as ‘informers’. Not everyone took this seriously, though.

“According to me, I think... the group was one... because I don't believe in rumours some times... Some says other male comrades... have every information... I don't know... I can't say we were divided... It might be one... person maybe who... leaked that information...”

In the November gathering, Nancy Castro and Nina Benjamin wanted the group to move on from the Winter School and the conflict, and were designing awareness raising exercises on the link between women's struggles in the home, within a collective of women, and within the broader activism for social justice which women are involved with, using a mix of rational (or intellectual/theoretical), spiritual and emotional techniques.

On the second day of the meeting, the participants were divided into groups, in which they analyzed how they as women are affected by problems in different sectors of society, such as education, health, family, religion, entertainment, safety and other arenas. The issues and how they specifically impact on women were written down and presented in the big group, and the problems were pasted onto the wall, in a ‘woman's sky’. In the exercise, it was evident that none of the issues which (most) of their organisations focus on, such as water privatization, were present in the ‘woman's sky’ which was jointly created, or mentioned amongst the major problems affecting women. As Nina Benjamin pointed out:

“ Free water... if it comes... the women will still be kept where they are.”

The follow-up exercise, in which participants were asked to re-write slogans for their organisations, which would speak not only to the need of the general population, but also to women's specific needs, proved difficult. Most did not fully make the connection and claimed that the women were already part of the general slogans, through expressions like 'for all'. Others managed to see the connection and came up with examples of slogans speaking specifically to women's needs, such as:

“Sexual harassment of women at work is equal to apartheid”

“Free female condoms for all women in South Africa is the answer to HIV and Aids.”

Also when asked to reflect on how we contribute to our own oppression as women, and how unequal gendered power relations are played out in the organisations and in the homes, the participants' abilities to see and exemplify how we all play into pre-set gender roles, and conserve unjust patterns, differed starkly. One woman who was able to see this link said:

“When I enter the office early in the morning, I clean all the dishes and maybe the offices. Even to dust... although it is some one else's duty ... [On the other hand], when you want an information, you always ask the male comrades”.

Other women failed to see how, by doing all the ground-service at home, they were contributing to upholding unequal gendered power relations. Reflected one GRG-member:

“Our oppression is here in the mind... It is a mindset. If you carry your oppression with you the whole time, we are oppressing ourselves. You need to surround yourselves with the people of the same mind and start practising.”

Other example of side-tracks, and steps backwards from things women had learnt and reflected on in previous workshops, was a late-night discussion which kept most of the women awake until the early morning hours, and which centred around how women, if they get the power, will abuse it and 'use' the men in an unfair way. Previous discussions on the hierarchy of struggles, where in SMs and CBOs 'class struggle' is often privileged over

'gender struggles' was also given blows when women, echoing their male comrades, let it slip out that sexuality and oppression in the home are not 'political' issues.

The fact that there was no time scheduled for follow-up talks on the experiences during the Winter School, and on how women had coped on the return to their organisations, also meant a slight step away from the atmosphere of togetherness which had existed in the Winter School, and the June gathering. Instead, and understandingly, quite some time was dedicated to another positive development which had been fuelled by the GRG-intervention. The women GRG members who were part of, or whose organisations were affiliated to the Anti-Privatisation Forum, APF, had taken the first steps towards creating a women's forum within APF, with the aim of strengthening the voices of women activists and ensuring that issues which the women felt had been neglected in the forum, such as health issues, HIV and AIDS, and gender-based violence, were better incorporated onto the agenda. Other positive signs were that women spoke out in the group, and some times also publicly in gatherings of their SMs and CBOs, about issues which have pressurized them for a long time, such as abuse or their HIV-status. Many had also during the course of the year been elected to positions within their organisations, managed to find a job, and in some cases moved out of their family home to support themselves and their children. Even though the link between the creation of an APF women's forum, the election to positions, the self-empowerment, and the GRG participation does not have to be direct, most interviewees expressed in strong words their feelings of having been empowered through the process. They claimed that participating in the group had changed and strengthened them, made them feel more secure, and/or given them a broader understanding of gender issues.

"I know that maybe they didn't do any magic in me... like telling something that I didn't know about. It is just that... they are working with my mindset, what I am living... what I want... they are speaking my language... I think they have changed me, because now I know who I am... I can also be proud to say: 'I am not happy, I am angry'. Experience my... feelings... And also they have broken the silence in me..."

"When I share with them [the GRG] more... they make something in my mind..."

"I would say that it... brought a change... in me. Because... it kind of made me to be firm and... if I go to a workshop, I... am to the workshop for the reason that I am there for. And I... won't let anything change that... because what I have realised is that..."

some men, they like to just... fool around with women in the workshops. And I told myself that I... don't want to... do that ever. And ... being... in those ... reference group workshops and the Winter School, kind of strengthened that... and made me realise that I have to be very firm... And even if I am not in a workshop, I have to know what I want in life, and... stand for it..."

"It is the only workshop that I have attended and... we speak... general things that are ... really happening to us. Besides politics... I know gender is politics... but then we feel like these people, they are speaking our language. They are speaking what I am. Rather than speaking about... neoliberalism, and big words... that I don't even understand... But... in the reference group people become more... participating because they know, this is my life... So it is better if you teach some one... according to what they know. From their experience, and then they will understand it better ... Because you can teach some one... and then... she is right under you, and you are there on top, and you are sure... you are teaching people, but then at the end she doesn't know anything. So it is better if you just start some one from down... all the way to the top, and then she will follow you."

In the last Gender Reference Group Meeting of the year, the women were writing down short stories and speaking about their experiences since having joined the group. This is some of what came out through the exercise:

"Before I joined the reference group... I couldn't speak up for myself... It was very hard. Even to stand up and go in front of other women and men... Now I can speak. This group really changed me a lot. Thank you."

"Before I joined the group I took many things for granted. Like motherhood. I now look at every thing with caution... I have begun to sort of question... how I do things ... I see this as a process... Every time I go through the process it is like lifting the veil... I see something new."

"Since joining the group, I am assertive... I demand certain leadership positions."

“I joined [my organisation] but I was a follower... I did not think about where I was going. Now, I have changed a lot... I have learnt more in the past few months than I have learnt as an activist since high school.”

“I have been able to make peace with myself, I have confidence and self-esteem... I am able to talk freely to anyone about my status...”

“My life was terrible before I met women who knew themselves... who are always ready to fight for their needs... I had a serious problem in my family... it was making me feel like I am nobody... There was nobody to discuss this with... Then I met the group... I now know all is possible in my life...”

“I was being the second person. My voice was not loud and clear, or rather not heard. Now I am a better person... I can express myself with no fear. I can say no and be clear... I am in control of my life...”

“Before I became aware... all is political... I only saw women as a nurturer... Now I am aware that the challenges we are dealing with... Knowing we have strength... It gives me encouragement... but it also adds to the burden... You still have to be a mother, a child, a daughter... Even fight for your own rights... You have to prove you are able to do it...”

The Khanya staff members working with the process also expressed a lot of optimism about the GRG process and its potential to transform women, and gender relations in organisations.

“... for me... it is another break-through... on the women’s side... and it is going to lay foundation for... a bigger... group of women who are liberated here [points at her forehead] ... I feel with the gender reference group, we are breaking through. The mindset is transforming now. And they are starting to realise their importance... And they are starting to articulate ... about issues regarding them... And since the forum... it’s composed of women from different... social movements, for me there is a potential for growth. Because the few that we have will go and plough back... to their organisations”.

“I am very excited with the process... And... from this process... I can evaluate... very positive the Khanya work... If ... the quality of the work in Khanya was different... the result of the group here... never ever can be like that... [It would] need more time... These women have all the skills... [but they] don't have the confidence to use it... That was not necessary to give tools... was to reinforce individually and like group... because all the other work was done for Khanya... That makes... this process... a lucky process... And I am very lucky with the possibility to be there...”

As the sections on the GRG process before, during and after the Winter School have shown, the learning process in the group has been dynamic and consciousness of gendered power relations in communities, homes and organisations has been raised, and sometimes temporarily erased again. The women activists have built knowledge through rational as well as emotional, spiritual and experiential learning processes. As one woman pointed out in a post-Winter School interview:

“through being in the gender reference group in the Winter School, our experience was nasty. It was not nice. But I learnt through that experience”.

In spite of the vulnerable position which the group was placed in during the Winter School, an overwhelming majority of participants point out the strength, support and self-confidence they have gained through being part of the process, which is described as both healing and “confidence-building”. The learning processes also start from the experiences of the learners themselves, a ‘ground rule’ for popular education, and according to one activist, the content in the workshops were:

“more than relevant to our structures, they are relevant to our lives, to ourselves...”

The section about women’s experiences as activists in SMs and CBOs presented earlier in the Chapter, largely confirmed the complicated and discriminatory gender dynamics within these spaces which (a thin body of) South African research has indicated (see Chapter 3). These experiences were confirmed also during the Winter School, when the GRG participants and the Khanya staff members linked to the group were ostracised, and de-politicised while raising issues of gender equality, and specifically the ‘taboo’ topic of sexual harassment and abuse, which clashed with the accepted and expected rhetoric in the Winter School space. The

targeting and harassment which the GRG women experienced did not result in the splitting of the group but instead in some ways strengthened it - although causalities were reported during the way - and one GRG participant predicted that the group will lose members. Positive results, such as new groups emerging out of the GRG process (i.e. the APF women's forum) suggested that the long term goal for the group – for women to realise the need for a collective struggle against gender oppression, and organise to combat it – has already partly been fulfilled. However the data also indicates that working with strengthening this group of activists, with a hope that they will share their knowledge, and create spaces in their own organisations where women activists can come together and discuss techniques for combating exclusion and systems privileging men, means working only with one side of the equation. At some stage, it will be necessary also to engage the male activists in CBOs and SMs, to really enable changes to the status quo – something which the Gender programme has already started planning, and which is theorized in the College as the 'second step'.

Conclusions:

In this Chapter, I have introduced Khanya College's process for empowerment of women activists in SMs and CBOs, the Gender Reference Group, GRG, its programme during the year, and its interaction with a joint group of men and women activists in the Khanya College Winter School space. I have analyzed the dynamics of the group; the learning processes and the reactions to one specific intervention of the group, to surface issues of sexual harassment and sexual violence in an activism space. In the Chapter, I have concluded that the GRG process has been both empowering and difficult for the participants, but that most of them described their participation as a relevant and strengthening learning experience.

Chapter 7: Analysis and Conclusion

When embarking upon this study, I framed it within broad contextual questions, concerning the meaning of “taking gender seriously” within the contemporary South African terrain of social justice movements. I also posed a number of questions relating directly to the focal point of my research, the radical popular education organisation Khanya College, relating to the content, timing, theorizing and outcomes of a specific external intervention to empower women social justice activists, the Gender Reference Group, as well as in relation to the internal change work for gender equality inside the College (see pages 1-6). In this concluding chapter of the thesis, I will move between the broader context and the specific questions, drawing conclusions on a general theory level, as well as directly in relation to Khanya College as institution. The chapter will end with an attempt to suggest what other South African actors may learn from the Khanya College experience.

This thesis has been conceptualized against the reality of the rapid changes on the South African labour market, brought about by neo-liberal globalisation, which has effected a change in the composition of the South African working class, as elaborated on in secondary data and interviews (Chapters 3 and 4). The permanently employed, full-time worker has become a minority on the contemporary labour market, which now consists mainly of the unemployed, underemployed or casual workers and workers in the informal sector. The lack of any real transformation in the form of re-distribution of wealth, or realisation of citizenship rights in practice for the majority of South Africans living in poverty, has again created a basis for public dissatisfaction, 12 years after the over-throwing of the apartheid system (McEwan 2005:183-186, Ballard et al, 2006:2).

With the decline of political activity in the traditional trade unions, which now organise mainly white-collar workers and the top-layer of the blue-collar workers (Makgetla, 2006), new mass-movements have emerged in townships and rural areas, in the form of ‘new’ social movements (SMs), which are claiming rights from a ‘moral entitlement’ standpoint, and community-based organisations (CBO’s), setting up projects through which volunteers provide essential social services, which local government is failing to deliver (Hassim, 2004:14). Within the new emerging groups, working class women are at the centre, constituting the majority of the activists, but the formations are in spite of this reproducing a predominately male leadership (Xali, Davies-Van Es and Gentle, 2005). These movements, although not uniform, are broadly concerned with neoliberal attacks on the private sphere,

visible through the privatisation of water, electricity, health care and other basic commodities, and respond by claiming rights to essential medicines, to free water, electricity and housing, etc (Ballard et al, 2006:17). From a feminist point of view, what is striking with the issues which these organisations of men and women raise is the lack of inclusion of issues relating to women's strategic gender interests, which Maxine Molyneaux has defined as the "formulation of strategic objectives to overcome women's subordination". (Molyneaux 1985:233). These seek to, for example, abolish the sexual division of labour, put an end to institutionalized gender discrimination, and put in place measures to hinder violence against women. These are issues which the post-apartheid government (as well as the fragmented women's movement) has indeed sought to safeguard by legal reforms, but the follow-through in terms of ensuring the implementation of these rights has not been successful so far (McEwan, 2005:177-184). Given the contemporary context, with very high and rising prevalence of HIV/AIDS, especially among young women, and an increase in reported GBV-cases, the exclusion of these interests is particularly disquieting.

For the leadership of Khanya College, the popular education organisation whose gender work this thesis has investigated, it is clear that the context is changing, and that to remain relevant, some kind of re-orientation of the work is needed. In the analysis of Leonard Gentle, director of the like-minded organisation ILRIG, which has also recently embarked on an empowerment programme for women activists, the ideal time has come to try and re-orientate towards women activists:

"Nobody, I think on the left who takes seriously political struggle today, can't fail but to prioritize the issue of building and organising women's activism..."

It is not an idea that is too soon, I think... we are late."

(Interview with Leonard Gentle, 13/10, 2006)

Based on the interviews with Khanya College staff and other key informants (see further Chapter 4), and on interpretations of recent literature, I move from the premise that organisations targeting working class formations ought to re-orientate their work in ways which correspond to the changing composition of the working class, in order to remain relevant, and reach others than the relatively 'privileged' workers who are organised in the formal trade unions (Makgetla, 2006). But what should such a re-orientation look like? What would it mean in terms of the political line of organisations, and what methodological implications would it have? And most importantly for my research, what challenges would

the gendered nature of the contemporary 'working' class and the mass formations developing in townships and rural areas pose in relation to the problems such a re-orientation should seek to address? In the process of designing this study, the following factors emerged as important to weigh into an interrogation of this nature; women's experiences as activists in SMs and CBOs of men and women today, women's reflections on what kind of empowerment and educational methods they see as effective in strengthening their activism; and organizationally specific experiences of working consciously with gender politics. My focus on Khanya's College's work allowed for all these themes to emerge, although the specificity of the case also operates as a limitation. In order to deepen my understanding of the gendered experiences of women's activism in mass organisations of working class men and women in South Africa today, I interviewed eight women (two of them twice) representing six different organisations which Khanya College are targeting. The women are members of the Khanya College Gender Reference Group, which was formed in 2005, and although they can not be said to represent women activists in South African CBOs and SMs at large, they are representative of the group of 'core women activists' which the College has identified. In summary, the difficulties which the women activists brought forward in interviews (which have been complemented with the limited secondary data available and interviews with key informants) can be divided into the following areas:

- 1) *That key organisational focus is not representing women's gender interests.* The issues which SMs and CBOs organise around, for example against evictions, or against the privatization of basic services, are not addressed in a way which also allows women's practical (and strategic) gender interests to surface, in spite of the fact that the majority of activists in the movements are women. As a Khanya College staff member pointed out in a GRG workshop: If free water comes, will this lead to a change in the responsibilities of women?

The 'non-gendered' way of raising important socio-economic issues is (by many male and some female activists) seen as more truly 'political' than (some of) the ways in which these and other topics are discussed in the GRG meetings, i.e. including issues of women's agency and bodily integrity. One woman GRG member reflected on the focus of a SM she used to belong to in the following way:

"We were... dealing with 'political' kind of issues ... Which you would find... somehow ... they are... not... close to your heart."

Another woman from the group added that:

"When women state issues that... affect them directly, they [the men] don't regard it

as important...”

These comments show that women are not included as ‘embodied’ activists in their SMs or CBOs, on an equal basis with men. The organisations furthermore fail to represent main problems which women face directly in their day-to-day lives.

- 2) *Oppression of women within the movements.* Another sphere of concern which the interviewees raised is how women are treated in the movements. Different aspects of culture are analyzed as oppressive to women. Socio-cultural norms, such as respect for elder people, is by some women activists described as problematic, since they feel that (especially elder, male) activists are abusing ‘culture’ to order them around. It also hinders men from ‘hearing’ younger women activists’ opinions since they are culturally not expected to speak out and claiming space. The organisational culture is in many movements also not conducive for women activists, since complicated language, fighting and arguing about small things, and criticising each other in hard words is privileging masculine or male socio-cultural roles. One woman GRG member says about one organisation she belongs to that:

“I don’t attend a lot of their meetings, because these men all make a noise at the same time ... And the small thing ... is blown out of proportion... even a simple issue on the agenda about the date of a meeting”.

Strong women are sometimes also purposefully kept out of organisations, by men holding positions. One woman activist from the group describes that she was not invited to many important meetings, since she was expected to object and question the ways things were done. Thus, *“if there is an important decision ... it is better if you are not in that meeting”*. Abusive behaviour is also common in some organisation, such as shouting, using bad words, and blaming women for problems that arise (see Chapter 4).

- 3) *The lack of self-confidence amongst the women.* All the interviewees, in different ways, bring up the issue of women’s lack of self-confidence, and the power of socialisation, when trying to analyze the low number of women in leadership positions. A couple of interviewees see the need for more technical skills, and knowledge of the topic under debate, in order for women to climb the organisational hierarchies. But most reflect on the power of socialisation, and low self-esteem hindering women from claiming space.

“It depends to... how empowered are you...” and *“The way we are socialised ... I was not used in leading discussions”* are common ways in which GRG members open up this topic. In meetings and elections for positions, *“some of the women, they denied ourselves”* or the women do not involve themselves so much since *“they don’t know what they want in their lives”*, one interviewee from the group points out. One woman holding a leadership position claims that women activists are elected *“more like statues”*, as a token gesture in the name of gender equality, showing that organisations are aware of the need to demonstrate gender-awareness by including women in leadership structures, but several interviewees point out that little is done to empower women once they are elected.

- 3) All of these problems are characterised by a *gap between theory and practice*: while gender equality is on the agenda of most organisations and movements, this is not visible in practice, showing that creating policies and other documents to safeguard the interests of women is in itself not enough. This was also evident in the conduct of and comments made by activists in the 2006 Winter School (see further Chapter 6).

Against this analysis of women’s situations, and lack of agenda setting power in the movements, how should education and support organisations change their strategies if they want to contribute to a change?

Khanya College took a concrete step towards taking gender more seriously in its work with SMs and CBOs by focusing on Gender, Neoliberalism and Social Movements in its annual Winter School, and by deciding to develop ways of overcoming gender inequality also “in the daily functioning of the College itself, including its various programmes” (Baldevu, 2005:6). But since then, a conflict has emerged in the College around what kind of gender work can be defined as ‘political’ (see Chapter 5). Although no clear definitions of ‘political’ gender work have been presented by the different ‘camps’ within the College and in the constituencies outside, some distinctions can be made by analysing the interview material and field notes from the Winter School 2006, and from other meetings and workshops organised by Khanya College which I have attended (see further Chapter 6, pages 2-8).

Although all interviewed staff members would emphasize the importance of seeing gender work as part of the political work, the ideas about the meaning of this work, and where the focus should lie in order for it to be truly ‘political’, differed starkly. When discussing practical examples, words such as ‘real’, ‘interesting’ and ‘important’ were used to describe

the parts of the gender work which the majority in the college found acceptable, whereas 'insular', 'individualistic' and 'liberal' referred to other parts of the gender work, dealing with the private sphere, sexual harassment or sexuality. The process developed with the Gender Reference Group (GRG) were by several College employees not seen to be 'political enough', and the initial focus on women's individual experiences of oppression in the 'private sphere' were interpreted as liberal feminist approaches, and unfitting for work in a left-wing organisation like Khanya College. Similar sentiments were echoed by male activists in the movements, as my participatory observation during the Winter School showed. This also raises questions around if women in CBOs and SMs, and especially the women involved either in 'survival projects' or women raising issues of gender equality within the movements can at all be considered as legitimate 'political actors' (Hassim, 2006:17).

In an office meeting I attended in October, evaluating the College's Winter School 2006, a male PCT member questioned why "*women have to be privileged*" in the design of the school. Statements like this imply that there is no need to adapt methodologies so that they correspond with a changed situation in the movements, where the bulk of the activists are women. It would then either amount to female and male activists having the exact same educational needs (which Khanya College are fulfilling well using its current methodology) or that women activists should adapt to the needs of male activists (who are in minority).

When discussing what kind of topics would have been relevant for the (much criticised) GRG June meeting, it emerged that issues such as water privatisation and the World Social Forum, are 'real' and 'interesting' issues, while women's 'individual' experiences of oppression in families and organisations are not in themselves fitting. The GRG was also called a 'self-defined structure', implying that it is not desirable that women who are part of SMs and CBOs organise separately, or at least not in the way it is presently done.

South African political scientist Shireen Hassim has used Jane Jenson's concept 'the universe of political discourse' when investigating what could be called 'the politics of the political'. Hassim writes that "*The universe of political discourse delineates what is considered to be "political" as opposed to private, religious, or economic ... it sets the boundaries for political action and identifies which actors in society are considered to be legitimate in particular settings*" (Hassim, 2006:17). Contestations around the meaning of the word 'political' is, in my analysis, the basis for the conflict within the College. This naturally spills over also to the debate about which methodologies are most appropriate to use when trying to 'empower' women activists. Are their needs linked to a lack of skills and theoretical knowledge? In that case, training around political processes, neoliberalism, globalisation,

labour laws, organising skills and other issues where Khanya College has a lot of expertise, would be a sufficient method for solving the problem of a lack of women in the leadership of working class organisations.

But if the problem is also linked to the ways in which women and men have been socialised, resulting in women's lack of confidence for participating and taking the lead in 'public sphere'-activities, and men's lack of abilities to 'hear', see the importance of, and respect the experiences of women, then the solution would look different. Women activists would then need to be assisted in building their self-confidence, realising the value and potential of the knowledge they possess, and subsequently voice their own experiences and opinions, so that issues which are 'close to their hearts' can be included in the organisations where they are active. Men would also need to be involved in processes in which they can gain an understanding about what gender equality means in practice, how they are involved in the pattern of performing and perpetuating gender stereotypes on a daily basis, and how organisational cultures need to change to better suit the needs of both women and men. This would enable the 'embodied' and active participation of women in SMs and CBOs, on an equal basis to men.

Inside the College, the analysis of women activists needs differ starkly between the two 'camps', as described above, and in Chapter 5. But the women activists who are part of the GRG, where the focus has been on both individual and collective empowerment, and on realising that it is not individual women's lack of abilities, but structural conditions which contribute to women being disempowered in both the private and public sphere, appeared in interviews and GRG meetings to have a much more collective understanding. All the women I have interviewed have described the exercises and focus of the gatherings as highly relevant and empowering, and several say that these sessions are more relevant and important for their activism and their lives than anything they have experienced before (see Chapter 6). Some of the comments made during meetings include:

"They are working with my mindset, what I am living... what I want... they are speaking my language."

*"I have learnt more in the past few months than I have learnt as an activist since high school."*⁵⁸

⁵⁸ From my workshop notes

“I have been able to make peace with myself.”⁵⁹

(Field notes from Gender Reference Group meeting, November 2006)

On the process of learning, one of the interviewees analyzed the content and the teaching style in the following way (see chapter 5):

“It is the only workshop that I have attended and... we speak... general things that are ... really happening to us ... People become more... participating because they know, this is my life... So it is better if you teach some one... according to what they know. From their experience, and then they will understand it better ... Because you can teach some one... and then... she is right under you, and you are there on top, and you are sure... you are teaching people, but then at the end she doesn't know anything. So it is better if you just start some one from down... all the way to the top, and then she will follow you.”

This analysis of the learning process in the GRG relates closely with main theories of how experiential learning takes place: where the learners individual experience is analyzed and reflected upon, and through this process, new insights are gained (Walters and Manicom, 1996:2). The social and collective learning which happens in CBOs and SMs is furthermore dependent on group consciousness and solidarity (Kilgore, 1999); conditions which interviewees have argued are present in the GRG. This process is the basis for what adult educator Paulo Freire has dubbed ‘consciousness raising’ or ‘conscientização’⁶⁰, which he argues may subsequently inspire collective action for transformation (Freire, 1996:17). The Gender Reference Group intervention also represents feminist popular education in particular, since it works with both social and personal empowerment, gives attention to feelings and emotions, sees sexuality and gender-based violence as specific parts of women’s embodiment, and it engages not only gender but also other social categories such as race, class and sexuality – all ingredients which Walters and Manicom list as important in their understanding of ‘Feminist popular education’ (Walters and Manicom, 1996:1-22).

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ Paulo Freire uses the Portuguese term ‘Conscientização’ which refers to “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradiction, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” in order to transform it (Freire, 1996:17)

Main conclusion

So what conclusions can be drawn from this study of educational and theoretical approaches in the Khanya College gender programme during 2006? Is it possible to speak of methods which are ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, which are ‘relevant’ and ‘irrelevant’? When embarking upon this study, I did not set out to draw conclusions which could be extended also to other organisations and contexts. This would be presumptuous, since all knowledge is contextual (Donna Haraway, quoted in Barr, 1999:73). However, my findings from interviews with the Reference Group women indicate that the experience of being a member in the group has been empowering. Concrete results, most likely inspired by the GRG activities (see Chapter 6) include among other things, the initiation of a women’s forum in the APF, that several women have been elected to positions in their organisation during the process, and that all my interviewees claim to have been strengthened and gained more confidence, allowing them to speak in front of others, voice their opinions, or openly declare their HIV-status even in a masculine activist environment. The confidence which the GRG-women have gained, and the learning, has happened on several different levels – what I would refer to as emotionally and spiritually as well as rationally or theoretically.

One woman activist reflected on the choice of topics in the GRG workshops in the following way in an interview:

“... in fact they are more than relevant to our struggles.

They are relevant to our lives, to ourselves.”

Inside the College, the change efforts which Nancy Castro has initiated as part of the gender programme are only just emerging, and have so far not moved into the ‘rational’ or ‘theoretical’ side of learning. She argues that:

“...to change culture is impossible... under the normal tool... of the patriarchy... [It] needs to be something like you breath... and you feel... and you... live... [Only then]... you can come with the conceptual... of it...” (Interview with Nancy Castro, June, 26)

The disagreements and resistance to the gender work which Nancy Castro has initiated (both externally and inside the College) has, as pointed out earlier, mainly been linked with different views of the meaning of ‘political’ gender work. But aside from these different theoretical standpoints, there are of course also other factors weighing in, such as the

uncomfortable feelings which arise in groups when the power is beginning to shift from one block to another. As Anne Marie Goetz has concluded (Gender and administration, IDS bulletin 23, no 1, 1992), trying to change organisational cultures internally and externally is in the end “a matter of political struggle”. This means contesting and claiming power in the organisation, but as Rao, Kelleher and Stuart have pointed out, it is crucial to seek dialogue and try and include every one while at the same time still daring to contest power structures, since changing organizational culture requires “both power and participation”.

The practical examples highlighted in this study (chapters 5 and 6) show that internal divisions around how to conduct gender work in the organisation, impact strongly also on the external programmes. Thus, if not every one in the organisation is willing to transform, and find new ways of working, the external programmes risk being undermined and lose credibility. I therefore argue with Rao, Kelleher and Stuart, that for organisations attempting to do serious change work for gender equality, it is necessary to combine internal and external efforts, since an organisation which upholds a patriarchal structure on the inside is unlikely to be able to impact positively on the status quo outside. The experiences within the College, however, indicate the importance of attempting to tread carefully, so as to not polarize the situation too much, and in this way block possibilities for change.

One of the difficulties with making sense of, and knowing how to approach, women’s forms of activism, both while engaging with community projects started by CBO’s and when trying to influence SMs to adopt more gender-inclusive goals and working methods, is that it represents ‘the unknown’, areas where the College has less experience. As College director Oupa Lehulere reflected on the activism undertaken by male driven social movements:

“...there is the attraction of the ... militancy... but part of that attraction ... is that... it dreams of things we know... People organize and they stop privatization...”

(Interview with Oupa Lehulere, October 17, 2006)

In order to adapt and be relevant to the gender interests of women, and not try and fit women into a concept of ‘the activist’ which is defined from male needs and capabilities, it is necessary with other visions and goals, which dreams of things we do not know as well. Yes, constant theorization and reflection of the work, which the part of the College staff criticising the GRG process are calling for, is crucial in order to remain clear of in which direction the process should move. But, based on the finding of this study, I would suggest that there is also a lack of appreciation of the gains that have actually been made. Women GRG members

have been empowered both on an individual and on a collective level, and the next step (in the external work) should be to support them further so that they, in collaboration with male activists, can use their newly gained experiences and confidence to bring about change in gendered power relations in the organisations where they are active.

Recommendations for Khanya College:

Although the time I have had at hand to engage with the work of the College has been short, and my conclusions are limited to those of an outsider looking into the College, and a participant/observer/activist in the Gender Reference Group, I will attempt to make some suggestions for the College in its further efforts to try and improve the gender work externally, and transform the College into a more gender equal work place.

- Improve communication. A lot of the misunderstandings and dissatisfaction is, according to several interviewees, especially staff who are not members of the management committee, fuelled by the lack of communication within the College, where they do not feel adequately consulted about important decisions, and where information is scarce, given late, and sometimes presented in the form of direct orders. Involving staff members at an earlier stage, and taking their opinions into account, combined with efforts to present essential information, such as the financial difficulties, including plans to temporarily withhold parts of the salary, in an informative and pedagogic way would do much in order to diminish the conflicts.

- Include women's specific gender interests in a real way in educational programmes and goals. In the beginning of this chapter and in chapter 4, it has been pointed out that women are at the core of the new working class formations emerging in townships and rural areas. Although women naturally represent a wide range of different interests, based not only on their gender, but also on class, race, sexuality, political affiliation and other markers of identity, consideration has to be given to some common specific gender issues, if educational organisations like Khanya College want to remain relevant within the rapidly changing context. Issues concerning the private sphere and the problems which women experience as confronting them on a daily basis in their organisations and communities must thus be mainstreamed, and incorporated into the course curriculum of gatherings like the Winter School. The 'rational learning', which has been the focus in the College will naturally remain important, but 'emotional' and 'spiritual' learning methods should also be considered, and given the same status as traditional forms of learning.

- Continue the Gender work, but analyze its impact and effects parallel. Several interviewees have expressed fear that the gender work might be stopped completely, since influential

people in the College do not agree with the political approach on which it is based. The reflections from women activists who have been participating in the GRG, which I have presented in Chapter 5, point to the importance of the programme in strengthening these women individually, and also in inspiring them to taking collective action as women activists (i.e. through initiating the APF women's forum). If the programme was to be stopped now, it would send out negative signals and de-motivate not only the targeted women activists, but also other activists in CBOs and SMs trying to highlight gendered power inequalities in the movements, and its effects on women's 'real' participation. There is a serious risk, as an interviewee predicts, that this would reverse the situation in the movements, to where it was before 2005, when the College decided to highlight and place gender relations on its agenda. However, since this work is emerging and experimental, since it 'dreams of things which we do not know', a constant and continued analyzes and follow-up, to make sure that the wished-for effects are achieved should be encouraged. It would also be important for the drivers of the programme to place more effort on seeking dialogue and cooperation, since the divisive atmosphere in the College at the moment impacts both on internal and external work, and risks undermining the credibility of the programme.

So what can be learnt from this experience?

Is there any knowledge emerging from the Khanya College experience which can be useful also for other contemporary South African gender practitioners, academics or institutions, engaging issues of 'gender' and 'class' within struggles for social justice? Is this study relevant beyond the College, and my own master's research project?

As I pointed out in the previous section, my aim has never been to build a theory out of this limited engagement within one institution, nor to draw conclusions which claim to hold truth also within other, similar, South African spaces. I do, however, think that engaging with the discourse of the Khanya College staff members and women activists whose voices are heard in this study (filtered through my left-wing, feminist, foreign and academic ears and eyes) can provide valuable insights for both academics and practitioners engaging with the hierarchical nature of 'political' struggles prevalent within the broad South African left today, shaping, and setting boundaries for the contemporary popular resistance to social injustices. Finally, I will pull out some general points from this concluding chapter, which I suggest be taken into account also in other attempts to engage 'gender' and 'class' within grassroots mass organisations in the present South African context. These points include; the importance of realizing that a changed gendered composition of the working class as well as movements

also calls for a changed methodological approach in education interventions; that such interventions should regard emotional and spiritual learning as equally important to rational or intellectual learning, since learning is an holistic process; that interventions should be properly grounded in what women activists themselves see as the most pressing challenges in their immediate 'social context' (Walters and Manicom, 1996:2); that women involved in 'survivalist projects', engaging in micro-level struggles should indeed be regarded as equal 'political' actors to men involved in 'confrontational' struggles demanding socio-economic justice (McEwan, 2005:189-190); and that internal organisational dynamics need to be engaged simultaneously with external interventions in a serious way if any 'real' change is to be made possible (Rao, Stuart and Kelleher, 1999:11).

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Interviews

Key informants (outside of Khanya College):

Anna Davies-Van Es, Researcher/Educator, ILRIG, Cape Town, 13 September, 2006

Leonard Gentle, Director, ILRIG, Capte Town, 6 October, 2006

Rebecca Pointer, Activist/Researcher, Cape Town, 2 June, 2006

Gender Reference Group Members

Seeking to protect the anonymity of the interviewees from the Gender Reference Group, I have chosen not to list the names of the 8 members in the group which I have interviewed (two of them twice). Instead, I will simply name the organisations which are represented in the group, to give an idea of the nature of activism which the group members, and the interviewees are involved in. These organisations are: South Africa Unemployed Youth Forum, Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF), Evaton West Crisis Committee, Kganya Women's Consortium, Batlhabine Rural Development Trust (BRDT), Community Networking Forum, Landless People's Movement, Soshanguve Community Development Forum, Lungelo Women's Organisation, Bophelong Community Service Forum (BOCOSFO) and Alexandra Concerned Residents.

Khanya College staff members

Oupa Lehulere, College Co-ordinator & PCT-member, October 17, 2006

Mondli Hlatshwayo, PCT-member, September 27, 2006

Ighsaan Schroeder, PCT-member, June 29, 2006

Mothobi Mokhethi, PCT-member, July 1, 2006

Nina Benjamin, PCT-member, June 27 and October 17, 2006

Nancy Castro Leal, Gender Programme Coordinator & PCT-member, June 26, Oct.16, 2006

Elias Mkhwanazi, staff member, June 29, 2006

Nthabiseng Mkhwanazi, staff member, June 29, October 17, 2006

Lebogang Mashile, staff member, October 26, 2006

Duduzile Mabona, staff member, October 26, 2006

Events attended:

Khanya College Winter School 2006, July 3-8, Wits University, Johannesburg

Gender Reference Group Meeting, 21-23 June, 2006, Germiston, Johannesburg

ILRIG Globalisation School, 24-29 Sept, 2006, Cape Town

Gender Reference Group Meeting, 19-21 November, Rossettenville, Johannesburg
Building Women's Activism meetings (organised by ILRIG), 19/4, 24/5, 12/6, 26/8, 8/11,
Community House, Cape Town

University of Cape Town