REFLECTIONS ON A BODY OF WORK/WATER:

RE-MEMBERING THE POST-SLAVE FEMALE BODY THROUGH PERFORMANCE PRACTICE.

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

REFLECTIONS ON A BODY OF WORK/WATER: RE-MEMBERING THE POST-SLAVE FEMALE BODY THROUGH PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

By Rehane Abrahams

This study attempts to 're-member' the post-slave South African female body through personal performance practice. It addresses re-membering both as an embodied activity of recalling erased memory and as a recuperation of the dis-membered post-slave female body.

Through reflecting on two examples of personal performance practice, *What the Water Gave Me* (2000) and *Spice Root* (2005), I use my own post-slave body as the locus of intersection between the private and the political, the biological and the historical.

The transmission of cultural memory through performance is traced through Joseph Roach's (1996) 'surrogation' and Diana Taylor's (2003) 'Repertoire'. Specifically I employ a syncretic spirituality and objects of cultural memory to re-member a diasporic narrative continuity and recuperate embodied feminine agency.

Gabeba Baderoon's (2014) perspective on the Indian Ocean as site of colonial slavery and cultural memory across diaspora and Raissa De Smet Trumbull's (2010) monograph on 'Oceanic liquidity' inspire a figuration of the Ocean as an embodied, affective, anti-colonial presence. These modalities also inflect the style of writing in my inquiry, thus privileging the material/maternal, cyclical, leaky and excessive qualities of water a counter-hegemonic practice.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

CONTEXT

This is a study about re-membering the post-slave female body through personal performance practice. I am a South African performer and theatremaker of Cape Coloured/ 'Malay'/Muslim descent concerned, in the phase of practice studied here, with articulating the erased intersections of slavery, colonialism, religion, patriarchy, and apartheid on and with my brown, female body. My practice has been generated through an 'excavation' of my own body as the site of these intersectional erasures.

This study then is an autoethnography inspired by moments in life and in performance training when I experienced somatically produced epiphanies, or profound shifts in conscious awareness, that felt as though they were generated by my body itself. These experiences flooded my everyday awareness, changing my relationship with the world and provoking a series of performance works which I call *Body of Work/Water.* The works span a period of seven years from 2000 to 2007 and include the performances, *What the Water Gave Me* (2000), *Anatomy of Clouds* (2003), *Spice Root* (2005) and *Ocean Beneath the Skin* (2007). The study examines two of these works: *What the Water Gave Me (WTWGM)* and *Spice Root.* However, the process of making these works started much earlier than 2000, with an epiphany in 1993 that re-ordered my understanding of how socio-historical forces were entangled with my biology and identity as a brown woman in Apartheid South Africa. I discuss this experience in greater detail in later chapters; for now it suffices to introduce my personal context and relation to the work.

In 1993, moments before the end of Apartheid, HIV/AIDS and the term 'transmission of bodily fluids' was emerging into growing awareness in South Africa, and in retrospect perhaps this too informed my re-perception of South African history as an embodied 'liquid transmission' passed down genetically via bodily fluids. As is apparent in the titles of the pieces that form *Body of Work/Water,* the 'liquid transmission' of genetic histories also resonated strongly both with the Indian Ocean across which my slave ancestors were transported from Asia to Africa, and what the ocean represented to me about slave/colonial history. This liquid history was at once deeply intimate, in the passing of genetic material that marked my epidermal reality and was embedded in my very cells, and at the same time historically vast, encompassing ocean voyages through the movement of colonizing vessels, powers and annexations. Like a drop of water containing the world in its reflecting/refracting convex surface, this history zoomed from the political to the uncomfortably personal, where the particular combination of moralistic repression and sexual violence that I had grown up with on the Cape Flats was part of a larger systemic story carried in bodies, but that was silenced and erased in the community in which I grew up to the extent that it felt like a repressed collective memory. From this emerged *Body of Work/Water,* which this study examines through a critical reflection on the two productions, *WTWGM* and *Spice Root.* This reflection turns its gaze on the *process of performance practice* rather than looking only at the products or performances themselves. This processual focus follows from Turner's (1979:82) interpretation of performance as deriving "from the old French *Parfounir* - *par* (thoroughly) + *furnir* (to furnish)" where:

> … performance does not have the structuralist implications of manifesting form but rather the processual sense of 'bringing to completion' or 'accomplishing'. To perform is thus to complete a more or less involved process rather than to do a single deed or act.

Whilst sections of this study do indeed describe the performances, they do so in order to provide a point at which the reader can enter into an understanding of the practice as well as to demonstrate the endpoint of a particular conceptual strand. Following Turner (1979:82), the actual on stage performances of the plays constitute the 'finale' to a much longer processual experience, or the arrival after a long and somewhat arduous journey. It is through the examination of the process of performance that a bodied confrontation with my practice can be revealed as thick description, or phenomenological accounts, wherein embodied knowledge is given authority, and self-reflexive, somatic experiences open out space for inquiry. Magnat (2013:16) notes that Turner's (1979:93) processual understanding of performance generates an "embodied reflexive standpoint, where one is … at once one's own subject and direct object". This processual understanding of performance is, according to Magnat (2013:16), "conducive to a particularly productive form of intersubjectivity, which may provide access to another way of knowing". The focus on process in this study enables a foregrounding of the embodied experience from a maker/performer's perspective within the moment-to-moment encounters between body and world. A focus on performance as product would not yield the same richness or depth of inquiry and could potentially fall into the trap of a distanced 'about the body' study, rather than one that is generated from the body in what Diversi and Moreira (2009:33) term "visceral knowledge". This visceral production of knowledge is integral to my approach in this study, as it relates directly to the means by which the works themselves were generated. I identify primarily as a performer, a

performer-who-writes or makes theatre or theorises; however, the primary impulse in my work is located in the body and returns to the body. Crucially, in the process of making performance, there are many ways to deploy awareness, and the embodied self-reflexive awareness called on to produce 'visceral knowledge' in this study is not the same awareness as that employed as a performer on stage in front of an audience. The performer on stage is concerned with the detailed specifics of the performance that are expressed through repetition and precision in word, gesture, and feeling. There is no space for self-reflexivity; in this context it would only distract from the task at hand. So, in order to reflect on my practice and interrogate its meanings, I have found it necessary to turn to the self as a questioning source of somatic self-reflexivity, and not to the disciplined singular focus of the 'in-performance self'.

This embodied processual perspective is also significantly imbricated with the autoethnographic project of 're-membering' in the *Body of Work/Water* that is examined in this study. Re-membering, for me, is a reworking of Myerhoff's (1982) term in two interwoven ways: firstly, a re-membering that calls together a body that has been shattered and fragmented through colonialism and, secondly, as a particularly potent form of recollection that approaches 'myth or religion' rather than a list of historical facts. Myerhoff's (1982) 're-membering' too, is inspired by Turner's 1969 ideas on rites of passage in his *The Ritual Process* (1969), where re-membering is seen as a slow process that emerges after the social disorder of ritual as the subject 'reconstitutes' herself. Myerhoff explains the difference in the hyphenated version as follows:

> Re-membering is the re-aggregation of one's members, the figures who properly belong to one's life story, one's own prior selves without which the story cannot be completed. Re-membering is a purposive significant communication quite different from the passive, continuous fragmentary flickering's of images and feelings that accompany other activities in the normal flow of consciousness (1982:240).

Myerhoff sees re-membering as integral to ordering and sense making. For her, "without re-membering we lose our histories and ourselves" (1982:240). But, unlike Meyerhoff's subjects who had survived the Holocaust and lived to tell the tale, I am five generations out of slavery and grew up with a profound silence and shame around my family's slave history. The only slave story in my family that I recall was a vague mention of a slave ancestor on a farm in Constantia, whose mouth had been smeared with pig fat during the fasting month of Ramadaan as punishment for speaking her 'own language'. Pork and alcohol are the most forbidden substances to Muslims; it was almost as if the pig fat had sealed everyone's mouths for generations to come, and any attempts at giving voice to recollection were tainted with the 'unclean' viscosity of pig grease on the tongue. This image for me was redolent with what Wicomb identifies as "the very nature of shame, to stifle its own discourse" (1998:92). For me, the act of re-membering a history that had been erased was a purposive act of re-collection of silenced parts of my community and myself. And to use the metaphoric modality that I propose is essential to the reinscription of the female body in this study; re-membering was for me a respeeching of tongues, a telling of unclean, venal secrets, and it was also an ablution, a washing of the mouth, a restoring and cleansing of the brown female body that Wicomb (1998) identifies as 'the site of colonial shame'. To make these plays of re-membering felt like an imperative act of survival; it felt vital to place myself in the historical narrative even if I had to re-imagine a narrative or piece it together from fragments and gestures and

tastes. It was essential to place the self and, through the act of performance, to place others into a narrative continuum so that self and community were seen to be carriers and transmitters of story, and not just carriers of silent shame and 'transmitted bodily fluids'. Re-membering is, as Myerhoff (1982:240) says, "a unification (where) a life is given a shape that extends back in the past and forward into the future". Importantly to my project, Myerhoff (1982:234) also sees re-membering as a constructed creation that includes what was, but also, 'what should have been'. She speaks of 'cultures in disarray', where groups have been 'disdained or marginalised', and how it is imperative that these cultures visibly perform their self-definition. In this case of 'cultures in disarray' re- membering is a "shaped and groomed" reality, and, as Myerhoff (1982:243) says, "Any reality is capable of being made convincing if it combines art, knowledge, authentic symbols and rituals, and is validated by appropriate witnesses". The fact of its self-definition or construction does not, in Myerhoff's view and my own, make the re-membering any less authentic.

At the same time as my taking up this more 'conventional' use of re-membering (after Myerhoff) as a theoretical basis for my study, the term was reworked to signify the simultaneous process of re-remembering and re-constituting a fractured and dismembered body in my practice. The idea that sociohistorical reality can impact the physiology of the subject has recently entered into more mainstream research with the work of Sullivan (2015), for example. Sullivan (2015:17) examines the physiology of sexist and racist oppression to find that these oppressions "constitute the muscle fibres, chemical production, digestive processes, genomic markers" of the body. She identifies a "dynamic transactional relationship

between the social and the biological in which the two are inextricable" (2015:18), and result in the 'epigenetic psychophysiological transferral of the effects of racism on the black body' (Sullivan, 2015:20). At the time of my making the work however, this area of research did not as yet exist, and I proceeded from an intuited sense, or a gut-feeling that my body (or psychophysiological being) was marked and marred by a transgenerational (following Sullivan (2015)) experience of racial and sexual violation that had been silenced and erased. I felt that this resonated around me in other brown women's bodies in a very particular way, and that this, coupled with my own personal experience of sexual violence and transgenerational racism, affected how I lived in my body in ways that were beyond my rational understanding. I felt convinced that, by embarking on a project of re-membering through performance, I would in some way be able to recuperate my own post-slave female body and 'restore it to order'. This restoration would, in some way, I believed, address the 'disease of colonialism' as Fanon (1961) describes it in *The Wretched of the Earth,* lodged in my very tissues. Additionally, I felt convinced that an intellectual process would by itself be insufficient, and that the body's own resources, that existed beyond rational understanding, had to be engaged. Performance making seemed an adequate space to effect this restoration.

For Myerhoff (1982:23), the "impulse for order" is a vital part of the process of re-membering that underlies art and ritual and history, and creates a 'tidy tale':

> … that may be enlarged to the level of myth as well as art—sacred and eternal justifications for how things are and what has happened. A life, then, is not envisioned as belonging only to the individual who has lived it but it is regarded as belonging to the world, to progeny who are heirs to the embodied traditions, or to God. Such re-membered lives are moral documents and their function is salvific, inevitably implying, "All this has not been for nothing".

In the rationale that follows I unpack and contextualise the specifics of what I mean by the intersections of Apartheid, colonialism, and religion on my brown female body. It would be understandable if the average reader or audience member was perplexed by the conviction and urgency with which I propose the reconstitution of the post slave brown female body within a moment which by most accounts finds us a century away from slavery and colonialism, and 23 years after apartheid. What makes this inquiry so urgent and significant? To begin to answer this question it will be useful to look at the legacy of systemic sexual violence founded in colonial slavery and the impact this has on the female descendants of slaves. Secondly I examine the particularities of Cape Islam, which, as Baderoon (2014:7) claims, is integrally connected to the founding institution of South African slavery.

RATIONALE

This rationale moves from a discussion of colonialism and slave women's bodies to Islam as the religion practised by those slaves subjected to 'enforced prostitution', as Baderoon (2014) describes it. Islam is then discussed in the light of differing views of Muslim and Malay identity at the Cape, and then a particular Folk or 'Malay' inflected Islam is examined. First however, I present an embodied epiphany as outlined earlier, which then opens out into thought.

"Empire was a pornographic project"[1]: Slavery and Sex

This section of the chapter begins with a narrative interlude, a re-membering of sorts of a particular kind of experience alluded to earlier, from which I open out into theory and reflection. These epiphanies transformed the way I perceived the world, and compelled me to make sense of the experiences by translating them into performances. Denzin (2013:53) explains epiphanies as: "ritually structured liminal experience connected to moments of breach, crisis, redress, reintegration and schism, crossing from one space to another".

Bochner (1984:595) sees epiphanies, despite their self-proclaimed nature, as revealing a way to negotiate "intense situations" and "effects that linger—recollections, memories, images, feelings—long after a crucial incident is supposedly finished". For me, making sense of this experience began the process of translating a somatic experience into performance practice, and so it is fitting that I use it to begin this study as a process of translating the "internally somatic to the externally semantic" (Spry, 2001:721). From this narrative I begin to prise open the autoethnographic context that erupted as 'bodily knowledge' for me, and as what Bochner (1984) describes as an epiphany. The entanglement of a history of colonialism, slavery, and female sexuality within a locally inflected Cape Islam is revealed as foundational to the marking or social inscription of my body, and my response to this becomes the rationale behind my performance practice. This interlude is based on a long prose poem I wrote entitled *Lyfskrifte* (Body writing/scriptures/texts), and I use it both to poetically situate the rationale and

[1] David Dabydeen in Dawes 1997:220 quoted in Gqola 2010: "Empire is a Pornographic Project: it wasn't just economic or sociological or a political project, it was also a project of pornography".

concept, and as an example of how a somatic experience leads to thought and meaning:

In 1993, I returned to Cape Town and South Africa after my first year living away from the country. I remember clearly the shock of seeing school students of different races walking out of previously whites-only school gates together. I was supposed to feel joyous and full of possibility, but didn't. So much had changed in my year away that I had missed. Walking around Cape Town in the first week back in town was not an experience of liberatory joy, but, unexpectedly, one of physical revulsion. I experienced the air as thick and stinking and struggled to breathe. Rotten fish smells wafted up from the waterfront, and drains were rank with smells of bodily fluids and decaying meat. The air caught in the back of my throat and the foul taste on the root of my tongue made me gag. At times the air was so thick I could almost see its viscosity. I was very aware, for the first time, of the history in my biology. My awareness of 'Colouredness' as a racialised category became molecularly historical. I felt moments of colonial contact as situated in my bodily fluids, in my DNA if you will. I saw how history had become my flesh and how that history was one of enslavement and violence, including sexual violence. I was aware of my own sexual fluids as a 'chemical solvent' into which history vanished and became "colouredness", leaving me with nothing but shame and disgust. Trying to capture the sharp viscerality of this experience, I wrote a prose poem intended for performance that I called "Lyfskrifte" (Body writing/scriptures/texts). In Afrikaans, the story told of a town where the collective ghosts and memories had been buried and the inhabitants retained nothing but a vague sense of loss and shame. Loss and Shame gradually became who they were. For years they carried on in this unwitting way, till on a day the ghosts began

to escape from the drains, sewerage plants and vleis on the Cape Flats to which they'd been previously banished by the city council. The disembodied phantoms of old roamed around the city disturbing dreams and causing accidents until one day, a "bergie" (homeless) woman was set alight by street children and survived. Molecules of the remaining blood, ash, tears, methylated spirits, urine and sweat were recombined by the phantoms and used as a substrate for materialisation. Now, given flesh, the ghosts began to manifest all over the city in uncontrollable excess. In the story, their suddenly increased weight causes the collapse of time and all times become present in the same space in dangerously differing states of materialisation. Coupled with this simultaneity the phantoms also constructed obscene architectural edifices out of old lies and suppressed shames, for example concentric walls topped with erect ejaculating phalluses that rise up at different times of day throughout the town.

I found the violently pornographic, often in obscene Cape Afrikaans, text disturbing. While I was partially aware of the history of South African slavery, the juxtaposition of images, and the haunting shame of history in the text, overspilled the limits of my understanding, and for years I continued to work on and around this piece. The context that follows is, after Bochner and Ellis, a further 'sense-making process' where, through research, the somatic epiphany finally yields knowledge about the interrelation of race, history, culture, slavery and female sexuality.

Gqola (2010:6) sees slavery, colonialism, and apartheid as "moments along a continuum" and not as different, distinct times. Slavery was practised at the Cape from 1658 to 1838, and slaves were brought from Africa, India, Indonesia, and other colonial territories in the Indian Ocean by the Dutch, and later by the English. Up

until 1808, when the oceanic import of slaves stopped, the majority of migrants in South Africa were Oceanic slaves (Shell, 1994:155). Society at the Cape was founded in part on the (enforced) sexual labour of slave women, generating creole children destined for lives of slavery. Sexual violence during slavery was "systemic", with slave and Khoi women serving as wives for settlers as well as prostitutes for the entire population of Cape Town (Baderoon, 2014:83). Uneven sex ratios of male to female slaves at the Cape meant that the larger male slave population had no access to female slaves' bodies except in the Slave Lodge, where these same female slaves were prostituted by Dutch officials (Shell, 1994:71) to slaves and others. Shell (1994) remarks that the "slave trade to the Cape was a factory of both orphans and perpetual bachelors" and goes on to note how this demographic of unbalanced sex ratios had on-going behavioural impacts on potential family life, sexual violence, and deeper psychological implications for the society at the Cape (Shell, 1994:6). Additionally, for Shell, the fact that slavery was practised within settler homes in a violent patriarchy suggests a founding trauma, in the sense of Eyerman's (2001:1) "primal scene", of sexual violence within the family at the Cape Colony. Indeed, Baderoon (2014) suggests that the current "epidemic" of sexual violence in the Cape can be traced to the systemic sexual violence practised in the founding institution of slavery[2].

Young (2005) articulates the deep connection between sex and racism, particularly in the anxiety around miscegenation, as well as the god-like fantasy of empire, and the ambivalent attraction/revulsion in the colonial sexual economy. Citing Gobineau's (1848) construction of 'civilisation' in his *An Essay on the Inequality*

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[2] Thejournalist.org.za/spotlight/remembering-slavery-in-south-africa accessed October 10 2016

of the Human Races, Young (2005:102) demonstrates how “the fabled erotic relation so fundamental to the history of European colonialism is given the status of a natural law, and becomes the motor of history and of civilization itself”. Levine (2004) argues that, “to control and to change non-Western sexualities were vital components of imperial rule”, where a “perceived lack of bodily shame signified immorality”(2004:135). For colonial Britain, and in South Africa at the time, this translated as increased governmental control of sex, which paved the way for racial classification, as demonstrated by the Immorality Act of 1927, which prohibited sex between Whites and Blacks. In 1957, during Apartheid, the Immorality Act was extended to prohibit sex between all “Europeans” and “non-Europeans”, including “Coloureds or Asians”. The Act was specifically severe on Coloured women, with a six-year sentence for ‘provoking White men to have sex with them’ (Martins, 2007). The severity of the sentence is a powerful indicator of how connected Coloured Women’s bodies were with ideas of concupiscence and miscegenation in a continuum from slavery and colonialism through Apartheid. That Coloured women are severely sentenced for supposedly ‘provoking’ men exhibits a conflation of Coloured women with prostitution where the provocation is akin to soliciting, and the White man’s neutrality or innocence is implied. The Act’s labelling of sex between races as immoral made Coloured people, by virtue of their mixed racial origins, corporeally immoral. Wicomb speaks of how “those (females) that have mated with the coloniser” carry on their bodies the shame of its own violation in the “marked pigmentation of miscegenation” (1998 cited in Atteridge & Jolly, 1998:92, 93). This “intense and internalised shame” (Baderoon, 2014:88) that makes women culpable for their own violation has generated an overwhelming silence amongst

Coloured communities, and a culture of forgetting around slavery. For Wicomb (1998), this “shame stifles its own discourse” (1998:92) and is responsible for a “folk amnesia” (1998:100) around issues of slavery.

For Young (2005), language and sex are the two most fundamental areas where colonial contact is preserved. Baderoon (2014) examines the traces of slavery and colonialism in language. She looks at the use of the swear word *‘naai’* in Rayda Jacobs’ novel, *The Slave Book* (1998) as evidence of how slave women’s domestic and sexual labour entered the language with the word *‘naai’* as both the Afrikaans and Dutch word for ‘sew’, and a crude word for sex that conflates sexual and domestic labour. However, through tracing this word’s VOC Batavian origins, another use is revealed. In colonial Batavia, the word *Nyai or Naai*[3] was originally an honorific in Javanese and Balinese, denoting an unmarried or married woman, that came to signify a ‘concubine’ where young slave women worked in the kitchens, homes, and beds of VOC officials. As Levine (2004:138) points out, concubinage is “one of the earliest sexual encounters between colonizer and colonized”. Sears, in *Fantasizing the Feminine in Indonesia* (1996), demonstrates how Dutch literature describes the *Nyai* as lustful, malicious, lazy (‘except in bed’), and practising black magic to keep the favours of her master. Viewed negatively by both Indonesian and Dutch society, the term ‘*Nyai Belanda’*“(Dutch Concubine) became derogatory during the time of the Dutch occupation of Batavia. The migration of meaning from *Miss* to ‘Concubine’ explains the evolution of the term during Dutch Colonialism in the Indies, and the VOC’s systemic prostitution of women’s bodies. In Colonial South Africa, no longer the word for Miss or even colonial concubine, *naai* becomes a

[3] This is based on my own research prompted by hearing the word to refer to women puppets in shadow puppet performances especially by Dalang Ari S Sastrawijaya.

derogatory word for the sex act itself, violently loaded with issues of power and resentment over control of slave women's bodies. Within the Afrikaans speaking Coloured Community up till today the word means sex and is used as a rage filled epithet, or an indication of *worthlessness,* that I feel expresses the history of slave men's impotent rage and powerlessness over slave women's bodies, and once again, the woman's culpability and complicity in her own violation. The *person* that the word originally referred to is removed and only the female sex or sex act remains. This word *naai*, and its migration from Batavia to the Cape, encapsulates the 'Liquid transmission' that I discussed earlier in both its venality and in the simultaneity of personal intimacies and vast socio-historic movements where, as Baderoon states, "an intimate bodily experience of the Indian Ocean is also a public one, weighted with history" (2014:68). In my view, tracing an Indian Ocean migration of the word is far more revealing about the place of brown women's bodies, and their status in the colonial and pre-colonial context, in that the word carries knowledge about slavery, concubinage, and a pre-colonial past, whereas the etymological Dutch 'stitch' or 'sew' goes no further than the institution of domestic and sexual slavery at the Cape, where *naai* is a jocular euphemism for the sex act. Recalling the Indian Ocean migration of the word *naai* privileges an 'insider' circulation, where memory is transferred across diaspora within the language and culture of the slaves themselves, and decentres the colonial narrative.

Diaspora and Cape Muslims/ Cape Malays

As a non-orthodox woman of Cape Malay/Muslim descent, the fact of my art practice would be considered outside the 'proper' domain of the *Ummah* or

community. In fact I have, since childhood, been somewhat of an outsider in the Muslim community, with the result that a large part of my struggle in my work is with recognition and acknowledgement of my voice as a member of this community, despite the very unorthodoxy of my voice. This recognition is integral to re-membering the post-slave female body in my view, as an orthodox practice of Islam does not offer me the potential for the visibility of the female body, and has had to be contested in my practice in order for re-membering to occur as both a mnemonic transmission and as a recuperation of a dis-membered body. This strand of claiming space for a feminine voice, and a practice that emerges from *within* this community, runs throughout the performances in *Body of Work/Water*, right up to the final piece *Ocean Beneath the Skin* (2007) that was performed at the Museum for Islamic Art in Kuala Lumpur. In this study, this insistence on claiming space for my body motivates for the development of a personal syncretic feminist spirituality that is outlined in the Conceptual Frame that follows. My reason for laying out this section as part of the rationale is to locate and contextualise the contested positioning of Cape Muslim/Cape Malay identity, and my rationale for seeking out a feminine space 'in excess' to orthodoxy as discussed below.

"Islam was first practiced in South Africa within a creole slave community subjected to systemic sexual violence through the enforced prostitution of female slaves at the Slave Lodge" (Baderoon, 2014:16). In the Cape Town where I grew up from 1970 to 1990 Muslim women and girls were encouraged to remain within the home; mobility and visibility on the street invited danger from strangers and censure from family. Gqola (2010:144) identifies how the two terms 'Cape Muslim' and 'Cape Malay' are conflated by

members of the community to occupy the same space, and that their meanings in the Western Cape are interchangeable. She posits two opposing positions around the use of these terms, that of embracing Malay diasporic identity and that of disavowing and critiquing this identification. Gqola (2010:155) notes that, at the Cape, Islam became constructed by slaves as a counter-discourse to Western, Christian 'slavocraticism', offering an identity that pre-dated slavery and a transnational community in the *Ummah*[4] or community of faith with the *Ka'aba*[5] in Mecca as the site of the transnational home of Islam. Jappie (2011), examines the re-assertion of Malayism and even 'pure Malay' identity during the 1990s in Cape Town, accompanied by feelings of recognition and kinship that demonstrate a renewed increase in heritage and expressions of identity formation. This Malay identification is decried by scholars such as Vahed and Jeppie (2005) and Baderoon (2014:6), who argue that 'Malay' is a category created by colonialism, reinforced by Apartheid as a category of 'Coloured', and that its use fosters "self-ethnicising and further fracture". In this view, 'Malay' is an old 'racial' category as described by Blumenbach in his 1995 taxonomy of races. Baderoon (2014:13) makes a strong case for the exoticisation of 'Malayness', and its South East Asian focus, as diminishing the relevance of slavery to South African history by making it an Asian, not an African concern. She notes how the term is subject to shifting racial discourses and that it has a complex set of connotations. The word 'Muslim' is regarded as a category that encompasses the history of resistance to slavery, and fosters a sense of pan-

[4] The *Ummat-ul-Islam* is the world community of Islam – a Supranational fellowship of believers.
[5] The *Ka'aba* is the most sacred site in Islam, situated at the Masjid-al Haram in Makka. It is called the house of God.

African identity (Baderoon, 2014; Vahed & Jeppie, 2005). The linguistic basis of the term 'Malay' is the Lingua Franca *Melayu,* spoken both in Indonesia/Malaysia and also at the Cape up until the mid-19th century (Gqola, 2010:134; Baderoon, 2014: Shell, 1989). *Melayu* was a *Bahasa Pesisir* (Language of the shore or coast) used principally for trade in South East Asia, and originating in the 7th century seafaring Sumatra based Sri Vijaya Empire.[6] It was a lingua franca for traders along the Indian Ocean Basin from the 7th century, with influences such as Sanskrit, Javanese, Portuguese, Arabic, and Dutch. The language has subsequently been used for purposes of national identity construction in the region. In Malaysia the Malaccan origin of the language is foregrounded to situate the language within Malaysia's borders. In Indonesia, *Melayu* became *Bahasa Indonesia* with independence in 1945, where its official language status was an attempt to unify and nationalise a linguistically diverse Archipelago of more than 800 languages. It is a second language for most of the country's inhabitants, except for the population of Jakarta, for whom it is a first language[7]. In my view, far from Malay being "stability in changing times", as Jappie (2011) argues, or an ambivalent marker of 'pure identity', as Baderoon (2014) and Vahed and Jeppie (2005) assert, its *lingua franca* origins and fluid borders, as well as its redefined deployment to serve political purposes in South East Asia and even South Africa, attest to its very instability and *creolite.* However the linguistic roots remain geographically South East Asian. These diverging positions express a contradiction in the heart of a living diaspora

[6] http://www.yawningbread.org/arch_2005/yax-455.htm

[7] Jakata, formerly Batavia, was the primary entrepot for trade and seat of VOC rule in the region. http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2013/10/28/indigenous-language-policy-a-national-cultural-strategy.html

because “diaspora consciousness is entirely a product of cultures and histories in collision and dialogue” (Clifford, 1994 cited in Gqola, 2010:137).

Ilmu Kebatinan/ “Wat mooi is”/**Cape Folk Islam**

In a conversation with my father about the growing homogenization of Islam, he lamented the rejection of ‘Malay’ Islamic practices by certain members of the Cape community who judged these practices as Bid’ah.[8] *He felt that the Arabic-style, pure Islam that condemned ‘Malay’ or East African inclusion of song, music and other more Sufic practices, left a religion with “niks wat mooi is nie” (nothing that is beautiful). I found the idea of receiving aesthetic pleasure from worship and that worship should bestow aesthetic pleasure, intriguing.*

A marked difference between Folk and orthodox practices of Islam resides in this aesthetic[9] appreciation. The pleasure of the senses in music, colour, dance, and even smell, is used in Folk Islam to celebrate the divine, and exists in excess to orthodoxy. Van Bruinessen (2000) cites Gellner’s 1983 model of Islam in which the dichotomy of ‘folk Islam’ and scriptural Islam is key. Gellner claims that modernity, especially mass literacy, global media, and urbanisation, has eroded the basis of ‘folk Islam’ resulting in a predominance of the Scriptural which he sees as akin to secularisation in the West.

Jappie (2011) relates a meeting with Hassiem Salie, President of the Melayu Cultural Society, during which he shares his *Kietaabs* with her, describing them as containing “*Ilmu Kebatinan”*, which Jappie correctly translates as ‘Knowledge of the

[8] *Bid’ah* is an Arabic term used to refer to practices that are innovative, novel and potentially heretical to strict orthodox Islam.

[9] My interpretation of ‘aesthetic’ is inspired by Joseph Roach (1996) who uses the word in what he understands to “be its 18th Century meaning: the vitality and sensuous presence of material forms” (xiii).

Spirit'. *Ilmu* means 'knowledge' in Indonesian and Malaysian, but *Kebatinan* carries a far more complex meaning and use. Coming from the Arabic *Batin*, meaning 'internal' as well as 'hidden', *Kebatinan* can be read as the Science or practice of the Inner or Hidden. In Indonesia the term *Kebatinan* refers to a locally (particularly but not exclusively Javanese) inflected practice of Islam characterised by mysticism, syncretic animism, and ancestor veneration, as well as elements of Hinduism and Buddhism. In Malaysia Islamic authorities have declared *Kebatinan* as *Shirk,*[10] or heretical, and indeed the practices are also strongly decried by modern orthodox Islamicists in Indonesia, where religious polymorphism is more tolerated than in Malaysia. Despite this, the folk, mystic practice of Islam exists all across the Indonesian archipelago to a greater or lesser extent, with animist practices overlaid with Islam, and inflected with local particularity that, according to Van Bruinessen (2000), is "deliberately syncretistic". This mystical 'folk' Islam practised across the Indian Ocean Basin is strongly evidenced in the Islam practised at the Cape. It is my view that these practices constitute the "organising principle behind diasporic identity" (Gqola, 2010: 134) within the 'Malay' identified community at the Cape. These practices are the 'difference within', and their observation varies from mosque to mosque in Cape Town according to the mosques genealogical affiliation. In my view these rituals signify a collective mnemonic genealogy that is specific to 'Malayness' and its *practice* within the broader *Ummah.* Because these practices are connected so intimately with daily life, religious life, rites of passage, and remembrance of the ancestral dead, they have become integral to collective continuity and comprise. According to Le Goff (1992 as cited in Roach, 1996:11)

[10]*Shirk* is an Arabic term meaning 'idolatry' or 'polytheism', an unforgivable sin in Islam.

there are three major interests for the transmission of culture. They are 1) myths of origin, 2) Genealogies of leading families and 3) "practical formulas of daily living and special observances, particularly those deeply imbued with religious magic". Sufi Islam, with its mysticism and magical cures for both psychological and physical ills, provided the 'power' for slaves to survive their conditions. Even outside of Cape Town, Muslim charms made by *Doekoems*[11] were widely sought, even beyond the slave population (Jappie, 2011:376). Sufi Islam was powerful because of its secrecy (Tayob, 1995). Even though slaves were allowed to practise Islam in private, public observance was punishable by death. In this context, the word *Kebatinan* takes on additional meaning, where the hidden Islam practised at the Cape became a strong magical knowledge *(Ilmu)*, capable of protecting slaves in their threatening environment and helping them to survive. Thus *Ilmu Kebatinan* functioned on many levels of interior secrecy that sometimes reveal their genealogy on closer inspection. Gqola (2010:146) theorises that the extent to which diasporic memory is 'hidden', 'inner', or 'secret' points to the 'creolisation' of these memories over time. I would suggest that practices of the 'hidden or secret' carry evidence of creolisation *and more.* For example, the Cape word used for incense, '*Miyang'*, is very far from the *Melayu* or Indonesian word for incense, '*Dupa'.* The closest Indonesian term to *Miyang* is the Javanese word for 'divinised forefather', *Eyang/Moyang/Mayang* (Beatty, 2004:99). Incense is burned traditionally on Thursday nights at the Cape,

[11] *Doekoem* from the Melayu *Dukun* are practitioners of the magical arts in Indonesia, Malaysia and South Africa who curse, heal or provide talismanic assistance. There are still doekoems in the Cape. In fact I wore *doekoem* made *Azimats* (Magical talismans) pinned in my undershirt, throughout my childhood. Cape Rapper Isaac Mutant's Rap Act called *Doekoem* and his rap lyrics claiming that he has the power of a *Doekoem*, testifies to the ongoing hold of *Doekoem* on the Cape imagination. *Doekoems* are said to practice both white and black magic; however according to Jappie (2011) black magic formulations are hard to find in Cape Town these days.

echoing the Javanese *Kebatinan* belief that the dead visit on Thursday nights or *Malam Jum'aat* – Friday eve (sometimes referred to in the Cape as *Spoke Aand* - Ghost Night), and are called through burning incense. This points to how folk spiritual practices become 'hidden-in-plain-sight' and reveal themselves with deeper scrutiny. Whilst on the surface Cape Islam professes an aversion to ancestor worship of any kind, the folk practices evidenced in the substitution of the word *Miyang*, where the word for ancestor became the word for incense stick, points to an animist syncretism and ancestor veneration. An aesthetic appreciation of divinity, which is 'excessive' to orthodox practices of Islam whilst prevailing in Folk forms of Islam, becomes the basis for locating cultural memory and for re-membering the female body in my performance practice. Through excavating my cultural memory for the excess to orthodoxy that was located in embodied aesthetic *practices* I was able to trace a mnemonic transmission across diaspora that I examine in detail in the case studies.

The different strands or streams of thought outlined above provide both a rationale and a context to the key concerns in my study: that of re-membering the post-slave female body through a feminine style of performance practice that privileges an animist syncretism ('Malay' derived folk practices) existing in Cape Islam as a response to the inscription of slavery, colonialism, apartheid, systemic sexual violence, and Islamic orthodoxy on the brown female body. Through the chapters that follow the flow and interconnection of these strands are explored.

CONCEPTUAL FRAME AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to the fact that my core theorists strongly inform my conceptual frame, my literature review is unpacked simultaneously with the theoretical framework of the study.

The title of this study, *Reflections on a Body of Work/Water*, points to the Ocean as a metaphor that simultaneously encompasses the geohistorical and the somatically personal. In the section that follows I examine how liquidity functions in both this study and in my practice as a set of concentric ripples of connected meanings, beginning with the ocean as the site of mnemonic transmission that is revealed through performance, and then moving through liquidity as a feminist epistemology onto a particular 'syncretic feminine spirituality' developed through the process of performance practice.

In the light of transoceanic slavery, and the attendant erasure of history for the descendants of slaves, the fascination with the Ocean as a site of re-membering becomes apparent. The transmission of cultural memory was done through performance across the circum-Atlantic world as a geohistorical vortex in which commodities ("the most revolutionary of which was human flesh") and culture travelled. The term 'circum-Atlantic' is used as opposed to 'transatlantic' in order to highlight "diasporic and genocidal histories of Africa and the Americas in the creation of modernity" (Roach, 1996:4). Performance theorist Diana Taylor (2003:20) examines how the performed "repertoire allows for alternative perspective on historical processes of transnational contact, and invites a re-mapping of the Americas, this time by following traditions of embodied practice". My study utilises these ideas from Roach (1996) and Taylor (2003) to examine a specific 'circum-

Indian' transmission of cultural memory that allows alternative histories to emerge through the process of performance. This is a relatively under-theorised area in South Africa, with a few notable exceptions, such as Jappie's (2011) study of *Kietaabs* mentioned above, which suggests that a preoccupation with land as "a great obsession for whites and a measure of anguished loss for the indigenous people of South Africa" has enabled us to "turn away from the sea" despite South Africa's long transoceanic history. The Ocean's absence from our history is "weighted and powerful" and the question is: "If we turn back to the sea, what might we perceive?" (Baderoon, 2014:67).

In my study the ocean is viewed as a site of memory and mnemonic transmission but it also functions as the liquid lens through which I view my practice. Cixous, in her seminal theatrical manifesto *Aller a la Mer* (1977), challenged the scopic economy of the stage, and suggested a 'body-presence' in opposition to the voyeur-exhibitionist relationship of male gaze to female performing body. The location of this feminine theatre in the Mother/Ocean is a potent response to the scopic economy because the nature of liquid as a medium forces us into a different way of looking that disrupts the fixity of the 'gaze' (De Smet Trumbull, 2013). "[I]ntimacies at surfaces, fast changes in scale, ranges of magnification, and the immersive optics of refraction" create a "haptic visual symphony" (Haraway, 2008:259 cited in De Smet Trumbull, 2013:103) that eludes and elides separation and definition. The other senses too are magnified and become strange; sound carries across great distances and the "drag of the hand produces a surge that can be felt meters, fathoms away" (De Smet Trumbull, 2010:103). In this realm, the body moves and is moved by its environment; currents carry us away, we eddy and flow,

continually returning in never-ending cycles.

Liquidity in my study functions as an appropriately female-centred way of thinking which guides the structure and writing by privileging fluid modes, such as diving into immersive phenomenological accounts and then surfacing to reflect and refract on the somatically produced experience. This does not proceed in an orderly linear fashion, but meanders riverine, connecting streams of thought as it goes. It wells up between the formal lines of analysis and institutional rhetorics, and ripples in and out in concentric circles. In its leaky, runaway trajectory, liquidity carves out new interstices for the brown female body to produce discursive space. This way of seeing and thinking is “ephemeral, processual, refusing any fixed visuality” (De Smet Trumbull, 2013:104), and resisting what she calls the colonial fixation of absence and presence. It is a view from “the sea as a counter-hegemonic field”, where liquidity also serves to disrupt, in a reworking of De Smet Trumbull’s terms, the ‘binary of the postcolonial’. Liquidity is used as an “excess of bodies, of water of ’life’ even” that “overflows the bounds of traditional postcolonial critique”, thereby overwhelming the before-and-after “bivalve” temporal narrative of postcoloniality, allowing the emergence of different ways to address the postcolonial. Liquidity floods the ‘bivalve of the postcolonial’ and calls ancient pre-colonial or pre-contact knowledge into the present and also the future. It produces a different temporality that opens out “onto a future unforeseen and at times excluded by the strictly *post*-colonial frame” (De Smet Trumbull, 2013: 10-11). Important to my study, this transmission of ancient pre-colonial pasts into the present decentres the West by offering to my post-slave mnemonic project a temporal continuity that displaces the primary importance of the moment of colonial conquest. This allows alternate narratives and circulations to

emerge through a circum-Atlantic alternative transmission (Roach, 1996; Taylor, 2003).

As examined in the Methodology chapter, liquidity resonates with Lather's (2007) 'Voluptuous Validity' which she identifies as a leaky, runaway, academic practice that goes "too far", and characterises an "emergent but not yet 'readable' discourse of women" (Davis, 1990:106 cited in Lather, 2007:126). 'Voluptuous Validity' partakes of self-reflexivity and embodiment and is inspired by Irigaray's (1989) project of claiming maternal/material space (Lather, 2007). For me, this material/maternal space resonates with as the space of the sea and an emergent feminine theatrical style (Cixous, 1977). As an explication of the emergence of my own feminine theatrical practice that I touch on with Lather (2007), Cixous (1977) and Irigaray (1989) above, and to demonstrate an example of a liquid modality where I dive into a 'thick description' and then surface to reflect and refract, I turn to a narrative interlude or phenomenological account.

Narrative Interlude

*In 1996/7 at Cell Space in San Francisco[12], I performed a solo piece that I had written entitled 'transmission/reception'***.** *Performed as part of* Festival on the Faultline *on a small stage in the cavernous warehouse space, the piece involved a fictional character called Myriad I Sabbah, a descendant of the legendary Hassan I Sabbah (1050 – 1154), the leader of a Gnostic Ismaili sect in Persia known as the "Assassins"[13]. This sect opposed both Islam and the Crusades and were considered*

[12] http://www.cellspace.org/new/

[13] The word "assassin" is said to have originated from this sect either from the word 'Hashisheen' (smokers of Hashish) or as Amin Malouf suggests from 'Assassiyoon' (those faithful to the ('Assas') foundation).

heretic for their declaration of the end of the world, and thus, the end of the Law of God. They were said to declare: "the chains of the Law have been broken". It is important to distinguish that this piece focussed on the legend of the Assassins and not the actual history of Ismailism.

In the performance, the fictional character, Myriad I Sabbah, was born from the pattern on a prayer rug in the fortress Alamut, which is located on the current Syria/Iran border. One way of seeing this character's birth is as a denial of the maternal; similar to the birth of Athena from the head of her father Zeus Myriad I Sabbah is a product of the male mind. Myriad is born from a place of devotion where one of the men (there were only male Assassins) had laid his head in obeisance to God. But patterns on rugs were a major motif in my own performance history. The first place I recall using as a stage was a circular rug in the family living room where I rehearsed, performed, danced, acted and often just spun round in the circle until the patterns broke out of their two dimensions and I fell on the floor too dizzy to stand. My five year old self imagined that the blurring and spinning marked the end of ordinary reality. The point of delirium where objects of ordinary life spun around me was a place where the world became fluid and malleable; it was an interstice between worlds that was magically potent but difficult to inhabit for any length of time. After spinning as long and hard as I could, I would fall and rest on the floor until reality coalesced into straight lines around me, and start my performance again. The freshly coalesced reality was a 'new world' for me, as though I had dropped through a vortex into another plane, or by spinning made the world anew.

The prayer rugs my family used were rectangular and narrow and had images of the holy shrine in Mecca at the place where one laid one's head in prayer. As a child, I

imagined that putting one's head on the image was akin to being transported in some inexplicable religio-mystical way to Mecca and Divinity. These mats were portals and portable stages linking in my young mind the fervour of performance and prayer.

In 'transmission/reception' the character Myriad is born – like Athena from Zeus' head- from a rug at Alamut. In the story she encounters one challenge based on an image from a recurring dream I had. In the dream my father, in an act of ritual sacrifice, as if with a sacrificial lamb or korbaan on Eid ul Adha, cut my tongue from my mouth. The yearly sacrifice on Eid renews the covenant with God that was established by Abraham and Ishmael, where God presented a lamb for sacrifice, thus saving Ishmael's life. In the dream my father sprinkled the holy water over my mouth, tenderly laid me on my side, said a prayer, and with the special sacrificial knife usually carried by the officiating Imam, cut out my tongue.

I created a soundscape for this piece that played throughout the performance. On one track, my own voice recited a litany of goddess names that looped till it formed a glossolallic background – a texture of tongues, akin to the babble of a baby. On another track I recited a Quranic verse called Al Alaq. This verse relates how the prophet Muhammad (SAW)[14] divinely received the power to read and write – the words are a command to read and write. This verse is said to be the first revelation that initiated Muhammad (SAW) into prophethood and begins: "Read/Recite, bring recitation into existence, beginning with: In the Name of your Lord Who created

[14] SAW is an abbreviation of the Arabic for 'Peace Be upon Him', a respectful honorofic after the name of the prophet. Used by Muslims. I use the term out of respect for Muslim readers.

you…", and continues "Who taught, [the art of] script, by the pen."[15] *The 20 minute long show was performed twice only.*

The sacrificial lamb is central to Abrahamic religions and is tied with that other bloodletting pact of Abramic tradition, circumcision. Both these rituals signify emergence into a tribe or society, and at the same time the pact with God, but these rituals of belonging are for male members of the tribe only. In the patriarchal/phallogocentric economy of God-Father-Book-Law there is no space for the feminine. Lacking a penis to offer the father in the rite which makes boys part of the tribe, the little girl in the story sacrifices her tongue in a transaction with the God-of-her-father from which she stands to gain nothing. She will occupy silence, living discreetly as is required of her on becoming an adult woman. Despite the place she may occupy in the larger world, in the place where things really matter, the place of God-Word-Law, she is absent.

In Lacanian terms, this castration reveals to the little girl, her lack of the phallus, and the realisation of lack is a realisation of her place in the social order. Through acceptance of the Law of the Father she will enter into Lacan's (1997) 'symbolic order', stave off psychosis, and assume her proper social position through language. The recitation of *Al-Alaq,* the Quranic verse, supports this as she sacrifices the wilful organ of her downfall to the Law of Symbolisation, and, in the name of God of her father, begins to *"Read/Recite, bring recitation into existence"* (*the Q'uran, Al Alaq*), while the words she uses to call her mother deteriorate into nonsensical baby babbling.

[15] https://blackbunker9.wordpress.com/2010/10/12/translation-of-holy-quran-96-surat-al-alaq-the-clot-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%82/ accessed April 5 2016

This Lacanian reading of the work, and coming into language, is complicated when considered through a simultaneous feminist genealogy that draws on Irigaray (1989) and Grosz (1990) to propose a counter-Lacan birth into language and symbolisation. Grosz (1990:191) counsels a “cultivated ambivalence” in reading Lacan, a “synchronous supposition and de-supposition” that uses his work to explain the psychical conditions of patriarchal subjectivity and then de-supposes him of knowledge around “femininity, female sexuality and female specificity”. For Grosz this ambivalence is “not psychotic … not a disavowal” but rather “a fluctuation of affect not of attitude or belief” (1990:191).

While on the one hand, my Lacanian reading of *transmission reception* explains the particular conditions of patriarchy that shape the emergence of the young girl into her society, the performance text simultaneously desupposes, or rejects, this reading when we consider the “femininity, female sexuality and female specificity” present in the performance (Grosz, 1990:191). The little girl emerges into patriarchal law but in a time and place where the ‘chains of the Law have been broken’. This is achieved in the performance by placing her within the unassailable fortress of the heretic Assassins. There the little girl joins the Ismaili heretics in proclaiming herself ‘god-of-her-own-soul’. This momentary break in the law allows her to suspend the ‘phallogocentric’ terms of her symbolisation and enact a “deliberate intervention … into the canonic tradition of sacred/literary texts” (Henderson, 2014:71). She does this in two intertwined ways, through word and gesture. This intervention as crucial to the process of her finding her own voice because the “self-inscription of black women requires disruption, rereading and rewriting the conventional and canonical stories” (Henderson, 2014:71). To speak

to/for the collective, the woman has to insert herself into the sacred text from which she is absented and claim the territory for her own. By putting herself in Alamut, in the ritual of Abrahamic sacrifice, calling upon herself to *"Read/Recite, bring recitation into existence"* (*Q'uran)* the girl disrupts the phallocratic order of the ritual by *her* presence in it. By cutting out her tongue she excises the father's language, the father's name, and the word of God from her mouth. She cuts out what is patriarchally constituted and she intones and babbles Motherese. She re-speeches, rereads, reinscribes, and re-members her allegiance to another symbolic, that of the Mother and the mother tongue. The term 'mothertongue' became the name for the theatre company founded in 2000 by Sara Matchett and me to produce *What the Water Gave Me*. The name indicated the attempt to reclaim the maternal nature of the transmission of language and meaning. Instead of language emerging through loss and castration into the symbolic and the pre-existing law of the father, mothertongue implied a gathering of liquid words in the womb, or at the mother's breast, or in the grandmother's embrace.

The girl uses language "in a playful way, without giving special importance to syllabic or phonemic oppositions. It may be bisyllabic, or like a litany, and rather singsong, modulated tonally because "girls do not enter language in the same way as boys … they make their entry by *producing a space*, a track, a river, a dance, a rhythm, a song" with a desire not to "master the other, but to create themselves" (italics mine) (Irigaray, 1989:133-134). Gesturally, the little girl describes a circle around her body, she produces a space, she breaks through the linear world of God-Father-Law, and, through an interstice in the swirling patterns on a rug (in the case of *transmission-reception*), spins herself into another world. This circular space that

girls produce as they emerge into the symbolic is a territory that Jung compares to mandalas that "is present in the iconographic traces left by traditions in which women are visible" (Irigaray, 1989:133-134). Girls produce this space from their own bodies; it is both created and defended territory within which the little girl plays, extending and contracting its borders. The girl emerging into language spins, "constructing for herself a vital subjective space, a space which is open to the cosmic maternal world, to the gods, to the other" (Irigaray, 1989:132-133). The inscription of a feminine circular space then is also the inscription of a womb-like space that echoes Cixous' (1977) injunction that going to the theatre should be *Aller A la Mer* - going to the Sea, the womb of the Mother". It is a spatialisation of the self in order to 'author' theatre because "[y]ou can only arrive at the theatre with a self which has almost disappeared, which has *been transformed into space* [...] becoming [...] not the hero of the scene, but the scene itself: the place, the opportunity of the other" (Cixous, 1990 in Dobson,1996:italics mine).

Grosz (2008:12), following on from Deleuze and Guattari (1994), asserts that the first imperative of art is spatial, where the impulse to organise artistic space is an impulse to organise the space of the world. It is the production of a frame that is distanced from the body wherein sensation can be abstracted from the body and intensified and separated from the chaos of the natural world. In this inscribed frame "qualities are now loosened onto the world, no longer anchored in their 'natural' place but put into the play of sensations that departs from mere survival to celebrate its means and excesses" (Grosz, 2008:13). For this creation of a frame that precedes all art, an example is the performance of a bird of paradise. The bird first clears a space, meticulously picking up leaves and arranging a frame in which his

performance can best be viewed by a potential mate. This creation of a space is a territorialisation, where the bird, animal, human can seduce the observer. The aim is mostly sexual, but it is also a territory for the intensifying of an excess of form, colour, pattern and movement (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994 in Grosz, 2008:12), where these forms are able to "resonate for the sake of intensity alone" (Grosz, 2008:12).

This feminine re-inscription of space occurred in my practice through the development of a 'syncretic feminine spirituality' that took form around a personally significant pantheon of water goddesses, 'totem' animals, and the symbolic associations of the Ocean with the ancestors, with cleansing and with recuperation; additionally existing in opposition to both patriarchal religion and colonialism that was 'spun from my own moving body', as Irigaray (1987) suggests. The idea was to create a personal 'spirituality of resistance' essential to the production of a feminine anticolonial space in which the post-slave female body could be divested of the "historico-racial body schema furnished by the white man" (Fanon, 1967 in Noland, 2009:199), or from the natal alienation of slavery. This space was imagined as a liquid ocean/womb in which logocentric Cartesian binaries and hardened categories were dissolved, allowing a re-membering of the body to occur. Objects such as stories and symbols were used to configure "a site for the socially and culturally 'alter' or other to express, preserve and transmit cultural or gender-based religious and political differences" (Pérez, 2007:91). In their animist excess to orthodox Islam, the objects I used invited the past to spill into the present, opening up and valorising a liquid transmission of ancient 'folk' practice, and thus allowing the erased past to be re-membered. These objects, and their use in non-Western traditions, were also anti-colonial in that they valorised cultural practices that have over centuries been

devalued and derided by dominant Eurocentric culture. Native American scholars and practitioners show that ongoing sexual, racist and colonial violence can potentially be undone or challenged by reaching into the generative wellsprings of cultural transmission and 'spirituality' (Young & Nadeau, 2005). My inscription of an oceanic stage space attempted to provide a container for these 'generative wellsprings' in which the body, fractured by racist and colonial violence, could be re-membered. As a feminist practice, Williamson, Batson, Whatley and Weber (2015) note that, in eco-feminist versions of 'spirituality', there is a valorisation of the body, nature, and the feminine that evidences an experiential/somatic relationship to the earth and finds resonance in much contemporary movement and somatic practice characterised by a syncretic personal spirituality.

To sum up, my practice is conceptually aligned with a liquid feminine re-territorialisation of stage space that is formed around a personal pantheon of water goddesses, animist totems, ancestral rituals, and the sea as a mnemonic and counter-hegemonic space, and is spun out of my own body with the aim of creating a space to re-member the post-slave female body.

In the Methodology that follows I ground this fluid conceptual frame that addresses liquidity as an 'embodied autoethnography'.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

If this thesis is about re-membering the *personal* female post-slave body through *personal* performance practice, it follows that embodied autoethnography is both the object and the methodology of this study. In the section that follows I give an account of how I view the link between the body and autoethnography and follow this by briefly touching on where I place myself in the field of autoethnography, before finally outlining the structure of this study.

For a performer, the body's action in response to verbal or physical stimuli is often a starting point for generating material, which is then refined in rehearsal, and finally presented in performance. In the process of performance this entirely embodied process is used in order to yield insights into culture and world that exceed a rationalised intellectual understanding. In my view, this process calls on Csordas' (1993:135-156) "thinking through and with the body" that, in his *Somatic Modes of Attention*, is simultaneously a "thinking through and with" the world. Csordas' (1993) entangled simultaneity of culture, body, and world is echoed by Noland (2009), who reads Mauss' (2009) mature teachings in *Techniques of the Body*[16] to suggest that:

> … social conditioning reaches beyond the ideas of the mind to lodge itself in the very tissues of the body. (and that) … cultural subjects have a lived experience of such social conditioning, that is, a sensual apprehension, in those tissues, of socially organised kinesis (Noland, 2009:21).

Based on this reading of Mauss (2009), that socio historic and cultural context becomes lodged in the very tissues of the body, it follows that a politically situated embodied practice, or an 'embodied autoethnography', could potentially address

[16] Published in *Journal de psychologie normal et patholigique*, Paris, AnnCe XXXII, 1935: 271-93. Reprinted in Marcel Mauss, Sociologie et Anthropologie (introduction by Claude Levi-Strauss), 4th edition, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968: 364-386.

the social conditioning of that body. More recent studies on the subject examine the physiology of racist and sexist oppression in a way that establishes an inextricable "transactional relationship" between the social and the biological (Sullivan, 2015:18). Two interrelated propositions raised by this bodily focus that underpin my performance practice are: firstly, the body's affective permeability to the world, and secondly, the potential for a corporeal 'decolonisation' or challenge to socio-historic inscription as the body seeks to resensitise itself. The discussion that follows attempts to map out what I mean by these two propositions.

In contemporary body theory the body is not "singular, bounded, molar and discretely human" (Blackman, 2008:140). In what is known as the "affective turn" in the humanities, theorists are engaging with the cross disciplinary evidence for a model of "connectedness as opposed to singularity or separation" that is characterised by what Brennan (2004:49) calls the "transmission of affect" between people and between people and environments. "Affect" for Brennan (2004:3, 5) "is one translation of the Latin *affectus*, which can be translated as 'passion' or 'emotion' " and is a physiological sensation in response to a judgement. "[T]he affective body is considered permeable to the 'outside' so that the very distinction between inside and outside as fixed and absolute is put into question" (Blackman, 2008:10). This re-formulation of the body in the social sciences challenges "Cartesian Dualism and foregrounds the richness of the affective and tactile-kinaesthetic body" (Blackman, 2008:35). No longer inert flesh in subordination to the mind, a surface for social inscription or even a text, this reformulation of the body is revealing, and is "an intelligence of the flesh" (Brennan, 2004) that is always "in excess of our understanding" (Manning, 2007:xv). The body, according to Manning (2007:xxi), is

not “Ontological” but “Ontogenetic” and posits that bodies resist the stable category of Ontology because they are constantly “evolving in excess of their Being”. In other words, they are continually Becoming because “[a]ffect is an ontogenetic power of existence”. This ontogenetic body or Becoming-body has an “antagonism within politics of the state” (Manning, 2007:xxi).

In the South African context that informs the rationale behind my practice, this relates to how the tissues of the body are penetrable to, and store legacies of, state violence in manners that, in the Manning (2007) sense, “exceed understanding”. If the legacies of state violence as outlined in the previous Introduction chapter are stored in the tissues of the body, is it possible then to address these embodied socio-historic violences through the body itself? How does a practice of corporeal decolonisation through a becoming body play itself out? Brennan (2004:2) argues that self-containment is a “residual bastion of Eurocentricism in critical thinking, the last outpost of the subject’s belief in the superiority of its own worldview over that of other cultures”. She proposes that separation is a modern, Western construct and that boundaries between self and other, and self and world were much more permeable in the past of Western culture, and continue to be so in non-Western cultures. There is a link

> between the normalisation of state sovereignty and its adjacent body politic, and the denial of the sensing body in movement. Without a commitment to the ways in which bodies move, bodies become stabilised within national imaginaries in preordained categories, such as citizen, refugee, man, woman, homed, homeless. Deliberately avoiding the entanglements inherent in articulating (and ordering) sensing bodies in movement, the state can claim that its body politic is unified. The body can be described and its politics can be defined. Within state discourse, common sense is at stake not senses. To reclaim the sensing body in movement is therefore to think both alongside and against the nation- state (Manning, 2007: xv).

This bodily stabilisation in preconceived categories existed particularly within

the strictly policed categories of race in South Africa. If the body always "exceeds our understanding", it then follows that the physical integration of bodies after the end of Apartheid separation in 1994 was only the start of a much deeper challenge to the "national imaginaries" (Manning, 2007) of the body politic as well as the catalyst for a much deeper socio-historic project of 'corporeal decolonisation'. In my view, the separation and boundaries between self and world described by Manning (2007) is directly articulated in Frantz Fanon's 1963 formulation of "Alienation" in *Wretched of the Earth* as the bodily disease of Colonialism. My own reading of Fanon, however, has been enriched and expanded by Noland's (2009) deployment of the source text in which she clearly follows a trajectory of body-based theories. This critical understanding of Fanon's (1967) would not have been catalysed without Noland's (2009) work and so I refer to the secondary source to construct my argument below. According to Noland's (2009) reading of Fanon (1967), the racialised experience of Colonialism disrupts both proprioception (the awareness of the motor body in space), or kinaesthetic awareness, and interoception (the awareness of internal visceral homeostasis). Additionally, the "epidermal existence" to which the racialised subject is reduced, disrupts sensation on the skin (Fanon 1967 in Noland, 2009:90-91). This radical alienation from bodily "knowing", and ultimately agency, is carried unwittingly as a result of the practices and discourses of colonial violence. Fanon's (1967) construction of his own self – "a physiological self, to balance space and localize sensations" – does not take place as he would wish through "feelings and notions of a tactile, vestibular, kinesthetic or visual nature", but by the "historico-racial body schema furnished by the white man" (Fanon, 1967 in Noland, 2009:199).

The articulation of the most 'intimate and inarticulable' parts of the self

functions in my re-membering as both corporeally carried, as described above, and 'storied' in the way that Myerhoff (1982) proposed re-membering as a narrative recollection. The 'storied' aspect of re-membering brings me to the second part of the methodology, which is autoethnography. Alexander (2005: 433) defines his use of autoethnography in the context of transformative performance ethnography:

> …Issues of personal survival motivate scholarly production…I am positioning myself as an affected party, as a community member, or as an indigenous ethnographer. Through autoethnography I am exposing my own vulnerability to racial, gender and cultural critique as a method of understanding self and other, self as other, while engaging in performances (written and embodied) that seek to transform the social and cultural conditions under which I live and labour.

Ellis and Bochner (2000:739) are amongst the foremost proponents of autoethnography, defining it as "an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural". They trace the emergence of autoethnography to the "*crisis of representation"* of the 1970s and 80s that called into question issues such as claims for universal truth and stable knowledge about human culture, and the colonialist methods of ethnography which disrespected members of the groups studied, the negation of indigenous knowledge, and the lack of reflexivity around the researchers' own cultural biases (Adams, Holman Jones & Ellis, 2015:9-10). This challenge to the notion of representational objectivity motivated a shift in ethnography to include "introspective, personally engaged selves and cultural beliefs, practices, systems and experiences" (Adams et al., 2015:17). Additionally the rise in identity politics of the 1970s was accompanied by an increased interest in research by 'insider' members of cultural groups. In 1975 Karl Heider coined the term autoethnography to describe this 'insider epistemology'. Not surprisingly then, autoethnography is used by it's proponents to challenge colonial representation and

give voice to the marginalised and oppressed. Hemmingson (2009:130) quotes a peer reviewer who succinctly describes autoethnography as:

> … a constructionist epistemological perspective making both a methodological and theoretical deployment of strategies as the researcher becomes the subject of study for data collection, representation, and the interpretation of embodied and intersubjective knowledge. This lends a highly introspective and personal orientation to autoethnography that reveals multiple aspects of consciousness and self-consciousness that are personally and/or politically emancipatory.

In Bochner, Adams, Ellis (2015), autoethnography is characterised by the use of the researcher's personal experience to analyse cultural experience; the acknowledgement of the researcher's interrelations with others; the use of reflexivity to "interrogate the intersections between self and society"; the equal validation of academic rigour with emotions, affect and creativity; the impulse for social justice and social transformation (2015:2). This emphasis on the 'personal and politically emancipatory' is one of the characteristics of what Lincoln and Denzin (2005) identify with *'the seventh moment'* in qualitative research. As they propose, this moment is marked by a proliferation of voices: the subaltern, the postcolonial, and the formerly disenfranchised. Autoethnography is also seen by its proponents as a strategy for addressing historical injustice, erasure and trauma. Performance as "struggle, as intervention … as a socio-political act" places autoethnographic performance firmly within the seventh moment (Conquergood, 1998:32 in Denzin 2003:4).

In one way then, this autoethnographic study is about two plays and, as the research addresses issues raised through the practice of performance, the study is an example of 'Performance-Based Research'. In performance- based or practice-based research, while questions are generated or addressed through performance practice, the answers or insights that emerge in the project are shared through

written information.[17] This methodological claim is fairly straightforward in and of itself; however the clear cut, 'at-a-distance' perspective that this provides of the practices considered does not adequately reflect the reflexive embodied imbrication of my practitioner-researcher positionality. In my view the most adequate approach would be to consider *embodied* autoethnography as a research methodology. In this way, I feel, my body complicates my scholarship with 'going too far', with 'leaky, runaway, tentative, unbounded, self-revelatory excess' (Lather, 2007). However, it is only in this way that I as performer-researcher can adequately claim discursive space and pose such questions as: How does the body lay claim to knowledge? Are sensations or feelings or affect valid as evidence? How do we place the body centre stage in the production of knowledge, when for so long it has been relegated to the mute peripheries? The project then of valorising or laying claim to embodiment and autoethnography, both deeply reflexive practices as research methodologies, becomes a project of transgression, where, as Green (2015) states, "the male dominant and privileged, western, objective ideal of knowledge" is disrupted by a "marginalized, subjective and embodied space of knowledge" (Green, 2014). The methodological use of these "transgressive validities" moves us from an acceptance of epistemological validity, as the relationship between thought and its object, to the generation of counter-practices of authority which are grounded in the crisis of representation" (Lather, 2007:120). Thick descriptions, phenomenological accounts, "somatic sensitivity and reflexivity as a research tools"' (Green, 2014), as well as a preoccupation with the maternal/material that "goes too far", all make for the "less comfortable social science" (Lather, 2007:120) that characterises this study.

[17] http://www.adsa.edu.au/research/performance-as-research/ accessed June 23 2016.

To further complicate the demooring of thought from cognition in this research, I am preoccupied with the maternal/material in a feminist spirituality that gives credence to alternative ways of deconstructing and re-membering female post-colonial subjectivity. However, despite this "partial, positioned, tentativeness" (Lather, 2007:129), the study is grounded in an attempt to reflect on and critically engage this current historical moment. To best address these potential challenges to intelligibility, and to incorporate self-reflexivity in a rigorous manner, I utilise 'realist analytical autoethnography'. For Ellis and Bochner (2015 cited in Adams et al., 2015) realist autoethnography moves from story to analysis, "creating texts that separate experience and analysis" (Ellis & Bochner, 2015:85 cited in Adams et al., 2015). Whilst this style may be less exploratory than that of evocative autoethnographic styles, realist autoethnography more easily enables an interrogation of personal practice through analytical reflexivity. What I am hoping to achieve with this realist analytical autoethnographic is a flow of movement from the "internally *somatic* to the externally *semantic*" (Spry, 2001:721). In this way, as a performer-who-writes, I hope to prevent this study from falling into pure abstraction so that it becomes merely 'about' the body. I hope instead that the study can be written 'from' the body, thus offering the possibility of an "enfleshed scholarship" (Spry, 2001:724) that reflects my practitioner-researcher position, and makes space for my body to claim centre stage, to use Lather's (2007) term, in the "discursive spotlight".

Structure of this study

The structure of this study is processual, flowing and accreting as it progresses, like water. The Introduction located my personal context and defined what is meant by

the project of re-membering, followed by a rationale and the conceptual frame of liquidity that encompasses the emergence of a ‘syncretic feminine re-inscription of space’ within which the body can be re-membered. In the Methodology above I locate and ground the streams of my re-membering, first as the recuperation of a body, and secondly as a ‘storied’ recollection that has meaning to a larger community, or an autoethnography. In the chapters that follow, the two plays *WTWGM* and *Spice Root* as individual case studies illustrate what has been summarized above. These plays, the most fully realised (in the conventional sense of enjoying a run in theatre spaces) of the series of performance works, speak to each other across the Indian Ocean from Cape Town and Java. *WTWGM* is analysed for its meanings in terms of its inscription of space, using Roach’s (1996) transmission of cultural memory. It is also examined for the ways in which it employs liquidity to discuss systemic sexual violence and the post-slave female body. *Spice Root* is placed in the context of Javanese ideas of embodiment, as experienced during a two year period of Javanese dance training, and examined in the light of embodied figures of liquidity and the resultant inscription of space and syncretic rituals that it employs. The case studies both follow the allusive, elusive leaky excesses of the liquid modality in the project of re-membering the post-slave female body through performance.

CHAPTER THREE: CASE STUDY ONE – *WTWGM*

What the Water Gave Me (WTWGM) was a one-woman play that I wrote and performed in 2000[18]. The show received two productions, the original in 2000, and a second production in 2014, with a different team. The first production emerged from my personal practice, the staging was inscribed around my body in space, and the text directly related to concerns around re-membering through the body; for this reason I focus on the first production as my case study.

I start with a description of the performance of *WTWGM* to provide a clear picture of my body in space during performance, and the shapes and stories that it inscribed. The impulse for creating these images and inscriptions in space with my body derived from an unconscious impulse or drive to rehabilitate my own sense of self and my sense of the possibility of healing through performance. I follow this description with a reflection on my process, a thought exercise that flows liquidly between personal memory, theoretical analysis and intellectual insight about the process of rehabilitation or re-membering intimate stories related to my direct bodied experiences. While doing this I hope to take the reader closer to the sources of my theatre making inspirations and epiphanies.

WTWGM is also concerned with what Myerhoff (1982) refers to as reaggregation or re-ordering of the person's story in order to restore them to wholeness or harmony.

[18] It was directed by Sara Matchett, with sound and design by Julia Raynham, and published in *New South African Plays* (2006). The play was first performed at the Cape Town Laboratory Festival at the Artscape Studio Theatre, followed by a run at the Sufi Temple in Rondebosch, with two one-off performances at the Temenos Retreat in McGregor, and at the Market Theatre Laboratory Festival prior to a two-week run at the Baxter Studio (26 June – 7 July 2000). In 2014 *WTWGM* was directed Jade Bowers and performed by Cherae Harley at various venues including U.J., the Cape Town Fringe, and the National Arts Festival fringe where the show won an ovation award for best play.

This wholeness is imbricated with Denzin's (2003) ecology of being where 'right' relationships are restored between self and world, and between past and present. In *WTWGM*, as I explore below, embodied autoethnographic performance is drawn on to effect this restoration or healing, where the personal 'disease', as Fanon(1963) puts it, or disorder as Myerhoff (1982) sees it, is used to examine larger social ills.

An outline of the play

The action begins as the audience enters with the actor slowly circling the stage, carrying a big walking stick and dragging a large yellow sack. As they enter, the actor is already moving slowly around the stage, creating the impression that the play is a part of a larger journey, that she has arrived from somewhere and will leave for somewhere else, and that the audience comes upon her in the middle of going about her activities. In retrospect, this action unintentionally mimicked my own life at the time: I was in Cape Town for barely two years before I left; it was as though I arrived to tell the story and then to move on. She, myself as a performer, seems sage-like, as though she has carried her story across a great distance. Like a healer preparing the circle for the ritual, she sings out an invocation to the Yoruba river goddess Oshun. Oshun's colour is yellow like the sack the actor carries; the goddess is invoked as a patron deity, whose qualities of sweetness, flow, and pleasure, will infuse the experience of the play for the audience. There are four large cardboard circles on the floor approximately one metre in diameter representing an elemental station or compass point in the medicine wheel, as well as a character in the play. Yellow in the East for the element of Air is the storyteller and 'keeper of the myth'; blue in the West for Water is an 8 year child who tells of her ongoing experiences of

sexual molestation; a white circle for Earth is a teenage rapper trying to make sense of Coloured identity using verbal creativity to survive her environment; and Red for Fire in the South is a young adult who traverses the city trying simultaneously to escape and to find something. Each character is an amalgamation of qualities and aspects ascribed to the element they represent. They function in the same way in the play, interacting with each other's storylines in ways that reflect their elemental state, while the characters embody the element in voice and movement.

The actor circles the stage once in a clockwise direction. With the second circle, she removes objects from her yellow sack and places them on the coloured circles. Each becomes an altar as the domestic objects are set down and arranged to construct intimate personal tableaux. At the Blue circle, representing Water, she takes a Coca Cola bottle filled with water from her sack and pours it into the white enamel bowl, placing a naked plastic doll and a set of coloured chalks next to it. At the white circle, representing Earth, she pours sand from a brown paper bag in a small heap and places a black woollen cap on top. At the red circle, representing Fire, she takes a large candle and lights it, placing approximately thirty birthday candles around the candle along with a plastic ball. At the yellow circle, which represents Air, she lights a stick of incense and places it in a holder with a small Dictaphone or recorder of some kind beside it. This is the last station, which she reaches as the audience are already seated and the doors closed. We timed this to coincide with the movement of the audience into the space; sometimes I would move quickly if the audience arrived all at once and other times I would linger as people trickled in while conversation from the audience filled the room.

At this point she unties the yellow sack, which is actually a long length of yellow cloth, winds it onto her head like a turban, and becomes the 'Air' character. Gathering herself, she turns to face the audience and stamps out a rhythm with her feet. She spins in the Bharatnatyam '*Namaskar*', or greeting that precedes Bharatnatyam or Kathak performances, and makes the gesture for 'listen' while the sound plays a track of 'breath' that is the 'Air' character's theme.

"Once there was and once there wasn't…" The 'Air' character narrates the fairy tale 'Bowa Mera, Bowa Puti". Three sisters live an idyllic island life, until one day they encounter a strange man on the beach. The man flatters the two older sisters while the youngest, a toddler, throws a mud pie at him, but just before the stranger can react, their mother calls and they run home.

The 'Fire' theme music plays, the actor runs around the stage, removes her turban, and becomes the 'Fire' character who relates her escape from a pirate ship and her search for a hole through invisible walls that concentrically encircle the city she inhabits. She is also looking for a hole in her flesh so she "can spy on (her) blood, see where it's been, where it's coming from, sail in its currents" (Abrahams, 2006:20). She boards a taxi to Langa[19] on the Cape Flats but, disturbed by the sounds of aborted foetuses in the sewerage plant, she switches taxis to Mitchell's Plain, where she alights at sunset, and waits throughout the night on a field for 'the walls' to appear. When they do, the walls threaten her, "singing like drunk men dreaming of running away"…and warn her that violation is (her) historical condition, being as (she is) five generations out of slavery and a woman" (Abrahams, 2006:21). Despite

[19] Langa (Sun) is an older Apartheid township designated for Blacks. Mitchell's Plain is a newer 'Coloured' Cape flats township.

the omnipresent danger, no harm comes to her. At dawn, she takes a taxi to the city centre.

A hiphop beat signals the ‘Earth’ character who places the black cap from her station on her head and addresses the audience directly with a comic riff on race and ‘Colouredness’, which she refers to as “revolution and the colony dancing a symbiotic samba in its every cell” (Abrahams, 2006:21). This segues to include a discussion of hip hop culture in her own comic blend of feminist Afrofuturism.

The breath track signals the return of ‘Air’, who winds her turban and tells how the three sisters return to the beach to find the strange flattering man. This time the man gives Taki taki, the toddler, sweets, and the two older sisters almost don’t hear their mother call them home. The next day they return to play with the strange man, and he takes them to a rock pool where his true monstrous face is revealed. He pushes them into the water where they turn into fish and cannot escape.

The sound of water pouring signals the ‘Water character’, who bathes the plastic doll in the enamel bowl downstage and sings a nursery rhyme. She tells the doll about sex games she plays with her friends, relating an incident where she sits at the rim of a pond with a boy who fondles her while dead goldfish float in the water below. She assures the doll that it is only a game and forbids her to tell.

The hip hop beat announces ‘Earth’, who mixes up stories about the Dogon tribe from Mali, Hip hop celebrities, hair, and technology in a comic afrofuturistic mix of her own invention. In the same vein, she ends by discussing god and the devil.

The ‘Fire’ character arrives at the taxi rank in Cape Town where she sees ghouls of Michael Jackson haunting children. She follows people around the city and

ends up on Green Market square, where time dissolves, buildings crumble, and she falls down a very large hole. The hole is wet and she crawls around in the tunnels until she encounters a giant centipede that she invites to eat her.

The scene shifts to 'Water' who is looking at pictures of child pornography in a magazine that her friends pass around. She is much more disturbed by the images of adults and children together than her friends, who mock her discomfort; she leaves.

'Fire' wakes up inside underground tunnels populated by dead people. She meets a little girl in a white dress and follows her through a drain onto street level. They are at a past (perhaps 1930s) Greenmarket square where vegetables are sold. She follows the girl, who leads her through the "broken past, named and not" (Abrahams, 2006:28). They walk past a slave auction where women who look like them are sold, and on to the docks as slave ships arrive, until finally they arrive at the beach. 'Fire' sits down and the little girl begins to tell her "the story my grandmother told me" (Abrahams, 2006:28), the 'Bowa Mera, bowa puti' story.

A lighting change and the breath soundtrack take us into 'Air' who picks up the fable as the parents of the girls search for their children. The father takes his boat out on the water and entreats the ocean to return his daughters, while the mother prays to the moon to bring them home. The girls are trapped as fish in the rock pool, while the monster man drinks their vitality and the girls begin to weaken.

'Earth' arrives singing an 80s R 'n B tune and recalls her grandmother's stories about Princesses, and how she asked about a rescuing Prince and her grandmother told her that nobody would rescue her. She recounts praying for rescue from alien abduction, or trying Rastafarianism or taking drugs, all to no avail. Finally, at her

lowest, she 'channels' an "entity from an inner dimension" (Abrahams, 2006:29) who gives her a poem. She reads the poem to the audience.

In the 'Water' character's final scene, she talks about a teacher at school who takes the younger girls into his class while the older children are at mosque on Fridays, or in religious education classes. He makes them draw fish at his desk while he forces them onto his lap, fondles them and masturbates. The other teachers at the school won't believe the children or take action to protect them. 'Water' wonders aloud whether she should tell.

The 'Air' character begins the last part of the tale in the darkest time of night with a conversation between the sea and moon, who decide to answer the mother and father's prayers. They flood the rock pool and wash the three fish girls into the father's fishing net. He brings them home and the wife puts them in a pan on the fire. At that point the fish are transformed back into girls and there is a big celebration. The monster man is "found drowned half eaten by a school of little fishes" (Abrahams, 2006:31) and everything returns to normal, except for changes in the three girls themselves.

The description of the play outlines the predominant concerns with re-membering the post-slave female body. *WTWGM* addresses re-membering predominantly in the conventional sense of Myerhoff's 1982 recalling and reconstructing of a story through performance using Roach's 1996 concept of 'surrogation'. The second sense of re-membering as an attempt to recuperate the fractured post-slave female body is an epiphenomenon of the performance of re-membering, as recalled in *WTWGM*, whereby the re-membered 'origin' myth is called on to re-aggregate the fractured body and restore its harmony. The 'Fire'

character, for example, experiences the Apartheid geography of the city as a part of her psyche and her body. She travels to retrieve herself from her environment. In her journey “From city to Langa. From city to Sun” while she recalls a friend who committed suicide and was “flying through the flaming hearts of suns” (Abrahams, 2006: 20), her recollection is disturbed by screaming foetuses in the sewerage plant. This moment explores this powerful node of the city where Apartheid spatial planning separates white Cape Town from its Black and Coloured townships with highways, a power plant, and a sewerage plant. It is a spatially violent point linked forever in my mind with the stench of sewerage and foetuses at various stages of development that my mother used to collect from the plant and pickle in Formaldehyde for her High School biology class. Themes of teenage abortions, township sexual violence, abject toilets, and teenage suicides all collide for the Fire character and she switches taxis to “throw them off the scent” (Abrahams, 2006: 20).

In order to fully explore the ramifications of the different character’s processes of retrieval, and how this becomes linked to a post-slave, and not just a post-Apartheid body, in a manner that traces the dismembered female body through contemporary time to colonial slavery, I need to begin by examining the Bowa Mera fairy tale and its historical and personal origins.

Re-membering Bowa Mera Bowa Puti

My use of this story in WTWGM provided not just a mythical container for the play; it also evoked a very specific set of images that fed into the writing process that were connected to the times I spent listening to the story in my grandparents’ bed. Their

big 1940s bed, with its dark wood headboard, heavy blankets, and tight sheets, was in marked contrast to the modern duvet-covered informality of beds in my parents' house. My grandmother, Gawa Abrahams, nee Arend, had rheumatic fever as a child, and suffered from a very weak heart. She wore a pacemaker, or plastic valve, that ticked very loudly in bed, and her torso was covered with keloids from numerous surgeries. Her body fascinated me; its soft scars that were once entry points to mysterious insides, the plastic insistence of her heartbeat, the pills she took to stay alive. She went to hospital often, and narrowly escaped death multiple times, and so we frequently spoke of death and illness. Death had an ordinary, inevitable proximity in my grandmother's existence, but this did not stop me from being thrilled with the terrifying details. Gawa disciplined me with fearful stories; anywhere she didn't want me to play was 'inhabited by the devil' and we would discuss the 'devil's places', which were underground, under furniture, in vacant fields, down toilet bowls, in graves, in drains, and in mirrors. We also talked about what happened to the newly dead while we lay in bed, what would happen when Gawa inevitably died. Her stories combined Q'uranic lore on the tortures of the grave with episodes from our life, all embellished with imaginative flourishes. The darkness outside the dimly lit circle of their bedside lamps became those worlds of gaping afterlife and fiery underworld as I lay listening to her stories. Gawa believed in magic, or traditional healing in the 'Malay' tradition, and we would make real life journeys across the Cape Flats to visit Doekoems[20] and buy 'Azimat' or talismans. We would also journey to Groote Schuur, another place of magic and death, to sit and wait for treatment or pills on the dark wood benches.

[20] see footnote 16 on p. 27 for an explanation of *Doekoems*

The story Bowa Mera Bowa Puti that I used in WTWGM was a re-memory of the bedtime story that she told me most often; she said that her grandmother had told her the story. My grandfather, Abdurakiep Abrahams, knew the story too, but his version was different, with pumpkins instead of fish, and he got caught up with prosaic details, while my grandmother invented and expanded to suit the mood. They told me that the story was from 'where we were from', which was indistinctly 'Malay' but definitely 'over the sea'. It became a kind of 'origin myth' for me because it didn't exist in any fairy tale books and it felt authentic to my grandparents and me.

My grandmother's childhood recollections conjured a Cape Town that no longer existed, and so were the key for travelling back in time, while her tales of other realms helped construct a mythic geography in the imagined Cape Town of WTWGM. During the process of writing I imagined following my grandmother, who is a girl in a little white dress, through the streets of the city. In the play my grandmother is mentioned by each of the characters except by the storyteller 'Air', who is, in age and by virtue of the story she tells, the grandmother of the play. The 'Fire' and 'Water' characters hear her calling to them, and the Earth character talks of the stories she tells her.

After the run at the Baxter, I thought that I would continue to follow my grandmother's story, adding on to WTWGM and developing ideas around erased history. At the time, I had, reluctantly, to leave Cape Town and move to England for family reasons. I planned to continue her story there, or in Amsterdam where the story would tie in with the history of the VOC, perhaps yielding another part of the puzzle. Try as I might, none of my plans for continuing this project seemed to work, in Amsterdam or in England. Eventually, by happenstance, I ended up at a school in

Java, Indonesia. When I arrived in Java I discovered that my Bawa Mera story was known by everyone and that it was originally Javanese. This left me with the uncanny feeling that the story itself had drawn me to the place where it originated, and that my grandmother and her tale had 'other things' to 'tell me'.

Perhaps this feeling that I was now a 'part of the story' is precisely what Myerhoff (1982) meant by a re-membering that restores one to one's rightful place in a narrative continuum. In a way, finding the story in Java, and doing the subsequent research on this story for this study, became further orders of re-membering in which the felt, intuitive use of the tale in *WTWGM* was validated through encountering the story's origins. With this research project, 'uncanny feelings' were more deeply grounded through concepts like Myerhoff's (1982) re-membering and Roach's (1996) surrogation.

When I arrived in Java in 2003 I learnt, quite by chance through a cooking lesson with a neighbour, that the words Bawa Mera Bawa Puti were actually the Indonesian or Melayu words Bawang Merah, Bawang Putih, which mean red onion and white onion, or shallot and garlic. In the Indonesian archipelago these two ingredients form the basis of every meal, ground to a paste using a mortar and pestle. Little red shallots are not common in Cape Town and the flavour base of 'Cape Malay' dishes is onion cooked with ginger and garlic that is ground in a mortar and pestle. In both cases however, alliums in combination are the foundation upon which the flavour profile of a dish is built. I will not enter into the loaded territory of food and Cape Malay identity[21], but I do wonder under what conditions the story of Bawang Merah,

[21] For more on this see Baderoon's (2014) chapter *Kitchen Language.*

Bawang Putih ceased to conjure the taste of home and became the names of endangered girls disassociated from both foundational flavour and memories of kitchens. Yet, despite the loss of 'proper' meaning, the story was still transmitted.

Some of the power of this transmission could lie in the nature of the story itself. The tale of *Bawang Merah Bawang Putih* is foundational and exists across the Indonesian archipelago and Malaysia. Donaldson (2014) suggests that "*Bawang Merah, Bawang Putih* is not one single, cohesive story but rather a collection of disparate stories blanketed under the "*Bawang Merah*" title – even considering its origins as an oral tale" (Donaldson, 2014:3). The lack of research around the *Bawang Merah* stories, where, in one study on the stories' pedagogical value for children, the researcher, Marti Bunnta, records 29 different *written* versions of the story, the first one written in Dutch in 1904 (Donaldson, 2014). Donaldson avoids classifying the tale according to 'tale-type and motif indexes', noting that the "radical variability in plot between versions" evades categorisation (2014:3). Indeed she is of the opinion that classification would be reductive to the plethora of versions of this tale. I was told in Java that my grandmother's version with fish was from West Java, or Sunda, and the Western part of the archipelago, perhaps Sumatra, while my grandfather's prosaic pumpkin version was told in Central and East Java. His was definitely the most well-known variant in Solo, Central Java where I lived. My grandmother's many versions are testimony to the tale's own slippery variability and evasion of categories as well as to her skills as a storyteller. While the story itself varies widely from village to village and teller to teller, it is always about two sisters *Bawang Merah* (who is bad) and *Bawang Putih* (who is good), or vice versa. The third character in my grandmother's version, and in *WTWGM*, *Taki taki*, was unrecognised as a Javanese

name or word, and I was told that there was never a third sister in any of the versions. Donaldson2014 study of the fairy tale corroborates this. This third character, *Taki taki*, the wise instinctual toddler in my retelling of the tale, and her absence from the repertoire, intrigued me. Whilst in Java in 2004, an informant, Marita Arsomoedjo from Paramaribo in Suriname, related that *Taki taki* meant 'riddle' or tale in Suriname, possibly from the Creolised English "talky talky", as creole is spoken there along with low Javanese and Dutch. In Suriname the story title would then be 'The *taki taki* or riddle of *Bawang Merah Bawang Putih'*. While writing this study, I encountered Den Besten's *Roots of Afrikaans* (2012) in which he notes the origin of *Taki taki* as derived from the "now obsolete" Melayu term *Tjakkie tjakkie.* He identifies this as a reduplication word, probably from the Melayu word *icak icak,* meaning "ostensibly, pretend, swindle, fake, act as if"(Den Besten, 2012:196). The South African English reduplication word 'play-play' for 'make believe' is similar. In the version of *Bawang Merah* that had survived in Cape Town, *Bawang* became *Bowa, Icak icak* became Tjakkie tjakkie, that then became *Taki taki*, and, through the surrogation of repeating this performance of memory, *Taki taki* became another character in the story. This character, who is excessive to the original tale, carries a name, the etymology of which is 'pretend, fake, act as if', exposes two associations in my view: firstly, this etymology hints at what I came to understand through personal experience as the way in which transmission through the repertoire made itself apparent. There seemed to be an oblique quality to the communication, a 'winking in-joke' or riddle, revealed in unexpected ways that seem allied with the secret transmission of memory or knowledge amongst slaves and their descendants. This is discussed in greater detail in the Introduction chapter. This

playful communication is also integral to the suspension of disbelief needed for performance. There is always the winking 'let's pretend' or 'play-play' that allows us to enter the world created through performance, acknowledging a simultaneous 'not true', and 'possibly much more true than we could know'. This playful ambiguity resonates with the 'deficit' and 'excess' of Roach's (1996:2) process, in which a culture ”reproduces and recreates itself”, the process of 'surrogation'. For Roach (1996:2), surrogation can never be exact, or a perfect fit, but occurs within the 'cavities created by loss' where the surrogate either "cannot fulfil expectations, creating a deficit, or exceeds them, creating an excess". Roach (1996) bases this on Schechner's (1985) formulation of performance as "restored" or "twice-behaved" behaviour, where a transmission is always subject to reinterpretation, and there is a revision with each version. In this way, Schechner (1985) claims, despite remarkable similarities to the original that may exist, the subsequent versions of a performance will always be reinventions. It is my view that these reinventions or revisions constitute the space in which the sociocultural realities of each successive re-teller can be observed. In this way the failure of surrogation to 'accurately' transmit exposes the ruptures, the breaks in continuity, and the cultural persistence, thereby revealing more about the journey that the story and its tellers took. Taylor (2003:48) argues that, while Roach's (1996) concept of surrogation has been generative for performance studies, it falls short in many cases by "allowing for the collapse of vital historical links and political moves", making it forget its antecedents. Whilst this may be so in certain circumstances, in my view, with *Bawang Merah* as performed by my grandmother and then by me in *WTWGM,* the excess or the deficit in the retellings allow the ruptures produced by political moves to be discerned, thus making the

antecedents more apparent with examination. Just like the migration of the words *Myang* and *Nyaai* as related in the Rationale, the changes to the surviving South African version of *Bawang Merah* exhibit both loss of former meaning and the accretion of new 'inner' or hidden meanings.

There is no archival or anecdotal evidence that my grandparents did in any way come from Java or Indonesia; the connections had been erased through the years of slavery in South Africa. The performance of this story, a part of the family repertoire, was what enabled me to find "an alternative perspective on transnational contact" that Taylor (2003:20) claims the repertoire can do. From the perspective of the embodied repertoire, the story did not begin with colonial slavery at the Cape, but extended back through time to a pre-contact past. Through following the tradition of embodied performance, I was able to re-locate, or re-member, my grandparents' grandparents' past. Taylor (2003) defines the word 'repertoire' etymologically as "a treasury, an inventory" (that) also allows for individual agency, referring also to "the finder, discoverer," and meaning, "to find out". Despite the fact that history and memory had been erased, the knowledge of my grandparents' antecedents was carried in the repertoire, waiting to be 'discovered', as Taylor (2003) describes, or re-membered. By re-membering the *Bawang Merah* story in *WTWGM*, I am re-membering my grandmother and her grandmother, and the grandmothers who passed the story to her, spanning generations of little girls and grandmothers back to the Indian Ocean ancestor, 'who was not rescued', and instead was captured and enslaved, and then further back to the grandmothers who told that story to her. The re-membering in *WTWGM* places them all in a narrative continuum that starts on an Indian Ocean island, arrives on the shores of Cape Town,

and moves through time to an Apartheid-era Coloured school classroom. The transgenerational little girls become a "re-aggregation of one's members, the figures who properly belong to one's life story, one's own prior selves without which the story cannot be completed" (Myerhoff, 1982:240). They are placed in their narrative continuity through retelling their story, and the 'community in disarray' that Myerhoff describes is made sense of in a 'neat and tidy tale'. As the performer in *WTWGM*, I embody both my grandmothers' selves and my little girl self. My grandmother, her grandmother, the girls stolen away from island homes who arrived to be sold on the docks of Cape Town, and my own childhood self are all made present so that the story can be completed. In this way, slave and post-slave female bodies are re-presented, or made present again on stage, through the embodied performance of the repertoire of cultural memory. How this bodily recuperation is imagined to occur through an oceanic 'syncretic spirituality' and a feminine inscription of space is examined below.

Liquidity and syncretic feminine spirituality

I took the title, *What the Water Gave Me* from the Frida Kahlo painting in which intimate scenes from Kahlo's life are depicted floating in her bathwater. At the top of the painting, against the white bath and on either side of the outflow hole, are Kahlo's feet. The use of Kahlo's title was in part a reference to my experience at the Galeria de la Raza in San Francisco, where I was exposed to Yoruba, Santeria, Native American, and Latina spiritual practices, and to the art practice that this generated. This was a magical realist, brown, female aesthetic that I sought to tap into with the reference to Kahlo's painting. In the section that follows I turn to a narrative account

to detail this influence and explore the ways in which syncretic spiritual practices informed a spatial inscription fundamental to an embodied feminine modality that underpinned the project of reconstructing the fractured post-slave body.

In 1997, I was invited to perform at ***Dia De Los Muertos: Rooms for the Dead,*** *an exhibition event curated by Rene Yanez,*[22] *one of the founders of Galeria De La Raza*[23] *in the San Francisco Mission District. My performance was part of the Mexican Day of the Dead celebration culminating in a street parade and procession. The performance formed part of the daytime programme leading up to the street parties that night. It was an improvised monologue based on the prose poem, Lyfskrifte, written in 1993 that I discuss in the Introduction chapter of this thesis. The section used in the performance tells of a village where the villagers have been dispossessed and chased out of their story, emerging with only silence and shame. My performance was accompanied by live musicians from a shamanic circle with whom I practised weekly rituals. This group came from diverse backgrounds, and one of the musicians was in the process of initiation as a priest of Oshun in the Santeria tradition. Santeria is a Latin American Yoruba based syncretic religion similar to voudoun (or voodoo as it is commonly known) in that it combines Yoruba deities with Catholic iconography. During the performance I felt absent from my body as if I had no control over what I was doing; perhaps this was a light trance, or a feeling of light trance. The piece was*

[22] http://www.galeriadelaraza.org/eng/exhibits2/archive/artists.php?op=view&id=11&media=info accessed 6 June 2016

[23] Galeria de la Raza's stated mission is "to foster public awareness and appreciation of Chicano/Latino art and serve as a laboratory where artists can both explore contemporary issues in art, culture, and civic society, and advance intercultural dialogue"[23]. Galeria de la Raza is responsible for re-introducing Frida Kahlo's work to the United States as well as for starting up the Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) parade as an "articulation of Chicano/a and Latino/a aesthetics". http://www.galeriadelaraza.org/eng/about/index.php accessed 6 June 2016.

underprepared, but it was a first attempt at trying to integrate the concept of ‘medicine’ in the Native American sense, where songs, performances, and other objects can be used to effect a change toward greater integration, or ‘health’ in the participant (Mosby’s Medical Dictionary, 2009)*’.*

Concurrently, as part of the exhibition, there were large-scale altar installations at the Galeria De la Raza by artists from various disciplines that were of a very high aesthetic calibre. These works addressed spirituality and politics in novel ways for me and inspired the way I used syncretic spirituality in WTWGM.

Pérez (2007) details the work of renowned altar builder, Amalia Mesa Bains (also a curator and regular exhibitor at Galeria de La Raza), explaining that Mesa Bains’s altar building began taking on a cross-cultural assemblage that included universal female traditions like shamanism, santeria, and voudoun. Pérez (2007:99) goes on to note that the “politics of Mesa-Bains’s altar work is well described by the artist’s own theory of *domesticana rasquache*, which encapsulates the sensibility of feminist chicana art that reclaims cultural practices in the face of their historic social devaluation in Eurocentric culture”. These ‘domestic’ practices include healing rituals, altars, candles, and prayers; they valorise the feminine domestic. Pérez (2007:91), in her chapter entitled ‘Altars and Alterity’, notes how these domestic practices are “a site for the socially and culturally ’alter’ or other to express, preserve and transmit cultural or gender-based religious and political differences”. She asserts that current altar building practices utilise this ‘sacred site’ as a space to question and challenge political or religious dominance, “to figure the imbrication of the artistic, the spiritual and the political” (Pérez, 2007:92). This is in line with Denzin’s (2003) examination of non-Western spirituality as a political practice for colonised

people. In this worldview, concepts of Western Christianity and its stranglehold on culture are critical sites of resistance. Denzin (2003) proposes that the use of a non-Western spirituality is an intervention that asserts an interrelated ecology of being, and a grounding in spiritual beliefs. These beliefs are animistically based in an equal ecology of being, and act as a site of anticolonial resistance. This is an ethical epistemology that “recovers the moral values that were excluded by the rational, Enlightenment science project” (Denzin, 2003:257-258).

I saw the Altar building practices at Galeria de La Raza as a spatial territorialisation by women of colour that offered a resistance to both patriarchal religion and colonialism from within a feminine lexicon that valorized ‘spirituality’ and a particular female domestic aesthetic. I was struck too by African American and Latin American syncretistic constructions. In these practices, remnants of the pre-colonial were interwoven with the post-colonial to create a contemporary Creolite that appeared to valorise and acknowledged all parts of the self. At the same time, the aesthetic valorised the work, gestures, and domestic routines of women going back centuries. I identified my struggles with Coloured or Cape Malay identity in this and questioned whether this construction could function as a rememory. I wanted to weave my own fragmented, erased, diasporic past with my contemporary postcolonial condition. Implicated in this was an attempt to find a space for my body in both life and performance that I felt Islam did not offer. I intuited that a ‘space’ may be present in the animist cultural practices within the Malay community that were in excess to orthodox Islam and existed in daily domestic activities, rituals and stories. There were no specifics to latch on to; practices were not discussed, and so I developed a personal syncretism, inspired by altar building, as a response. The

practical question then, as a performer/maker, was how to place my performing body on an altar.

A partial answer came just before I left San Francisco in 1998 in the form of a book featuring Navajo Sandpaintings and their related rituals. I was particularly struck by an image of a young girl sitting on an intricately drawn sand mandala. I responded to the circularity of the space with the small lone body on it. It resonated with my earlier work on transmission-reception, where the character of a young girl had emerged out of the circular patterns on a prayer rug. This image evoked the possibility of healing as a process whereby stories, images, and other objects were employed to restore the patient to wholeness. In this process, which is conducted in a mythical time, the past could be drawn on or re-membered in order to address the present socio-historical ills carried in the person's body. It seemed feasible that I could somehow be the healer and the patient on this circle that was also an altar, that somehow the circle would be spun out of me and out of my stories or afflictions. I felt that, in order for this to be relevant to an audience, the 'illnesses' I addressed had to be psychosocially pertinent to more than my personal story.[24]

A brief description of the practice of sand painting will help to contextualise these ideas. In the Navajo tradition of healing with sand paintings, the healer responds to the patient's illness by constructing a ritual which entails the drawing of a sand painting. Each illness or imbalance is connected to a chant or a part of the Navajo

[24] Alannah Earl Young and Denise Nadeau write about a social programme called *Decolonising the Body: Restoring Sacred Vitality* that they conduct with Native American Women "who have suffered ongoing sexual, racist and colonial violence in their lives" (2005:12). This programme attempts to transform "the impacts of sexual, racial and colonial violence on Native women" through somatic and spiritual methods that aim at "unlearning ways of thinking and being that have been etched onto the body" (Young & Nadeau, 2005:13).The two draw on Native American 'Indigenous cultural resiliency theory' that demonstrates how spirituality and cultural transmission strengthens communities to not only survive new oppressions but to thrive despite legacies of colonial violence and adversity.

sacred creation story, which is microcosmically and macrocosmically represented in the circular painting. For each part of the sacred story there is a sand painting, and so the painting that corresponds to the affliction is constructed to effect a cure, thus restoring the ill person to order/harmony with the sacred story, the axis mundi, and the four directional points of the sacred circle. After a series of prayers and chants the sand painting is constructed and the afflicted person placed on the painting. Anderson (2011) notes: "The Navajo name for sand painting, 'ikaah', translates to "place where the gods come and go".[25] Through the animation of the sacred story, and the gods' presence in the sacred story, the healer is able to restore the ill person to harmony with the cosmic order. The sand painting is then swept away and discarded.

The idea of a medicine wheel, which held the four directions and elements and somehow encompassed a personal and larger political story that was specific to my South African context, germinated for some time. I drew circles with stories attached in my journals for years, gradually filling them in with ideas and theory. Finally, in 2000, I made an altar with incense, flowers, sweets, and a picture of my grandmother, and sat down to write WTWGM. I had already decided that the area I wanted to address was female sexuality and sexual violence as it intersected with Coloured female identity and slavery. I knew that I wanted to address it through a particular personal syncretism that bound my grandmother's tale and magical configuration of the city with an erased slave memory and with diasporic loss, and that this was intimately tied in with my own experiences of sexual violence and what felt like a legacy of this violence in my community.

[25] http://www.americana.net/articles/2011/12/legends-in-sand-the-, evolution-of-the-modern-navajo-sandpainting/ accessed March 31, 2016

My intention was to present the female performing body as an intersection between the personal and social located on an altar or personalised sand painting or medicine wheel in its most basic version, where each direction represented a disorder or social disease resulting from the Apartheid and colonial legacy that was played out on and through the performer's body. I wanted to use the practice of embodied performance to challenge these simultaneously socio-historical and psycho-physiological inscriptions on the body. The programme note claimed that the show was "an elemental exploration that digs up gestures and stories that have been buried in the darkness of Cape Town's history and floats them onto the performer's flesh". I saw the circular 'sacred' stage space as a site for an order of personal transformation to occur. The sacralisation of the space and its feminine inscription was imagined to amplify this situated bodily practice beyond the body's borders and make it coterminous with larger sociocultural concerns, so that situating the body's trauma in this feminine sacred space opened up possibilities for imagining a re-birthing or re-becoming or healing of psychosocial trauma for both the performer and audience. The programme note tentatively suggested that "through the resources of imagination the characters are able to transfigure their existing realities", where transfigure is defined as a 'transformation that exalts or glorifies'.[26]

In the writing, I returned to *Lyfskrifte* for its venal conflation of history and biology as played out in bodies and in the sea and in my grandmother's tale of *Bawang Merah.* At the time of writing, I adopted the fish symbol as a perfect totem for the tale and one that was obviously identified with water. Upon reflection

[26] www.dictionary.com/transfigure accessed 21 Nov 2016

however, through the lens of Javanese syncretism, a deeper layer of meaning is revealed that offers insight on my use of the fish.

According to Wessing (2006), Javanese life cycles exist on a vertical and horizontal axis, with the manifest earth and the human body being the centre point. The underworld is generally thought to be the world of under the earth and of the 'waters of life', a simultaneously fecund and festering realm. Fish are associated with this femininely figured horizontal realm and with the pre-birth foetus in its amniotic environment as well as with the dead under the ground (Wessing, 2006:208). There is a quality of inertia and a resulting lack of agency in these realms. The foetid inertia of the fish resonates with the swamps in the earlier poem *Lyfskrifte*, where repressed shame hides in stagnant water, suppurates, and becomes monstrously abject. It is "not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules: the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva, 1982:4). As De Smet Trumbull (2013:81) remarks, while "Kristevan abjection hinges on the maternal and porous borders of the subject, she does not explore how these themes get articulated through racial difference". Nonetheless, Kristeva's analysis of the expulsion of "Eve as Other ushers in the discursive possibilities of all exiles, all frontiers" (De Smet Trumbull, 2013:83). Following this line of thought through De Smet Trumbull (2013) to Kristeva (1982) to *WTWGM*, this disgust is provoked by the breakdown of order and categories is clearly relatable to the construction of female 'Colouredness' as corporeally immoral through miscegenation and concupiscence (Wicomb, 1998:93). In *WTWGM* abject water fills the rock pool where the fishgirls are trapped, the 'Fire' character hears aborted foetuses scream from the sewerage plant, and the 'Water'

character wipes sticky, slimy semen from herself in the school toilets while wondering whether to 'tell' about her ongoing abuse. The 'shame that stifles its own discourse' (Wicomb, 1998) is what allows the sexual abuse of the little girl in *WTWGM* to continue unchecked. In the play, the 'Water' character does try to tell a woman teacher about the abuse; the teacher chastises her, implying that she is "naughty", culpable in her own violation. Baderoon in *Silence, Slavery and Sexual Violence* (2014:88), acknowledges that the shame around slavery and sex has made women bear the shame of sexual violence while being held culpable, and thus available for continuing violation, whilst, at the same time, shame renders invisible and silent the "systemic violence of slavery". This is because "it is necessary to seek the founding moments in which this system of sexual violence entered South African society" (Baderoon, 2014:87). In *WTWGM,* the fish girls in their foetid pool, and the 'Water' character, are placed in a narrative continuity that acknowledges the role of the foundational trauma of slavery in systemic sexual violence in South Africa. Their capture resonates with both paedophilia and slavery, issues relating to the systemic sexual violence against women's bodies that appears at other points in the play. The use of the Indian Ocean Island as a site of plagium is an attempt at locating a beginning for this systemic violence, as Baderoon (2014) counsels. By doing so the story is made to encompass the moment of colonial contact and plagium that becomes a part of a larger narrative that includes erased history. Although in the telling of *Bawang Merah*, the little girls are rescued and returned to their families, the other characters in the play are not as lucky; they are the descendants of little girls who did not escape, who were not rescued. The four stories are interwoven and simultaneously become one, and so the rescue of the *Bawang Merah* girls becomes

potential rescue for all the other characters. They are freed from systemic sexual violence by the element of 'Water' itself, in the form of the sea, which conspires with the moon to flood the rock pool. This implies the power for self-transformation through the momentum of the vast interconnected sea. The resource for transforming the abject water is water itself. It is through allowing movement in an area previously bound, invisible, and stuck that the change can happen. This tidal flooding sets all four characters' stories into motion. The trapped fishgirls are washed into the sea and into their father's nets; the 'Fire' character moves up out of the underworld to a cityscape where time dissolves; the 'Earth' character receives a vision from an 'inner being' in which her body 'retrieves the power to heal and feel' (Abrahams, 2006:30), and the 'Water' character does tell about her sexual abuse because she in effect 'tells' the audience. These moments are interrelated, and though there is a chronological order in the play, it is not possible to causally trace which actions precede and which follow. It is not clear whether the flood of words from the 'Water' character sets the fishgirls free, or whether the 'grandmother' from the land of the dead sets all in motion through her telling of '*Bawang Merah'.* The telling of the *Bawang Merah* tale from a pre-conquest time and space is a source and resource of ancestral continuity and re- memory. The ancient fluid story functions to flood the 'bivalve of the postcolonial'. It forms part of a spectral liquid presencing of a pre-colonial past that wells up and "insists on remembering and retrieving what came before contact" (De Smet Trumbull, 2013: 11) bringing it into the present and even the future.

CHAPTER THREE: CASE STUDY TWO – *SPICE ROOT*

The play *Spice Root* was a performance ritual around re-membering the post-slave female body. The performance developed and re-contextualised ideas initially put forward in *WTWGM*. With *WTWGM*, the Indonesian fairy-tale *Bawang Merah* was utilised as a 'myth of origin' or mnemonic reserve (Le Goff, 1992 cited in Roach, 1996:11). Issues around slavery and the female body were placed against the backdrop of the "origin myth", or Navajo 'sacred story', which functioned ritualistically in the play to restore the performer's body to 'order'. Through the process of what Roach (1996) calls 'surrogation', the excess or deficit in the retelling of the tale revealed the socio-historic influences and internal life of the tale. In *WTWGM* the imaginative engagement with the Indian Ocean as site of ancestral memory created an "alternative perspective on historical processes of transnational contact", as Taylor (2003:20) says, through re-membering the *Bawang Merah* story. Thus the focus of *WTWGM* was largely on re-membering as mnemonic recollection. By contrast, with *Spice Root*, re-membering the fractured body via the embodied feminine figuration of the Indian Ocean is the core engagement of the work.

Spice Root was performed in 2005 at both the Baxter Theatre and the National Arts Festival. I directed, produced, and performed in it. Music was composed by Aloysius Suwardi, an ethnomusicologist and *Karawitan*[27] teacher at ISI (Art Institute Indonesia). Choreography was by Theresia Sri Kurniati, a dance instructor at ISI, and by Dorothea Quin Haryati, a Solonese performer and

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[27] The term *karawitan* refers to the playing of gamelan instruments, and comes from the word *rawit*, meaning 'intricate' or 'finely worked'. The word derives from the Javanese word of Sanskrit origin, *rawit*, which refers to the sense of smoothness and elegance idealised in Javanese music (Lindsay, 1992:10).

choreographer. Hidayat Sastrawijaya was the shadow puppeteer or *dalang*. Cass Abrahams, my mother and a food historian and expert in Cape Malay cuisine, cooked throughout the performance. Other performers included Wahyu Widayati, Yohanes Sri Raharjo (a musician), and Lanjar Sarwanto.

This chapter examines this work in two ways: (i) as a process of making, and (ii) as a performance 'text'. I use the term 'text' to describe all onstage action - spoken and gestural - that comprised the performance and were rehearsed, notated and repeated with every show. In this 'text' section, I also examine the specific ways in which *Spice Root* relates to and differs from *WTWGM* in order to uncover a development in my practice. Implicated in the 'process of making' are issues around the female body and an inscription of space in which this body is central. The 'process of making' section deals with a period of fieldwork from 2003 to 2005 in Surakarta, Central Java, during which I studied refined woman's style Javanese dance, and from which the ideas around the female body in *Spice Root* arose. In both discussions (i) and (ii), I use critical autoethnography or reflexive phenomenological narratives of making *Spice Root* as both the method and methodology for generating and interpreting a specifically feminist theorisation of the post-slave female body. Before turning to the points above I briefly discuss the significance of the play's title.

The title *Spice Root* is a playful re-rendering of 'Spice Route', the more romantic or picturesque descriptor, to use Baderoon's (2014) critical term, that has been historically employed to name the VOC[28] trade passage from the 'Indies' to South Africa. This term is well known and well used to express a view of the arrival of

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[28] VOC (1602-1796) *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* in Dutch, referred to as the Dutch East India Company.

slaves and spices at the Cape that relies on what Edward Said (1978) has described as 'Orientalism', where the exotic 'orient' is used for the "centring of the Western self" (Mutman, 1994:3 cited in Baderoon 2014:33). Till today well known spice companies as well as restaurants use the term for its picturesque association with the trade in exotic goods and exotic Asian bodies from the 'Indies', to the extent of using Dutch sailing vessels in their logos[29]. This rendering of colonial profiteering as a time of exploration and adventure elides and whitewashes the very real history of the trading in human beings as well as spices, and of displacement and conquest, and forms part of a "picturesque discourse (which) overlooks the brutality of slavery, and accept(s) the portrayal of slaves as complicit with the system that dehumanised them" (Baderoon, 2014: 40).

With the re-rendering of the term 'Spice Root' I wanted to explore an 'insider' circulation, or intergenerational transmission of memory, and tell the broader story of the slaves who had been reduced to statistics, or had vanished completely, while the tale of the conquerors remained. In my view this 'insider' story spanned the Indian Ocean basin and was apparent in the collective memory transmitted through food, performance, ritual, and music. Focussing on these mnemonic transmissions was a way to decentre the VOC master historical narrative, allowing alternative narrative circulations to emerge, as Taylor (2003:20) suggests. The swapping of 'route' with 'root' changed the focus from 'route' as an abstract line on a map that was about commodity exchange, to material 'roots' of people or their rootedness in the food they ate. If the *Bawang Merah* from *WTWGM* was about

[29] I refer here to the brand *Robertson's Spices* which uses a Dutch sailing vessel in its logo, and restaurants such as *Spice Route* in Paarl that uses the term to connote 'Cape Malay' food.

onions and garlic or the alliums, *Spice Root* was about turmeric and ginger – the *zingiberis rhizoma* that flavour food and build bodies. Conterminously, the word 'root' brought up issues of diasporic rootlessness, or an image of roots floating mid ocean, and the futile attempt to take root in a constantly moving ocean that the image conveyed. It raised questions about a history that began and ended with a Dutch slaving vessel and the absolute gaping hole in memory of anything that existed before this catastrophic world-changing event.

In this way, the play challenges what De Smet Trumbull (2013:10-11) calls the 'bivalve construction' of postcolonialism in which "there is colonization, and then there is what comes after". She examines liquidity as a trope that not only dissolves hardened structures, but also creates a temporal disturbance which exceeds the postcolonial timescale, insisting "on remembering and retrieving what came before contact, bringing it through and forward into the present, perhaps even the future" (De Smet Trumbull, 2013:10-11). *Spice Root* partakes of this liquidity through a location in, and embodiment of, the Indian Ocean, particularly through the dances of the Javanese goddess of the South Sea, *Nyai Loro Kidul* (a figure I became fascinated with and began to study while training in dance in Java). My intention with *Spice Root* was that the life affirming, generative figure of *Nyai Loro Kidul,* with her erotic, liminal, oceanic ambivalence, be employed to address the re-membering of the post slave female body.

Spice Root was thus conceived as a ritual for an Indian Ocean 'middle passage'. The 'term middle' passage is an old transatlantic maritime term for the passage of slave ships between Africa and America, where the voyage between Europe and Africa was 'outward bound' and the voyage between America and

Europe, 'homeward bound'. The abolitionist movement brought the horrors of this part of the journey, with slaves dying in inhuman conditions, to public attention. For descendants of the Atlantic slave trade, the term became associated with suffering, loss of homeland, loss of identity, and losses of life (Christopher, Pybus & Rediker, 2007:1). The 'middle passage' therefore exists as a topos (a traditional theme or formula in literature) in African diasporic literature that is intimately connected to identity formation. Complementarily, Chassot (2015) identifies what she calls "the trope of the living dead" in literature, in which the middle passage is persistently seen as a death, where culture, language, origin, community and life, as well as human beings, died. Hoving (2001) speaks of the middle passage as a 'black hole' or coffin into which the slave self disappeared. In this image of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the 'hole' "stands as an ironic indictment of the commercial birth of modern man" (Baker in Hoving, 2001:35).

By contrast, there is no evidence that the 'middle passage' occupies as central a role in memory or imagination for Indian Ocean slavery as it does for Atlantic Ocean slavery (Alpers, 1983 cited in Christopher et al., 2007:20). Due in some part to the relatively smaller scale of slavery in the Indian Ocean World, there is considerably less information on the subject than that on Atlantic Ocean slavery; Indian Ocean slavery has only recently come to attract serious academic attention.

In a chapter of her *Regarding Muslims,* entitled *"The Sea Inside Us*": *parallel journeys in the African Oceans,* Baderoon (2014:73) examines Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca as an alternative modernity, and a reclamation of the Indian Ocean for pilgrimage, as "an assertion of a new and sacred geography away from those traumatic histories" where "traumatic histories" recall memories of slavery and the

middle passage. I would like to suggest that pilgrimage as a 'new sacred geography' has come to fill the void left by natal alienation, replacing it with a transnational Islamic identification tied to the 'spiritual homeland' of the religious community. Admittedly, the concept of 'home', or origin, is a problematic one that entails issues of nationalism and the 'self-othering' in the postcolony that Baderoon (2014:6) proposes a 'Malay' identification could encourage. In purely practical terms tracing 'homeland' or origin becomes difficult in a slave population, where Creolisation was considered economically advantageous to slave owners, and local creole slaves were preferred, and fetched a higher price than did foreign slaves who came from continually changing VOC entrepots in the East (Shell, 1994:48-49). However, not all descendants of slaves are Muslim, and in light of this the notion of pilgrimage as a "sacred geography without the trauma of slavery" (Baderoon, 2014:73) carries the danger of discounting the descendants of slaves who are not Muslim thereby privileging 'Muslim-ness', and potentially fostering the very 'self-othering and fracturing' against which Baderoon so cogently argues.

Whilst this transnational vision of an Islamic spiritual homeland carries meanings of resistance, non-racial globalism, and pan-African identifications, turning away from a traumatic past could elide the complexity of creole entanglement with the colonial and the profound dealing with the past this implies. In his theorisation of 'entanglement', Glissant (1992:26 cited in Erasmus, 2001:23) argues that "diversion – turning away from the pain and difficulty of creolised beginnings – needs to be complemented with reversion – a return to the point of entanglement, the point of difficulty". For Erasmus (2001:23), who draws on and extends Glissant's 1992 work, this entails a "focus on memory and hidden histories, an acceptance of irreducible

difficulty and an acknowledgement that there is no real return to roots or original identity". While Islam and slavery combined "to form a South African *beginning"*, where Islam offered a non-Colonial spirituality and unity to the Creole slave population asserting a "new and sacred geography" (Baderoon, 2014:7, 73) that is specifically religion based and avoids traumatic history could very well infer denial of a complex past in both its painful and generative aspects.

Additionally, I would like to suggest that a complete denial of a pre-colonial past or sense of place leaves a gaping 'hole' in memory. It seems that though this 'hole' might be filled by pilgrimage as an alternate geography, it is only through dealing with slave memory and diaspora directly that it can be properly addressed. For me this gaping 'hole' is the black coffin into which slave identity disappears to be sacrificed to "the commercial birth of modern man" (Hoving, 2001:35). It was this area, this 'hole' in memory that *Spice Root* attempted to address through employing the Indian Ocean, not as a line on a mapped journey, but as a figure in itself, circulating tides and memory in an insider epistemology that exceeds the 'bivalve of the postcolonial' (De Smet Trumbull, 2013).

(i) MAKING *SPICE ROOT*

The process of making *Spice Root* arose out of the time I spent studying dance in Java. I use first person narrative in a phenomenological account that takes 'somatic sensitivity' seriously as an analytical tool that can "deepen theoretical thinking on a bodily level, bringing authority to body knowledge" (Green, 2014:12). As Csordas (1993) suggests, this bodily knowledge is culturally produced. A somatic mode of attention that attends to and with the body is therefore also necessarily attentive to

cultural milieu. According to Albright (1997 cited in Beausoleil, 2014:119), “physical practice has psychic consequences” that “dramatically affect a dancer’s own subjectivity” because

> [e]very movement repertoire also carries with it a particular philosophy, communicated by dance instructors and choreographers through distinctive and often metaphorical language, and transmitted through such rigors of physical training Beausoleil (2014:119).

Since my dance training in Indonesia ‘dramatically affected my subjectivity’ (Albright, 1997 cited in Beausoleil, 2014), my discussion of the most salient aspects of Javanese dance training, and my experience of it, is first grounded here in Javanese notions of embodiment as an example of Lather’s (2007:125) methodology of “Voluptuous validity”. I situate Javanese dance conceptually within this broader discussion of embodiment, using first-person narrative accounts as a somatically sensitive tool to “deepen thinking on a bodily level” as Green (2014:12) suggests. These moments, like the other narrative accounts in this study, also serve as auto-ethnographic epiphanies that at the time inspired my practice, and are now returned to as a negotiation of past intensities that open the experiences out to more rigorous interrogation.

Dance training in Java

In her study, *Embodied Communities: Dance traditions and Change in Java,* Hughes-Freeland (2008:27) describes how the “supple subtlety of the Javanese body, even as it is regimented and written about, creates a rhythmic space for resistance, a node of agency and the indeterminacy of orality.”

Spice Root *was inspired by a two year immersion in Surakarta, Central Java (commonly referred to as Solo), and in Solo style classical Javanese dance. I arrived there in August 2003 to enrol in the September 2003 intake at STSI*[30] *(Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia), now called ISI (Institut Seni Indonesia – Indonesian Art Institute). This institution is an academy offering visual art, karawitan (or gamelan musical study), dance, and shadow puppetry. I studied classical Javanese women's and men's dance, as well as Balinese dance and Jogjakarta style dance at first year level. Except for a handful of foreign students, the other students were all Javanese graduates of the High School of the Performing Arts where they had received dance and music training. In order to keep up with the first year students who already knew the dance, I took private lessons with ibu Theresia Sri Kurinati and Mas Hartanto, both lecturers at STSI and professional dancers. This time was also an immersion in Javanese culture. I learnt to speak Indonesian as quickly as possible because no-one in the environment spoke English and all instruction at ISI was in Javanese, with Indonesian for the benefit of foreign students.*

Living in Javanese society, and learning Javanese dance, brought up jarring resonances with the language, culture and practices of the Cape Malay community in which I grew up. At my first private Javanese dance class with ibu Kurniati I was asked to show what I knew of the steps. I stood and began to dance the little I had learnt. Ibu Kurniati stopped me. 'Sembhayang!", she said, "Sembhayang Dulu!" (Pray first!) At the time I did not speak Indonesian but I remembered my grandmother's insistence to "Sembhayang" or pray five times a day or before any major event. I knew the word. Ibu Kur then sat me down and taught me the opening gestures that

[30] http://isi-ska.ac.id/

precede every dance but the most secular. 'Sembah' means obeisance. Beatty (2004:99) explains that the word 'Hyang' is old Javanese for deity, while the word 'Eyang' refers to the generation of great-great-grandfather or 'venerated ancestor'. As explained in a previous chapter, the Cape Malay word for incense, 'myang' is cognate with these words for ancestors and deities.

In the 'sembahyang' that I grew up with, the female body was shameful and hidden. There was the distinct impression that communication with the divine (or prayer) was in spite of this female body and conducted in a manner where the body was denied. In this moment of training, the word 'sembahyang' was re-contextualised to allow, and indeed celebrate, my female body moving in space. Even more radically anathemic to my Cape Malay upbringing was that this movement of my female body would culminate in a movement on a stage. Not only was this 'sembahyang' that I was now learning, so that my body could dance, but additionally so that my body could dance in front of other people who would benefit. For the first time, I felt a space open up for my body as female performer from within my culture.[31] *I felt as though the 'venerated ancestors' to whom I addressed my gestural obeisance gazed kindly on me. I imagined them smiling as I danced and listened for them in the gamelan orchestra's big gong, where the ancestors are said to reside.*

Beatty's (2004) study on Javanism (or Kejawin as I described earlier), reveals a foregrounding of the body as a source of sacred teachings as opposed to reliance on a sacred Book. He explains: "Parallel to the young Muslim's training in Koranic recitation, the Javanist apprentice is told to `read/recite (*ngaji*) his or her own body'" (2004:161). Javanese dance training is based on and embodies Javanese

[31] Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world and Java is its centre.

philosophical principles, the breadth and complexity of which I am unable to discuss fully within the scope of this study; here, I limit my discussion to the body in Javanese dance training only (Beatty, 2004). I lean heavily on Hughes-Freeland's (2008) study of Javanese dance in order to support this work, as her reflections mirror so many of my own experiences,[32] except for the key difference that in my case I learnt Surakarta style dance.

Surakarta (also called Solo) style classical dance training is seen in Java as not merely physical but also as a training in 'becoming Javanese'. In Java, 'being Javanese' is regarded as full personhood. Foreigners, the insane, and children under the age of five are considered *dhurung Jawa* or 'not yet Javanese'. Being confused, or not being able to think rationally, is *ora Jawa*, or 'not Javanese' (Hughes-Freeland, 2008:81). Being Javanese is related to an intricate set of manners and behaviours that reflect how the spiritual refinement of the adult Javanese person has been integrated into every level of his/her behaviour. Dance training is thus an embodied training in Javanese values and in the closely linked aesthetics and spiritual understanding of the culture. The most important aspects of acculturation are those of *rasa*, from which follows notions of '*halus'* or refinement, and that of '*lahir'*-*'batin'*, or outer and inner (Hughes-Freeland, 2008). I discuss these below.

[32] Hughes-Freeland's training was in Jogjakarta style dance. Jogjakarta is the sister city of Surakarta (Solo) where I studied. The two were once one sultanate during the Mataram period but subsequently split and moved away from each other. They are now governed by separate monarchs, and, although the cultures of both court cities are remarkably similar, they exist in a restrained rivalry. Jogjakarta is larger and its Sultanate characterised by modernity and Islam, whereas Surakarta is smaller and its animist practices are still very much more apparent. In my experience of both styles, Jogjakarta style dance is more military inspired and staccato, while Surakarta style is more '*luwes'*, meaning smoother, supple, flowing. The Solo style of gamelan and dance is also considered more '*halus'*, or refined, although artists from Jogjakarta would disagree. From 2005 to 2007 I lived and danced in Jogjakarta.

“Dancing is as an education in *rasa*” and proclaims the pedagogic motto of Tamansiswa (the Indonesian Arts education system formed in 1922).[33] The Javanese concept of *rasa* means carrying “a heavy freight of significance” in Javanese culture (Hughes-Freeland, 2008: 46-47, 78). The dualistic separation of mind and body that characterises ‘western’ modes of thinking does not exist in Javanese culture, and ‘*rasa’* is used in numerous philosophical systems to give “a Javanese stamp to phenomenological explanations of being in the world” (Hughes-Freeland, 2008:79). Hughes-Freeland (2008: 183) uses the term to indicate “embodied consciousness or perception”, noting that, unlike Schechner’s (1985) ‘snout-belly-bowel’ *rasaaesthetics*, which emphasises the viscerality of mouth and guts, a Javanese appreciation of *rasa* refers to the “invisible, inner energies” of the body. Derived from an original Indian concept, the Javanese understanding of *rasa* blends the Sanskrit word *rasa* (taste, feeling, sensation, essence) with the Sanskrit word *rahasya* (secret, hidden, inner) to develop a particularly inflected variant. The most obvious dictionary definition of the Indonesian word *rasa* has to do with the sense of taste but, after taste, *rasa* travels in ever subtler layers of meaning from the outside of sense perception to the inner heart, and ultimately, to pure metaphysics (Gonda, 1973:256 cited in Benamou, 2010:41).

Beatty (2004:165) takes this further in his account of a conversation with a village mystic in Java who states that “God is in rasa”. Beatty explains that *rasa* is “taste, bodily feeling but also emotional feeling and awareness, inner meaning”, and

[33] *Tamansiswa* (Garden of Pupils) was founded in 1922 by educationalist Ki Hadjar Dewantara, a scion of the Jogjakarta royal court. It was a syncretic, pluralist education system under Javanist principles (as opposed to the Muslim Muhammadiyah system). It was non-governmental and offered an education in the Javanese Arts of music, dance, and visual arts and formed the basis of Arts Education in Java today. (Hughes-Freeland, 2008:46-47)

"refractions of God in a human faculty or centre of consciousness". He quotes the popular Javanese saying "*manunggal ing rasa"* (united in feeling), which implies that all life is united in feeling, and that feeling is not merely the sensation, but what underlies it and unifies all, enabling all living senses to function. Hughes-Freeland (2008) notes that *rasa* is of the category of concepts that is deliberately opaque and participates in a collusion that avoids meaning and promotes belonging. I suggest that another way to describe it is that foundational embodied knowledge cannot possibly be known until it is 'felt' by the body. In my opinion, the deliberate opacity of *rasa* is discursively maintained out of respect for the belief that it should be inherently 'beyond understanding'. This aligns with Manning's 2007 suggestion that embodied knowledge exists in a bodily realm that is in excess of sense and not reducible to logical comprehension. The deliberate vagueness that Hughes-Freeland (2008) mentions is perhaps an acknowledgement of this embodied way of knowing that exists beyond rationality and verbal communication. As any performer would freely admit, logical understanding cannot precede embodied cognition when it comes to bodily-located perception such as *rasa.* The Javanese student is "rarely told to 'think about' a mystical truth, rather to 'feel it for him/herself" (Beatty, 2004:160). Javanese arts then become a system of apprehending or contemplating the inner divine nature through the cultivation of a refined appreciation of the senses, or cultivation of *rasa*. In this way, a highly refined person can sense the divine with her body, or in other words, spirituality can be apprehended sensually. The more refined the person is, the more subtly they are able to feel.

It follows then that training in *rasa* is also a cultivation of the senses which leads to 'refinement', or *halus* as it is known in Indonesia*.* Politeness and awareness

of social position, not showing anger or hostility, an awareness of one's own and other's bodies in space, and speaking slowly and gently are just some of the attributes of 'refinement' or *halus*. Importantly, as Beatty (2004) points out, *halus* is also cognate with the immaterial or spiritual realms, as evidenced in the word for ghost, *mahluk halus* ('refined being'). *Halus* is therefore not just an aspect of dance or spiritual practice; it is also a manner of policing bodies and controlling behaviour (Hughes-Freeland, 2008:82). *Halus* is the antithesis of passion, freedom and instinct, which are seen as *kasar*, or 'coarse'. As an apocryphal example, the Solonese consider themselves *halus*, and other non-Central Javanese or non-Javanese as *kasar* or 'coarse'. In this way, ideas of '*halus'* behaviour entail a "collusiveness that comes from belonging" (Hughes-Freeland, 2008:82).

Along with Halus, went another term that I was familiar with from Cape Town: 'sopan' meaning 'polite' or 'nice', used mostly in reference to girls' behaviour. I was familiar with the term as punitive and referring to 'nice Muslim girl behaviour' that, as a child felt impossible for me to achieve. In Java, it was never blatantly pointed out that my behaviour was rude or coarse but it was politely explained that it was 'kurang', meaning 'not enough', as in 'kurang sopan' or 'kurang halus', thus always allowing for improvement and cultivation. My teachers explained the concepts of 'halus' and 'sopan' to me as integral to the study of dance, and so I adjusted my behaviour as part of the learning process. In my eagerness to learn dance, I was forced into cultivating all the acts of 'sopan' that I had so firmly rebelled against as a child.

By the end of the first year of study, 'halus' had been cultivated in me so effectively through my dance training (also a training in manners) that, whenever I ventured out of Solo to Jakarta or another island, my Solonese manners were immediately noticed and commented on. Of course, on one level it felt very oppressive. Ironically, instead of closing down or curtailing my sensual appreciation of the world, an embodiment of 'halus' in dance and in behaviour increased my sensitivity as it cultivated a sensitivity to other people's bodies, to space, and to the effect I had on others. This greater somatic sensitivity, or proprioceptive-kinaesthetic sensitivity, would be a measure in Javanese terms of how effective my education in rasa *was. So, in Hughes-Freeland's (2008) terms, my experience of Javanese dance training was a cultivation of 'embodied cognition or embodied consciousness/perception'.*

Cognate to the concept of cultivating *halus* is the concept of Inner and Outer – *Lahir/Batin*. The concept of *Batin* discussed earlier is from the Arabic word for 'inner' or 'hidden', and *Lahir* is from the Arabic word *Zahir,* meaning 'born' or 'manifest reality'. In the Introduction to this study, this is taken up specifically with relation to practices of *Ilmu Kebatinan* in Cape Town. Importantly, this concept is not akin to the Western idea of Body and Soul, as Javanese philosophy is not dualistic and makes no separation between the body and mind or spirit. Benamou (2010), in his discussion on studying Solonese gamelan and *rasa*, sees the movement from *lahir to batin* with specific regard to musical appreciation as a movement 'ever more inward' to a metaphysical state of cognition.

I encountered this movement from the outer to inner during my training in two ways: firstly in relation to the Javanese approach to dance pedagogy and my

training as a dancer, and, secondly in relation to my appreciation of performance as an audience member.

During the period of dance training, I was assured that I would learn the dance once the dance had 'masuk' or entered me, or I had 'masuk', or entered the dance. Dance is not taught with instructions or mirrors but by following behind the body of the teacher and copying gestures until they 'masuk'. The words for the moves such as "oekel pakkies" (curl of the fern) or "golek iwak" (looking for fish) are called out while the beats are counted. The stress of Gamelan music does not fall on the first beat as it does in most Western and African music; instead it falls at the end of a cycle. Gamelan is colotomic[34], with smaller gongs marking the intervals in a time cycle which ends with a bigger gong, and after 16 counts with the Gong Ageng (large/Great Gong). In dance training it is counted in eights, with the final gong often spoken by the teacher as "Gong". In my dance training, movements were not fitted to the beat and to do them on the beat or to evidence the beat with the body was considered, as one of my teachers said, "Bombasties!" (Bombastic). Movements flowed across the beat and the right moment for the movement, whether slightly on or after the beat was 'felt'. This difference in counting beats made memorising challenging, not to mention that I had never performed any of the moves before. Also Javanese dance is physically demanding as the lowered stance of the body with partially bent knees, the precise lock and arch of the tailbone, the upward curl of the toes, and the fluid shifting of weight from one side of the body to another is constantly strenuous. During the training teachers would ask "Sudah masuk? Belum masuk?" or "Already entered? Not yet entered?" Initially I struggled to get my head

[34] 'Colotomic' structure is a term coined for describing gamelan music but is applicable to other forms. It refers to a musical structure where specific instruments are used to mark off time intervals.

around the direction of entry. Did I enter it or it enter me? Later, when I knew the moves, teachers would remark that I had already memorised but not yet 'masuk'. It was only in the second year of training that my efforts were greeted with "Ya, cukup masuk" — 'yes, entered enough'. This made me aware of training as starting from the outside with mimicking the teachers moves until the moves were memorized, at which point the dancer's body and the dance existed in an interpenetrable field of ever-deepening affect.

This field also included the audience, and learning to appreciate dance followed the same injunction to 'masuk'. Initially I experienced difficulty watching the refined dances such as Srimpi or Bedhoyo. I found them slow and tedious and preferred the more action-oriented fight dances with Hanuman and weaponed princesses. I was assured that this was because I had not 'masuk' as an audience member. I took this to be what Hughes-Freeland (2008) explains as the 'collusion about belonging', where Javanese did not want to share knowledge about their arts with outsiders.

In the first few months of being there, every gamelan and dance recital I attended left me nauseous and shaken. Once, at the Mangkuregan Palace Tuesday morning rehearsal, I fell to the ground in a 'dizzy swoon'. The ground swayed and rocked beneath me; I felt the world become a vessel of sound and sensed warm, thick presences close around me; I was on the verge of vomiting and could not control my breathing. My excuse was the tropical weather, although nothing but live gamelan music and dance brought on these fugue states. Later, in my first year of training, I had the opportunity to attend the rehearsal of an old dance at the Keraton Solo – the Sultan's palace. The dance and musical notation had been discovered in an old

manuscript, and choreographers from STSI where I studied had been engaged to re-choreograph the dance. It was my first visit to the Kraton, not as a tourist but as part of a group of performers.

The rehearsal took place in the rehearsal 'pendopo' or pavilion. The earth around the pendopo was covered in beach sand, which was swept into patterns with a reed broom. A Javanese friend explained that the sand was from the beach Parangtritis in Jogjakarta where the Goddess of the South Sea was said to reside. The rehearsal was of a Srimpi dance with four female dancers. There was a small gamelan ensemble present as well as the choreographers, and some students interested in watching the restoration of the dance. To the side of the pendopo stood a narrow tower where, my friend explained, the Goddess of the South Sea met with the Sultan. The dance began and I settled in for tedium. A female friend noticed my distraction and I turned to her and whispered that I didn't like the slow dances yet. Somehow she coached me to feel the dance with my entire skin, concentrating on opening to the touch of the movement and music. As I did this a soft rain broke around the open pavilion and out of the corner of my eye, I saw a green mist float upward from the sand. As Hughes-Freeland (2008:149) says, 'seeing green' is said to be a sign of the presence of the Goddess of the South Sea.

The languid moves of the dance and the slow sonority of the gamelan felt eternally diffused in the soft rain, and my entire body dilated with floods of pleasurable sensation that in another context would have been embarrassing. One of my teachers who had re-choreographed the Srimpi turned and beamed at me with what I thought was recognition: "Ahh," he said, "Jadi masuk — so, it is; you have entered'. I pondered this experience where the intelligence of my flesh exceeded

logical understanding. In fact, it seemed that my attempts to logically understand the dance had blocked the potential for an 'embodied perception' of the dance. After this incident, I never experienced nausea at dance events again. It was as though the dissonance of resisting the boundary-dissolving nature of Javanese dance had caused my body to react with nausea. Once I was able to 'masuk', I could appreciate the dance from within, attending to as many subtle sensations as I could.

According to Hughes-Freeland (2008:80), "The embodied Javanese self is best understood not as a single entity but as a heterogeneous field of forces and potentials, some of which are more bounded than others". This notion of an unbounded embodied self is, according to Brennan (2004), in contrast to Western notions of the self-contained individual. Most non-Western cultures share, to varying degrees, ideas of 'transmission of affect and energy' where the "traffic between the biological and psychosocial is two way, and the social or psychosocial actually becomes apparent in the hormonal and affective dispositions of the individual" (Brennan, 2004:25). A training in Javanese dance for a foreigner would possibly be an entrainment in an interpenetrable, non-dualistic embodiment that challenges what Brennan (2004:25) refers to as the Western "historical aberration" of self-containment. Furthermore, if this aberrant fantasy of self-containment was predicated on a set of colonial beliefs that disrupted the order of the subject's body (per Carrie Noland's 2009 reading of Fanon's 'disrupted body-schema'), then it is possible that this training in a more unbounded affective embodiment could realign the proprioceptive-kinaesthetic self in such a way that it could decolonise the body.

The body in space

As Beatty (2004:161) suggests, Javanism or *Kejawin* takes the body as its holy book. The human form itself, called the 'Wet Book' (*kitab teles*), is considered a truer reflection of divinity than scriptures like the Q'uran. "Islam itself," he argues, "like every other tradition that falls within the Javanist compass, is moulded to human form, in a literal sense humanized". This results in a philosophical system which is rooted in daily reality and the reality of lived human experience. In Javanese philosophy then, the human body is the template for all manifest reality mirroring and being mirrored in it: "the notion of anthropocentric space is fundamental, serving as a model of perceptual and moral relativism and as a basis for speculation" (Beatty, 2004:162). In other words, the body is both the lens through which all reality is perceived and also the model of all reality. Beatty (2004:170) discerns four views that are the basis for the Javanist concept of anthropocentric space:

> … the body as mirroring the world with mountains, seas as well as historical and cultural figures reflected in the body; the body as centre and key to a patterned cosmos; the body and world as composed of the same four elements- earth, water, fire, air; and finally that the world and the human body exist together.

Washing the Dead: the body in *Spice Root*

Inspired by Javanese concepts of the body outlined above, *Spice Root* addressed the re-membering of the post slave body in a very literal manner. The play was conceived as a ritual for the middle passage, a ritual for a 'gaping hole' (as explained above) that was imagined to be in the shape of a human body. In *Spice Root* this body was re-membered: its bones were reassembled and washed, and a ritual of propitiation was performed for it. This ritual was based on the Javanese ritual of a *Slametan* or the Cape *Gadat.* From the Arabic word *Salaam* meaning 'peace', a *Slametan* is a ritual that restores order and equanimity to the community (Beatty,

2004:26). *Slametans* are performed for births, deaths, village cleansing, birthdays, or other transitional events like moving house. They follow different forms and I have attended strictly prayer and food based *Slametan* as well as Village-Cleansing *Slametan* that involved shadow puppet performances, masked dances and even rock bands. *Slametans* are also conducted if one has encountered repeated ill fortune, and to bring one back into harmony with one's *kanda empat* or 'four siblings'. The concept of the *kanda empat* or four siblings is discussed in detail below in the section on the *Srimpi.*

Veneration of the ancestors also forms a part of the *Slametan.* Beatty (2004) notes that, although his subjects rejected the idea of a personal afterlife, they took part in rituals for the ancestors, stating that rituals and prayers were a way of remembering the dead and our origins. He quotes informant, Pak D, who states: "The ancestors are nowhere but in us. You need not look outside. At a *Slametan* it is we who eat the food and hear the prayers. In so doing we verify our origins" (Beatty, 2004:174). In the *Slametan,* the ancestors eat the *sari rasa* (essence of *rasa)* that is offered to them. So, if incense and flowers are presented, they are able to eat the scent of both. If music and dance is presented, they too are able to enjoy the *rasa* of the aesthetic offering. Beatty (2004:59) takes care to point out the multivocality in practices of *Slametans* where there is often great ideological diversity. The ritual underpinnings of the *Slametan* move from being clearly explicated, to all attending, to being unsaid, where everyone draws "their own semiotic conclusion", to being entirely independent of and not needing a congregation for the ritual's efficacy. *Spice Roo*t fell into the "unsaid and under- interpreted" category in that it strove to allow for the audience to draw its own semiotic conclusion.

The ritual of the play followed on from the ideas about the Javanese concept of anthropomorphic space, and in keeping with Javanese conceptions of anthropomorphism, where the body is seen to have nine openings, the play was accordingly divided into nine sections. As Beatty (2004) claims, Javanese mysticism is characterized by an enjoyment of associative proliferation. The nine openings of the human body are also associated with the nine planets and the nine saints that purportedly brought Islam to Java. Another example is the *Kraton Solo* (Sultan's Palace in Surakarta), which is laid out according to sacred geography with nine gates. The nine dancers of the heirloom dance *Bedhoyo Ketawang*, performed yearly to commemorate the Sultan's accession to the throne, also represent openings to the human body as well as the human body itself. The dancers, according to Becker (1993), represent from one to nine: attachment, mind, neck, chest, genitals or lower end of spinal column, right arm, left arm, emergent desire or right leg, rear desire or left leg. In *Spice Root*, the 'body' was treated in the manner that a Cape Muslim corpse is prepared for burial, in the course of which the body is bathed and then each hole covered with incense, herbs, and flowers before being wrapped first in cotton wool and then in cloth. Each of the nine sections, or scenes, of the play was associated with the appropriate herb; for example the first scene in which the bones were lifted from the ocean bed was associated with *kencur,* or the resurrection lily (*Kaempferia galangal*), and the *Srimpi* scenes are associated with *temu lawak* (*Curcuma zanthorrhiza*), a ginger known for its properties of cleansing and restoring the liver, which is considered the seat of feeling in Indonesia, much like the Western 'heart'. The nine scenes, and their attendant medicinal roots and spices, sealed up the orifices of this body, restoring it to itself and laying it to rest with the proper

rites. In this way, the *Slametan* was a ritual for the ancestors within us, where we verify our origins by addressing the ancestors who are lost, erased, drowned, dismembered in the passage of slavery.

(ii) 'TEXT'

A fundamental difference between WTWGM and Spice Root is the way in which the text (by which I mean all spoken and gestural actions occurring onstage) was handled. The reason for this difference lies primarily in the solo nature of WTWGM: I was in direct control of every aspect of the production of meaning in the play; in Spice Root*, however, I was working in a new third language (Indonesian) with second-language Indonesian speakers whose mother tongue was Javanese and who were also non-English-speaking. A lot of the text was generated collaboratively. With regards to the script, the cast felt that they wanted to use English in certain scenes, which I wrote for them. On arrival in South Africa we discovered that the actors' spoken English was difficult for the South African ear to understand. I considered this unimportant having spent two years watching shadow puppet performances in High Javanese, which no-one really understood; the shadow puppet shows were not less appreciated because the words weren't understood. As far as I was concerned, the difficulty in getting tongues around a foreign language was part of what the play was trying to examine on stage. Feedback in South Africa however was that people wanted to understand the words and the actors felt that they wanted to satisfy this. So, at what I considered a sacrifice to the rhythm of the piece, the cast spent many days with UCT voice teacher Yvonne Banning refining their English pronunciation. At the end, I was reassured through audience feedback that the actors' struggle to make the foreign language sounds was indeed read by the audience as incidentally*

raising issues around loss of language and difficulty of learning the colonial language. Ultimately this proved more effective in terms of conveying the difficulty of language than unintelligibility, which could potentially leave the audience frustrated and signify lack of care on the part of the director or performers. The above serves as an example of how control of the production of meaning was a lot more collaborative than with WTWGM. Both my parents, Yusuf and Cass Abrahams, were also heavily involved in the production, with my mother on stage and my father acting as company manager. They too had a say in the direction of the play along with all the performers. Whist this was frustrating for me, it did lead to a richer participatory experience for everyone involved. The description of the scenes below also demonstrates the collaborative, multivocality of the play and serves to outline the structure of the play as performance 'text'.

An Outline of the play

The overall tonal range in the show is sepia. Naked skin, natural dyed batik, roots, fragrant powders, spice bark, leather shadow puppets, teak and brass combine to give the texture of something ancient and almost forgotten. The gamelan instruments in wood and polished brass are a musical representation of the visuals; a large circular gong in shiny brass, brass bells and glowing brass keys. Piercing this visual, aural and olfactory unity s is the red of a plastic bucket, the blue of a gas stove, bright green dance scarves and the sharp smell of frying spices.

The stage is set with large white fin or wave-shaped screens that are made of cloth tied onto a metal frame with rope. The screens are suspended with rope from the stage rigging at different heights. They move up and down on ropes that the actors

manipulate and then tie off, like sailors on a ship. Sometimes the fins are sails and the stage is a ship, sometimes they are waves and the stage is adrift at sea. In the upstage centre area is a large static fin screen for the shadow puppet scene and to the area upstage right is a raised platform with musical instruments. Downstage left is a raised gas cooker, a collection of big ginger roots, turmeric, and galangal, along with cinnamon bark, and stone mortar and pestles. There is a stool and a bamboo rice basket with rice on it.

Prologue: Before the play starts, and as the audience enters, Cass Abrahams sits stage left winnowing rice on a round, flat bamboo tray. The sound of the rice on the bamboo is mic'ed and amplified. The intention was to create a soundscape that resembled the aural texture perceived by a small toddler sitting on a kitchen floor and for the gamelan to emerge out of this texture. An actor enters as the doors open; he is wearing a sarong wrapped around the lower half of his body. He carries a red plastic bucket on his shoulder, squats centre-stage, and begins to inscribe a spiral on the stage in yellow powder from the bucket. The yellow powder is a mixture of the root Temu Lawak (traditional Javanese medicine for cleaning the Liver/Heart – the seat of feeling), lulur mandi rempah (a herbal body cleanser traditionally used in the Javanese Courts), and sand from the beach at Parangtritis, home of the Queen of the South Seas. The smell fills the theatre - spicy, flowery with a woody astringency. The overall effect created with the earth toned costumes, the slow moving performers, the fragrance of the yellow powder, incense and spices is an evocation of a fugue or faint recollection at the edge of memory or dream.

Opening Srimpi: The musicians enter and seat themselves on the raised platform and begin to play. One starts a slow incantation to Siwa in Balinese style.

Over this sound the actor drawing the spiral speaks an incantation to the sky and earth. The Srimpi dancers enter, with one singing Tembang Megatruh, a traditional Javanese song. Another dancer joins in the spoken invocation with the actor drawing the circle onstage. The dancers come into position centred on the spiral, with each dancer sitting in one of the four cardinal directions. They perform the Sembahyang and begin the Srimpi Dance. Rising up from the ground the dancers begin the langud shifting of weight from one side to the other as though floating in water, their hands perform the gesture of 'golek iwak' (looking for fish) but the movement is extended to encompass all the space around their bodies. They are searching for something. Sloly they circle each other, their green waist scarves lifted to eye level as they smoothly glide the cloth as though wiping tears or following sinuous ribbons of seaweed.

Scene Two: Two dancers break off and play a dialogue while dancing. The dialogue is about a storm at sea that raises the bones of the dead from the ocean floor and washes them up on the shore. The gamelan sounds likes waves washing over a coral shore, bleached bones clattering over each other. The dancers depict collecting the bones, licking them back to life, breathing into their mouths, and listening. One dancer moves behind the shadow puppet screen and slowly opens her mouth. From behind the shadow puppet screen, as if emerging from the mouth of the dancer, two wing-shaped gunungan[35] *flutter and, controlled by the puppeteer, they*

[35] *Gunungan* open each shadow puppet show. They are leaf or wing shaped shadow puppets that depict the mountain (gunung), the tree of life, and all the mythical animals associated with it as well as a pair of gates or doors. They contain all of life, and the shadow play begins with their movement announcing a change in realm, and that all present are travelling to another realm. A full explanation of the symbolism and ritual implications is well beyond the scope of this study. For more see Samastuti Sumukti's 1997 doctoral dissertation on Gunungan at http://www.anthropology.hawaii.edu/people/alumni/pdfs/1997-sumukti.pdf . Please see images for a depiction of the *gunungan.*

grow in size until they are fully seen. The Gunungan commence the shadow puppet scene.

Scene Three:Wayang Kulit/Shadow puppet: This scene is performed in high Javanese and Indonesian. From behind the screen, in the traditional shadow puppet style, it depicts the Java War (1825) and the defeat of general Diponegoro by Dutch Governor General De Kock, who used lies and trickery to arrest Diponegoro, sending him into exile, and his soldiers and other members of the resistance into slavery. Whilst this episode does not depict the actual details of the VOC slave trade to South Africa, it forms part of the Wayang Perjuang repertoire or "Struggle Wayang". This repertoire relates to the Javanese struggle for independence from the Dutch. We used the already existing puppets from this repertoire, adding a large bottomed slave ship and modifying the original script very slightly. It was chosen by the dalang (puppeteer) Sofari Hidayat, who felt that it related to the story of South Africa because of the depiction of Dutch treachery and the exile and enslavement of those who resisted occupation. This scene is accompanied by the musicians playing gamelan instruments. At the end only the rebab remains.

Scene Four: The Ocean's Tears: ATopeng/ Masked dance solo by Theresia Sri Kurniati as the Indian Ocean. The masked dance by Theresia Sri Kurniati was a collaboration between Kurniati and her composer husband Aloysius Suwardi on the Rebab. They felt the rebab related to oceanic trade because it had arrived in Java via Islamic trade routes and is played in Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and many parts of Asia. Kurniati choreographed in response to the idea of loss and what it meant for the Ocean to be complicit in the slavery of her children. Her dance embodied the

Indian Ocean as the goddess, and the goddess' tears as well as the Ocean itself. She made this dance in response to her memory of television footage of the devastating 2004 Tsunami.

Scene Five: Monologue: Performed by Lanjar Sarwanto as a young Javanese sailor who works on a slaving vessel travelling from the Indonesian Archipelago, Batavia, and the Mollucas to Cape Town. He performed this in a square set of scaffolding on the Spanish Web trapeze rope with the rope moving from being the rigging of the ship to becoming a rope that bound and hung him. Sarwanto choreographed the very physical piece for himself and guided me in the writing of an English monologue. The text dealt with feelings of powerlessness in the face of slavery and the loss of home that being an indentured sailor implied. It told of his longing for land and human connection.

Scene Six: Storm at Sea: Dorothea Quin Haryati choreographed the Storm at Sea. She used Balinese dance, especially the movements that usually depict trance possession, such as extreme backbends and tremors to signify both the possession by the goddess and the rage of the goddess, which caused extreme distortions as it moved through the entranced body. She was also inspired by the tsunami of 2004, but from the position of an enraged sea. Quin tugged at the white sails that hung above the stage, sending them smashing into each overhead. The musical accompaniment was an instrument that Alosius Suwardi had created; he played an adapted gendher, a mutli-keyed metallophone, with the bow of a rebab, to create a violent discordant sound.

Scene Seven: A recipe: Cass Abrahams recites the names of the spices in her dish, naming the places they came from and at what cost to the local populations, while

she adds each spice to a braise of onions and chicken pieces cooking on the burner. She waits for the smell of the spice to release before adding the next one, and the room fills with the smell of spices cooking. During this Wahyu Widayati softly tells the story of Bawang Merah in Javanese while pounding garlic and onion in her mortar and pestle.

Scene Eight: A song: Aloysius Suwardi as musical director, with the support of the cast, felt that at this point the audience needed something to lighten the mood and so, at this point in the play, the entire cast played music and sang a simple song in Javanese about companionship and enjoying company. Fortunately the musical segue transitioned well into the next scene.

Scene Nine: Goro-goro/Comedy: This was a comic interlude in low Javanese by Sofari Hidayat, and in Afrikaans by me, in which the comedy team of a skinny mother and her fat daughter make jokes about food, fat and sex. These characters are traditional to shadow puppetry where the 'highbrow' action is interrupted for some fun and ribald jokes about topical issues that everyone understands. Out of this Wahyu Widayati emerges as the fat daughter dancing to a Ghoema[36] song, and speaking a poem. The poem about time and rhythm has the sung refrain "I recall". With every "recall" that Wahyu Widayati sings the drummer, Hidayat, switches drum patterns, and Wahyu responds by dancing to the drum pattern styling. In this way, the two drum and dance as many different rhythms from across the islands of Indonesia as they can. This scene was always improvised and played out with teasing and encouragement from the rest of the cast. The moves she made in this scene

[36] *Ghoema* is a style of music peculiar to the Cape that is a blend of diverse rhythms and instrumentation.

where identified by Theresa Smith of the Cape Times as recognisable from the moves of the voorloper in the Klopse. (2005)

The closing Srimpi Dance: The closing Srimpi starts where the opening Srimpi left off and together the two bookend the play. The dancers walk into their circle in a stately, measured way. They pick up the sinuous flow of the Srimpi, turning and circling one another. Their green waist scarves are extended to the centre they move around in a circle, gestures mirroring each other. Finally when they have put what the centre contains to rest, they come to sitting on the ground, wash their hands with their green scarves and in unison, like all their moves, they raise their palms to their foreheads in the Sembhayang. The dance has ended.

Post Show: After the Dance the audience were invited to come on stage and given tasting cups to taste the food that Cass Abrahams had cooked throughout the latter half of the show. They remained to chat with the cast about gamelan, shadow puppets, etc.

As my description of the structure and content of the play shows, *Spice Root* was grounded in the use of multiple languages and multiple choreographic and compositional influences. This made the production of meaning a much more open-ended endeavor in *Spice Root* than it was in *WTWGM*, where my authorial voice was singular. There was a multiplicity and a mutivocality (in the style of a *Slametan* as described earlier) out of which the audience could generate a personal understanding of the work. There was often a looseness of meaning in the production of Javanese forms, where the audience were given the space to form their own “semiotic conclusion” (Beatty, 2004) that I had learnt to become comfortable with, and found to be generative rather than alienating. I was interested

in using this ambiguity of association in order to produce a different mode of attending, and to open up possibilities for a more 'embodied cognition'. I was hoping that the lack of easy meaning would allow for the audience to *masuk* the work, and for an intensification of affect and sensation leading to the transmission of *rasa.* As discussed in the personal story above, *masuk* cannot be controlled and offers a highly personal experience that may or may not be recognized or shared by others.

Before closing, I want to discuss in more detail the two most open-ended scenes in the play — the *Srimp*i and the two dances of the Indian Ocean — because these dance scenes were the most loaded at the same time with both 'freight of meaning' (as Hughes Freeland,2008 says of *rasa*), *and* the 'unsaid or under-explained', as Beatty (2004) says of the *Slametan*. Relying solely on the "transmission of affect" (Brennan, 2004), or in Javanese terms, the *masuk* of *rasa,* these dances contained a proliferation of associations and were also intimately connected to the embodiment of the Indian Ocean in the form of the Javanese Ocean goddess, Nyai Loro Kidul, Goddess of the South Sea. They therefore, in a sense, also represent the core project of re-membering the post-slave *female* body.

The *Srimpi*

Spice Root began and ended with a *Srimpi, a sacred women's dance.* In a way, the entire play, *Spice Root* is an explication of the *Srimpi. The Srimpi was* choreographed by Theresia Sri Kurniati, and danced by Dorothea Quin Haryati, Widya Widayati, Kurniati and me; the music was composed by Aloysius Suwardi, and orchestration included the sacred *kemanak*, used mostly in the heirloom *Bedhoyo* dance. According to Suwardi the *kemanak,* a banana-shaped metallophone with a thin slit

along one side was a tantric instrument as it contained the male and female genitals in one and so contained the entire universe. Suwardi felt that this made it an instrument of the goddess of the South Sea and would call her into the space. Kurniati choreographed in response to the *rasa* evoked by the music.

The lore of the *Srimpi* relates to anthropomorphic space and rituals of the body, and so is considered in some detail because this *Srimpi* provided the perfect vehicle for more fully conveying the medicine wheel as a feminine space that was attempted with *WTWGM*. The *Srimpi* also relates directly to the body of the audience and the ancestors, and, importantly, all this information is transmitted through affect from the bodies of four female dancers.

Javanese dancer Ben Suharto explains that the *Srimpi* is about balancing dark and light, life and death, where the dancer uses “balance as the source and strength of power” (Burton, 2009:82). The *Srimpi* is thus similar to the Navajo sand painting and medicine wheel I discussed earlier, in that its function is to restore order and balance in the worlds of those who directly experience the dance. The *Srimpi*, however, differs in an essential way in that the order is being restored for everyone present, both as a community, and as individuals. The way that it does this is related to the Javanese concept of the body as a heterogeneous field of intensities, and the creation of an allusive space that is at the same time universal and personal.

The word *Srimpi* is made up of two words — *seri,* which means 'the sublime', and *impi* which means 'vision' or ‘dream’ The *Srimpi* (usually involving four female dancers), together with the *Bedhoyo* — another dance form — are the more sacred or ‘refined’ of the Javanese dances. They are heirloom dances also often used for historical preservation. For example, there is a Srimpi commemorating the poisoning

of a party of invading Dutch, where the dancers dance with glass goblets symbolising the seduction and poisoning of an invading Dutch party. These form part of an embodied cultural repertoire of Java and commemorate important historical incidents in a manner that recalls Beatty's (2004) description above of the human body that contains both history and geography. Additionally, with their slow-moving, meditative style, the dances are opportunities for the audience to experience contemplation.

In the *Srimpi,* the dancers represent the four elements and cardinal directions. The four dancers also represent the *kanda empat*, or 'four siblings', with whom, according to Indonesian lore, humans are all born. In physical terms, the four siblings a baby is born with are: placenta; blood; vernix caseosa; and amniotic fluid. According to lore, each of these is a separate non-human being. Beatty (2004:178) cites an informant who identifies the four siblings (*kanda empat)* as "sight, hearing, smell, and speech". Eiseman (1990) explains that in the Balinese understanding of the *kanda empat* (which corresponds to the original Javanese concept)[37] the *kanda empat* carry a great spiritual significance, and are believed to accompany each individual throughout their lives and in to the afterlife. They can be called on for assistance through ritual, and consulted diagnostically to reveal the holistic health of a person. They are multidimensional beings with positive, negative, intellectual, and emotional traits, much as humans are. Their demonic aspects can be called on to accomplish feats of Black magic, their angelic aspects for meditation, and so on. If good relations are maintained with them, the person prospers; if not, they can harm

[37] In the 16th Century the Javanese Hindu kingdoms were defeated by Islamic forces and moved to East Java and Bali, where they continued to practice Hinduism and preserve remnants of Hindu Java culture. Balinese Hindu practices often preserve details of the Javanese originals, which have disappeared under Islamicisation.

and even kill their human fifth sibling. The *kanda empat* are also associated with the four cardinal directions, and thus spatially orientate and locate the individual in this dimension and in other dimensions (Eiseman, 1990:100-107). As Beatty (2004) points out, Javanist philosophy is characterised by a proliferation of symbolic association (though with a firm foundation in real life), and so the associations with the *kanda empat* and the *Srimpi* are more numerous than those I touch on for the purposes of explication in this chapter.

In the *Srimpi* the four dancers become the *kanda empat* for each individual viewer. The viewer has to 'enter' into the dance and become the fifth sibling or the manifest human being. The dancers then represent the four siblings moving around the viewer. In this way, each viewer experiences the full effect and purpose of the dance, which is to restore the human being to order with its four siblings, and thus with all of reality. It is important to note that, unlike Western understandings and experience of performance, where performance is illusory and fictional, Javanese dance is understood to "create worlds" (Hughes-Freeland, 2008:118). In Javanese court dance, of which the *Srimpi* is part, reality is constituted by *rasa*, or 'embodied cognition', as well as intellectual understanding. This produces a "poetic response to the world" that, in turn, produces a series of metaphors that, in turn, "produces an instrumentality which is more than representational symbolism" (Hughes-Freeland, 2008:118. Hughes-Freeland (2008) examines how this engages with both the political and the cosmological simultaneously. She suggests that it is able to do so, and to proliferate meanings, because of the abstract nature of Javanese court dance. The dance choreography, whilst having names for individual movements, does not have any consistent meaning (as in Bharat Natyam for example): the movements of the

Srimpi are associative and allusive, eliciting affect rather than defining meaning. Hughes-Freeland (2008:128) quotes Jogjakarta Court historian, Brontodiningrat, who suggests that, not only are the movements in Javanese court dance abstract but "meaning, intention, and content" are also abstract. Allied to this are ideas around the female body and its "symbolic power"(Hughes-Freeland, 2008:143). For Hughes Freeland (2008), this "symbolic power" is created through the dance's ability to proliferate meaning and stand as symbol for metaphysical concepts in a way that is de-gendered and desexualised. 'The symbolic power then is not allied to the natural, erotic power of the female body' (2008: 143) but to a set of meanings around concepts like Unity, non-gendered duality, transcendence, etc. Whilst this makes sense to me in terms of my understanding and reading around Javanese dance it differs from my actual embodied experience. This difference is perhaps because of my experience in Surakarta as opposed to Jogjakarta which is considered to be much more animist than Islamic in it's practices. My experience of Surakarta women's dance was highly erotic in addition to all the other plethora of meaning. For me, the presence of *Nyai Loro Kidul* as the sacred feminine or *Sakti,* insisted on the bodied female erotic as the undeniable source or root of all the generated meanings around it. Surakartan sculptural iconography in sites such as the Sultan's palace reception lobby and Candi Sukuh are explicitly bodied in sculptures of anthropomorphic genitalia.

Whereas *WTWGM* located the performer's body at the centre of the medicine wheel, in *Spice Root*, the audience occupies the space at the centre. Each audience member becomes the body upon which spatial and narrative trajectories

intersect. Each audience member themselves becomes the centre point, the body being restored to order.

The theme of *Spice Root* was a 'washing of the dead', or a propitiation of slaves lost in the middle passage. Following this the idea was that the audience members would experience the intended re-membering of the fragmented parts of their own history. The idea was that this would happen through affect or *rasa*, and not necessarily through rational understanding. The space created by the *Srimpi* for the body of the audience member was intended to be that space that Deleuze and Guattari (1994 cited in Grosz,2008) describe as the territory or frame in which intensity can be magnified and affect transmitted. Additionally, this frame or territory is by the nature of the *Srimpi* and the *kanda empat,* a womb-like space. In this space, the audience member is 'the baby' and the four dancers are placenta, blood, vernix caseosa, and amniotic fluid as well as earth, water, fire, and air. This melds Brennan's (2004) idea of the womb as the place where affect is first transmitted, to Cixous' 1977 notion of the theatre as the womb of the mother or the sea. In *Spice Root*, instead of the actor occupying this central empty space, the *Srimpi* invites the audience to *masuk*, or to enter into the dance. In this way, the audience enters into the interpenetrable field of affect or *rasa*, where the semiotic conclusion reached is informed by their personal embodied appreciation.

Water and the Sacred Feminine

In *WTWGM*, the totem animal of the fish is located in the realm of the waters and the underworld. Through the journey of the play the fish are freed from the stagnant rock pool into the open ocean, where they are rescued by their family. *Spice Root* is located in the same space on the Javanese axis mundi that Wessing (2006) speaks of,

in which water and the subterranean are spaces for the unborn and the dead. This amniotic realm in *Spice Root* is employed in the *Srimpi,* with each dancer representing one of the four siblings, and the audience member the foetus. However, *Spice Root* differs in its oceanic possibilities. The open ended nature of the *Srimp*i is one in which the audience can refigure and reimagine themselves. This oceanic potential for transformation — where the ocean's unboundedness represents a borderless site where time and space can be transcended and identities refigured — is represented by the liminal figure of the goddess of the South Seas, *Nyai Loro Kidul*. In the Javanese axis mundi, and the beings who populate it, this goddess is a *naga* or serpent deity, half woman and half serpent (Wessing, 2006). The *naga* and other symbolic animals are described as "markers of place or states of being, and aids in transition between states of being" (Wessing, 2006:205). *Nyai Loro Kidul* takes this further by herself being a transitional hybrid being. As a chthonic *naga, Loro Kidul* is associated with femaleness and the watery realms of the underworld, but, unlike the fish, the *naga* is a liminal creature. Whereas the fish cannot escape the horizontal realm in which it dwells, and is condemned to be acted upon, the *naga* is able to move across both horizontal and vertical planes of the axis mundi. Whilst still being an underworld creature, the *naga* is able to scale the axis mundi to different realms and is even found in the upper world in the form of a bird. This makes the *naga* an aid in transitions or rites of passage, where humans require guidance in the process of transitioning from one state to another, or, in imitation of the serpentine *naga,* are required to shed a skin and be born anew.

The *naga* is also associated with tantric practices in which the energy in the human body, which resides at the base of the spine and is represented as a sleeping

snake, rises up towards the head. Urban (2010:4) states that "Tantrism is practically impossible to define and consists of diverse esoteric precepts and practices that are found across South, Inner and East Asia from the sixth century down to the present day". The practices of Tantra then are highly localised, but share in basic principles which are functional in that they treat the body's energy as a technology which can be developed and deployed to serve specific ends. Imprtant to my discussion is the figuration of the source of this energy as female. The sleeping *naga* at the base of the spine is conceived of as a female energy called *Sakti.* Urban (2010:81) offers a useful etymology linking the root of all manifest life with the sleeping *naga* at the base of the body::

> The Sanskrit noun ´sakti comes from the root ´sak', "to be able" or "to do," and means "capability," "power," "energy," or "strength" on all levels of the universe. S´akti is the divine energy of the goddess, the power of both life and death, creation and destruction, which flows through the cosmos, the social order, and the human body alike.

According to Wessing (1997a:205), "The idea of the female as a locus of power (*sakti*) became far more pervasive in Indonesia than it ever did in India, where the concept originated". In the figure of the goddess of the Indian Ocean, *Nyai Loro Kidul*, ideas of the female as source of power and the *naga* as transitional being, come together. This half woman half serpent carries the power of life and death as well as the power to bestow boons, ruling over the creatures of the sea and underworld, and having direct effects on the human world.

But even more importantly, *Nyai Loro Kidul* is female. "As queen of the spirit realm, there is a way in which all female presences in Java may be said to flow from Ratu Kidul" (De Smet Trumbull, 2013: 151). In Javanese dance the female body is seen as carrying allegorical meaning, and, according to my dance teachers at ISI Solo,

represents the body of the goddess during the dance. Sometimes dancers are even possessed by her, a state my Jogjakarta style dance teacher Mbak Ning reportedly experienced during a performance at the Jogjakarta palace. The goddess is then a figure of the divine feminine who can be embodied on stage. Hughes-Freeland (2008) argues that the female body in Javanese court dance carries symbolic and allegorical weight, but is twice disembodied in both the choreography and as a symbol of a metaphysical concept. She qualifies this with the fact that Jogjakarta style dance does not include the tantric references or the presence of *Nyai Loro Kidul* as does Solo style dance. My experience of Solo style dance in contrast to this was one of extreme but *internal* sensuality in which the subjective experience was highly personally erotic while appearing from the outside as calm and meditative. This was also the experience of *masuk* that I described in an earlier narrative account in the dance training section of this chapter.

From these experiences, I began to understand Javanese ideas around an embodied appreciation of the spiritual. In my view, the figure of *Nyai Loro Kidul* encompasses combined associations of the sacred as an embodied female experience. She is liminal, able to shift form and change states; she is the source of all power *sakti;* she is chthonic and chaotic, but invoked to restore balance and order. In my view, the dances of *Nyai Loro Kidul* in *Spice Root* were an embodied response to the traumatised, numb body that had experienced colonial violence, and in the process been alienated from its proprioceptive, kinaesthetic power. The erotic enjoyment of the female body in languorous motion revived senses dulled and shut down, while the dance itself made space for the celebration of the female body in

motion, reclaiming the sensation of proprioceptive-kinaesthetic sensitivity as a bodied right.

Wessing (1997b) remarks that indigenous or Islamic sea spirits are venerated across Indonesia and of these predominantly female sea spirits, *Nyai Loro Kidul* is the most discussed. An in-depth examination of this figure exceeds this particular study and so *Nyai Loro Kidul* will remain an allusive, elusive spectral presence considered for her pertinience to the works discussed. In *Spice Root* the Indian Ocean is personified as the goddess. Theresia Sri Kurniati, and Dorothea Quin Haryati, both dance solos depicting different responses of this goddess to the event of the middle passage. For De Smet Trumbull (2013:11), "excess and liquidity operate not simply as themes or tropes, but also as figures with a job to do, as modes of dissolving hardened structure, and thereby allowing alternate forces and alternate narratives to emerge". In particular, the figure of *Nyai Loro Kidul* points to a liquid excess that is connected to a revalorization of "teeming forms of tropical life where the orientalist construction of the Indies as a non-Western, feminine site of excessive wetness, excessive fertility, and excessive languor is bypassed for an alternate indigenous liquidity" (De Smet Trumbull, 2013:1).

In this view, *Nyai Loro Kidul* as a deeply generative indigenous figure is a gateway to a way of thinking about Indonesia that originates "on the islands, not in the metropole" (De Smet Trumbull, 2013:2). This liquidity overspills the 'bivalve construct of postcoloniality', where the work of postcolonial theory is to disentangle "the original catastrophic event with its aftermath" (De Smet Trumbull, 2013:11).

Whilst emphasising the validity of postcolonial studies, De Smet Trumbull (2013) posits a different notion of postcolonial time predicated on her use of the

trope of liquidity. In this refiguring of time she sees figures of liquidity “as modes of dissolving hardened structures, and thereby [as] allowing alternate forces, alternate narratives to emerge”. For De Smet Trumbull (2013:11), “guardian spirits, ancestral presences, and other residues from the deep past well up in the present” and indeed the future, insisting “on remembering and retrieving what came before contact”. *Nyai Loro Kidul* is one (perhaps the most important one, to both De Smet Trumbull and to me) of those spirits welling up from a deep past. The excess of the goddess’s liquidity is, for me, akin to the excess to orthodox Islamic practice in the Cape Muslim community. For me, the deep past wells up into the present through the practices in excesses to formal religious observance, like the *Myang* burned as incense at the Cape, where the meaning of the word *Myang* — from the Javanese for ‘divinised forefather’ (Beatty, 2004) — is lost, but the practice continues. Even the honorific of the goddess *Nyai* (which as you’ll recall was the honorific for Miss, then became the word for concubine, and then a pejorative for the sex act itself) wells through memory and insists, as De Smet Trumbull (2013) suggests, on remembering and retrieving.[38] In *Spice Root*, Kidul’s hybrid half woman half *naga* body allows her to negotiate the space between life and death, and therefore between the past and the present. In scene two of the play two actors relate how a storm at sea has brought “creatures unbidden once hidden” to the surface exposing them for all to see. In this scene the goddess’s power over tsunamis is called upon to bring the bones of the dead from the ocean floor up to the surface. Through her liminal position between life and death, past and present, she wells up and retrieves lost memory and connection. Importantly this retrieval exists in the realm of *rasa*

[38] It is of interest to note that Parangtritis Beach, the site of the goddess home on the South Coast of Java, is a modern day place of prostitution and illicit drinking.

and affect, where a corporeal re-memory can occur. The chthonic tantric goddess suffuses the female performing body, allowing re-membering to become an active, sensual presence. The two danced solos and the performance of the *Srimpi,* make present again what has disappeared and this is effected through the representation of the goddess.

According to De Smet Trumbull's informant, and my own dance teachers, the goddess is always present during Javanese classical dance. "She is always there, when the music and the dancer stop … or when the body moves without effort" (De Smet Trumbull, 2013:170). And though Theresia Sri Kurniati and Dorothea Quin Haryati, the choreographer dancers in *Spice Root*, would never directly say that they 'felt the goddess' during their dance, their excessive bodily sensations that had to be 'shaken off' afterwards hinted at the presence of something more. For me, dancing the *Srimpi* always felt envelopingly pleasurable, like swimming. The sacred *Bedhoyo Ketawang*, which commemorates the Sultan of Solo's ascension to the throne and includes nine dancers, is said to have been taught to Sultan Senopati in 1584 during his tryst with the goddess at the bottom of the ocean. The Solonese dance skirt is a two metre long batik cloth, which is extended with the addition of an inner cloth of about one metre in length. The excess is pleated in front and passed through the dancers legs so that the long cloth resembles a sinuous tail. The dancer flicks the mermaid tail from side to side with her feet. In this way she resembles the goddess with a female upper body and a serpentine lower body. The movements of the dance are also an evocation of the slow, sensuous motion of water. In fact, the dance itself is characterised by the aesthetic of '*toyah milih'*, or flowing water. De

Smet Trumbull (2013:171) sees the *bedhaya* itself as “constituting a spectral space full of bodies, sensations, spirits – a liquid world that can be entered”.

This was the aim of *Spice Root*, to create a multiplicity of associations, presences and sensations – a thick viscosity of memory like the bottom of the ocean into which the audience could dive to retrieve or re-member what had been lost. But more than that, *Spice Root* aimed for the audience to enter this liquid world and *feel* it on and in their skin.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

In this final chapter I evaluate the project of re-membering in terms of its function as a 'Somatic mode of attending' *to* and *with* the body as Csordas (1993) suggests. In the course of writing this thesis I have discovered that these modes of attention are simultaneous processes, and while at times they are clearly distinct, at other times they merge and become indistinguishable. This simultaneity of attending *to* and *with* is reflected in this conclusion. In order to attend *to* my body in this study I drew on self-reflexive phenomenological accounts as epiphanies, which acted as catalysts for my practice, and opened out into thought in the writing of this study. I hoped to expand on Spry's (2001:721) idea that embodied auto-ethnographic performance as a movement from the "internally somatic to the externally semantic" by allowing the movement to flow from the embodied epiphany through performance into writing and research. I feel that I realised this intention by utilising a liquid modality in which a research direction emerged as a deepened reflection on the somatic epiphanies in order to parse their sociocultural or ethnographic implications. Baderoon (2014) and her ideas on the concatenation of Islam, slavery, and systemic sexual violence defined the territory in theoretical terms for me, bringing scholarship to my 'felt' responses of performance-making, and inspiring me with an urgency to understand and acknowledge the founding moment of slavery and systemic sexual violence. Additionally, Baderoon's (2014) monograph provided me with points of engagement to compare and contrast my experiential findings and 'intuitions' with rigorous research. One such area was that of my insistence on the appreciation of a pre-colonial or pre-slave past that acknowledged diaspora. For example, while dance

training and performance making in Java, I found that, by delving into erased diasporic memory through an embodied experience, the narrative around South African slave history was enriched. This proposal I believe decentres the Western VOC narrative, allowing other, non-Western, 'insider' flows and circulations of cultural memory to emerge through examination of words, gestures, and their embodied antecedents. I found my thoughts around this to resonate with Gqola's (2010) and Jappie's (2011) understanding of 'Malay' identification as a valorisation of diasporic and creole histories and identity formation for the descendants of slaves. Equally generative for my focus on slavery, and particularly the 'middle passage', was Glissant's (1992 cited in Erasmus, 2001:23) idea that "diversion or turning away from the point of colonial entanglement needs to be accompanied with reversion or a turning towards this moment". In Erasmus' (2001:23) view, this return "entails reclaiming and living with fragments of origins and entanglements that often are "contradictory, multiple and incoherent or incomplete". Diving into this point of entanglement in a pre-colonial past was the largely imaginative and embodied exercise of both *WTWGM* and *Spice Root*.

As imaginative, somatically inspired engagement, the productions were murky terrain that safely existed in performance or the theatre, but could not so easily be translated academically. However, inspired by De Smet Trumbull's (2013:102) reading of the sea as "a counter-hegemonic field", I was able to 'see' or 'view' my performance practice through the lens of liquidity, which rendered the oceanic female body in terms of the anticolonial project. Somatic attention *to* and *with* was allowed to become subject to the liquid realm, intertwining and merging. De Smet Trumbull's (2013) flooding of 'bivalve of the postcolonial' was particularly

useful in rendering theoretical form to the open-ended, apparent formlessness of *Spice Root*, where meaning for the audience was unsaid, instead eliciting from the audience their "own semiotic conclusion" (Beatty, 2004:59). This validated my use of ancestral spirits, ancient totems, and spectral goddesses to "well up into the present…onto a future unforeseen" (De Smet Trumbull, 2013:11). Moreover, her reading of the goddess of the South Sea, *Nyai Loro Kidul* as an anti-colonial spectral presence that resisted and defied the fixity of 'the gaze', gave me purchase on how this figure played a part in both the process of making and the performance of *Spice Root.* This unpacking of the water goddess circled back to earlier ideas of a 'feminine theatrical' (as I called it in the programme for *WTWGM*) inspired by Cixous (1977). In fact, one way to think about this study is in terms of an examination of my response to her *Aller a La Mer,* my desire to make attending theatre like going to the Sea/the Mother, and what exactly that meant in my particular context. In retrospect, the ideas set out in *WTWGM* did not find expression until *Spice Root's* deepened engagement with the Indian Ocean, where the sea and the 'Mother' in the form of the goddess of the waters were embodied by performers on stage during the *Srimpi* and by the two solo dances representing the goddess of the South Sea, *Nyai Loro Kidul*.

In *WTWGM,* the focus was more on working through the repertoire of cultural memory in the form of the fairy tale passed down through generations. My reading of Myerhoff (1982) allowed insight into the value of simply re-membering this bed time story through performance, and representing generations of story tellers. The survival of this tale in the embodied repertoire demonstrates how re-membering is possible despite the erasure of history and the absence of archival

evidence, and how re-membering is vitalised by performance. Further to this, I argued that the embodied repertoire reveals its antecedents in the 'excesses and deficits' of transmission through Roach's (1996) process of 'surrogation' as expressed in my re-performance of the *Bawang Merah* tale; in the changes wrought over time the lives of the tellers and the journey of the tale become visible. In *WTWGM* this was examined through the third, excessive character *Taki-taki,* a name that pointed to the 'excess' in Islamic orthodoxy within my Cape Muslim/Cape Malay culture. By tracing the excess through the repertoire in stories such as *Bawang Merah,* I was able to discern a 'folk' cultural transmission that reached back to a pre-colonial past. I found the living continuation of the repertoire of *Bawang Merah* in a kitchen in Java, where in one moment the transmission of memory revealed itself folded into women's domestic routines: storytelling and cooking. This intimate domestic scene of sounds, smells, and a soothing wash of words was reframed in *Spice Root* through a retelling of *Bawang Merah* to the accompaniment of the sounds of a stone mortar and pestle while my mother fried spices onstage. Mesa Bains' (1995 cited in Pérez, 2007:99) ideas around *domesticana rasquache*, where women's domestic objects and women's work are a counter aesthetic, enabled me to view my use of these domestic intimacies in my performance-making in a theoretical light. I saw that, by connecting kitchen(s) across the diaspora of slavery, I was tracing a mnemonic transmission passed down in spaces of nurture, intimacy, and domestic rituals, and in the process valorising spaces of traditionally female labour.

A clear thread of attending *with* my body was addressed in *Spice Root* through extrapolating from embodied epiphanies around dance training in Java. Liquidity here became a 'Somatic mode of attention' (Csordas, 1993) defined by

Javanese concepts of *rasa, lahir batin* and *halus.* My investigation of the agency of the affective body was inspired by Hughes-Freeland's (2008:80) idea of the Javanese body as "a heterogeneous field of forces and potentials".

Through this attention to the body as a liquid space I was able to constellate ideas around anti-coloniality, affective liquidity, and female bodily agency. In doing so, I was able to gain insight into my intentions regarding *Spice Root* of Ocean, and was able to view the anthropomorphic liquid territory inscribed onstage as a counter-hegemonic site that coalesced around the dancing female body in performance. Viewed through De Smet Trumbull's (2013) liquid lens, my attempts to bring the spectral presence of the Ocean Goddess *Nyai Loro Kidul* to embodied life in the *Srimpi* and in the solo dance of *Spice Root*, began to make theoretical as well as artistic sense. The goddess' dance was a precolonial force welling up into the present and allowing what had been erased to flood though the bodies of performers and hopefully audience members. In this way, attention was shifted once again *to* the body with De Smet Trumbull's (2013:11) assertion that this spectre of liquidity is not just a trope but a figure with a job to do, that of "dissolving hardened structures and allowing alternate forces, alternate narratives to emerge". The liquid excess, which was such a feature of *Spice Root*, was an attempt to flood the body with the mnemonic reserve held in its embodied repertoire and to transmit this to the audience so that the erasure of history could be bypassed by an alternate embodied force.

In reflecting on how an audience might be able to reconfigure a forgotten past during a present time performance experience, I also considered whether *rasa*, or the transmission of affect, could effect a spillage across space-time so that re-

memory could occur. I felt this needed to be addressed so that the work had a real time function beyond memorium. This brought me back to Manning's (2007) idea that the 'ontogenetic' body itself can challenge historical and geographical borders, redefining space-time. I understood this to function in terms of diaspora, where a simultaneous spatio-temporality created in performance can reach out across space and time to trade and slave entrepots across the globe, and into an indeterminate future. Manning (2007:20) suggests the body is not "a point on a grid of experience" but rather "an experience, a sensation, that creates the chronotopes[39] through which it travels". For Manning, "the state needs the body" in its "conflation of identity and territory" (2007:64). In the context in which I was working, I took 'state' to mean the South African 'state' with accretions of the effects of colonialism, apartheid, and post-apartheid on the body politic. This becomes important when considering the need to recuperate the individual body in ethnographic terms. Manning (2007) suggests that, when the body escapes the forces of the state, its border dissolving excess disrupts discrete boundaries between subjects and between space-time. This bodily challenge to the state is chronotopical as the new 'state-less' body reaches across time and space towards "new networks of power/knowledge" that exist outside the state (Manning, 2007:64). Here the body does not move into space and time, but instead creates space and time through movement and through reaching towards the world or another outside itself. In this sense the stable, over-determined linear geography and history of the state is challenged through the moving body. The diasporic experience then, as one existing in a distant past and an

[39] The term "chronotope" is defined by Bakhtin as "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature"(1996:84)

'other' place, opens itself out for a coterminous re-rendering outside of the linearity of space-time. I have followed this line of reasoning in order to understand how re-membering the post-slave body from current time through colonialism and slavery, and across the middle passage to a pre-contact past, as explored in both *WTWGM* and *Spice Root*, could potentially function.

The notion that I was able to address the intersections of colonialism, apartheid and patriarchy on the post-slave body *with* the body, or to 'decolonize' the body, is best viewed through Noland's (2009) writings on Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks* (1967) and corporeal decolonisation. Noland (2009:200) explains how Head's (1920) [40]"ground-breaking work in the areas of neurology, aphasia, cutaneous sensation and proprioception laid the groundwork" for Fanon's (1967) anticolonial critique as well as the belief that a "semiconscious, operative body awareness is available to – and constitutive of – the subject beyond or before the grip of the colonial world" (Noland 2009:201). Importantly, Fanon's use of the term 'body schema' as a tool to resist colonial domination *"anticipates the return in numerous scientific disciplines of interoception as a fundamental and abiding resource of individual agency"* (Noland, 2009:201) (my italics). While 'reclaimed interoception' (the awareness of the body from within) is not measurable as a product of performance practice, I suggest that it is in the act of doing, or the process of performance, that the agency is located. Manning (2007) suggests that it is through the 'doing body', the body that reaches out to space to other bodies and its environment, that interoception and agency can be attained. "Political agency",

[40] Henry Head (1861 – 1940) developed the idea of the body schema and an understanding of the body as somatic. (Noland 2009:200)

Manning (2007:65) says, “is achieved not as a given but on the basis of a practice that alters the body: political agency is conceived of as an effect of situated practice”.

Where this study could possibly be enriched, and suggest further research, is in considering the relationship of the hard sciences to affect and to restoring the kinaesthetic proprioceptive sensitivity of the body through performance. Sullivan’s (2015) study examines the transactional interpenetrative relationship between body and world through a combination of critical feminism and biological health science. She demonstrates measurable impacts of racism and sexism on the body and suggests ways in which to address this through a socio-psychophysiological therapy that acknowledges the somatic basis of consciousness. In my view, performance practice is ideally situated to address the transactional interpenetration of the socio-historic and the psycho-physiological; a further enhancement would be to measure this.

But validation through the hard sciences is not what this study is about; this study happens in between the opening breaths of *WTWGM* and the closing *Sembhahyang* (obeisance) of the *Srimpi.* Though these gestures are now fixed by the writing in this study, they are gone; the ephemeral performances that they began and ended vanished long ago. Hughes-Freeland (2008:141) notes how “Javanese dance movements resonate and expand away from meaningfulness, expressed in metaphors of fume and refraction that cannot be explained or understood” and that “[m]oves such as waves of water, palm tree in the wind and looking at a mirror share a boundary breaking expansive energy that resist definition”.

> Looking in a mirror' (ngilo) is itself also a well-known metaphor for knowledge in Javanese literary tradition: the proverb "Look at your own nape in the mirror' refers to self-knowledge - and its difficulty…As with images of dispersing scent, the mirror metaphor goes beyond singularity and containment and becomes an image of resonance and redundancy (Hughes-Freeland, 2008:141).

This image of "look[ing] at your own nape in the mirror" expresses some of the difficulty inherent in this process of reflection on a body of work/water'. First there are the challenges of finding the right position for seeing your own reflection, then there is the difficulty of reflecting on water where the natural impulse of water and indeed of performance is to resonate and refract, resisting definition.

I have attempted to gaze on the body in these works/water without dissection or evisceration. I have tried to write from within them and from within the body that made them; and I hope that some of the essence that the works held has resisted my gaze, slipped out of my grasp and disappeared, as Hughes-Freeland (2008:141) says of the feminine embodiment of the goddess of the South Sea, into "the vanishing point of being", eluding sense and material knowledge and always in excess of understanding.

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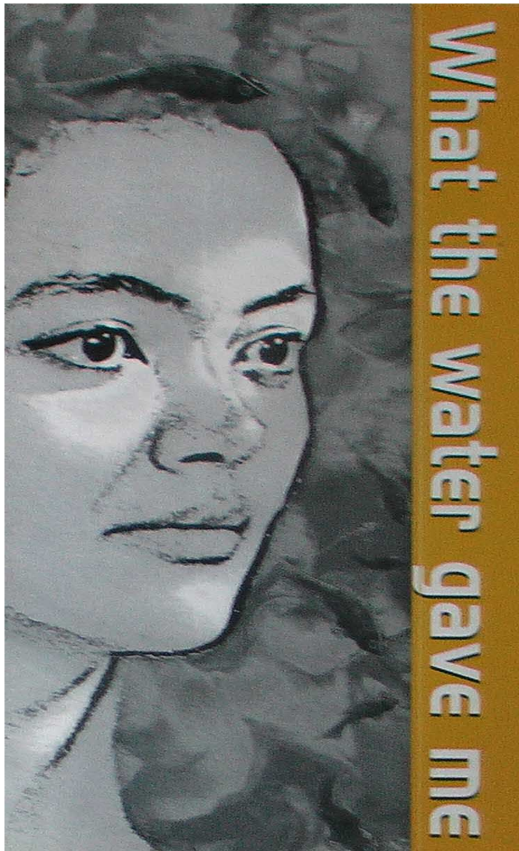
APPENDIX: IMAGES



Poster for *What the Water Gave Me* (2000) designed by Julia Raynham.

Poster for *Spice Root* (2005) designed by the Company.

***SPICE ROOT* at National Arts Festival 2005**
Photo credits Sovita Wagner

Srimpi dancers enter onto the spiral drawn by Lanjar Sarwanto while Cass Abrahams carries a shadow puppet of a ship across the stage.

Srimpi Sembahyang.

Wahyu Widayati and Dorothea Quin wash the bones.

.

The shadow puppet scene

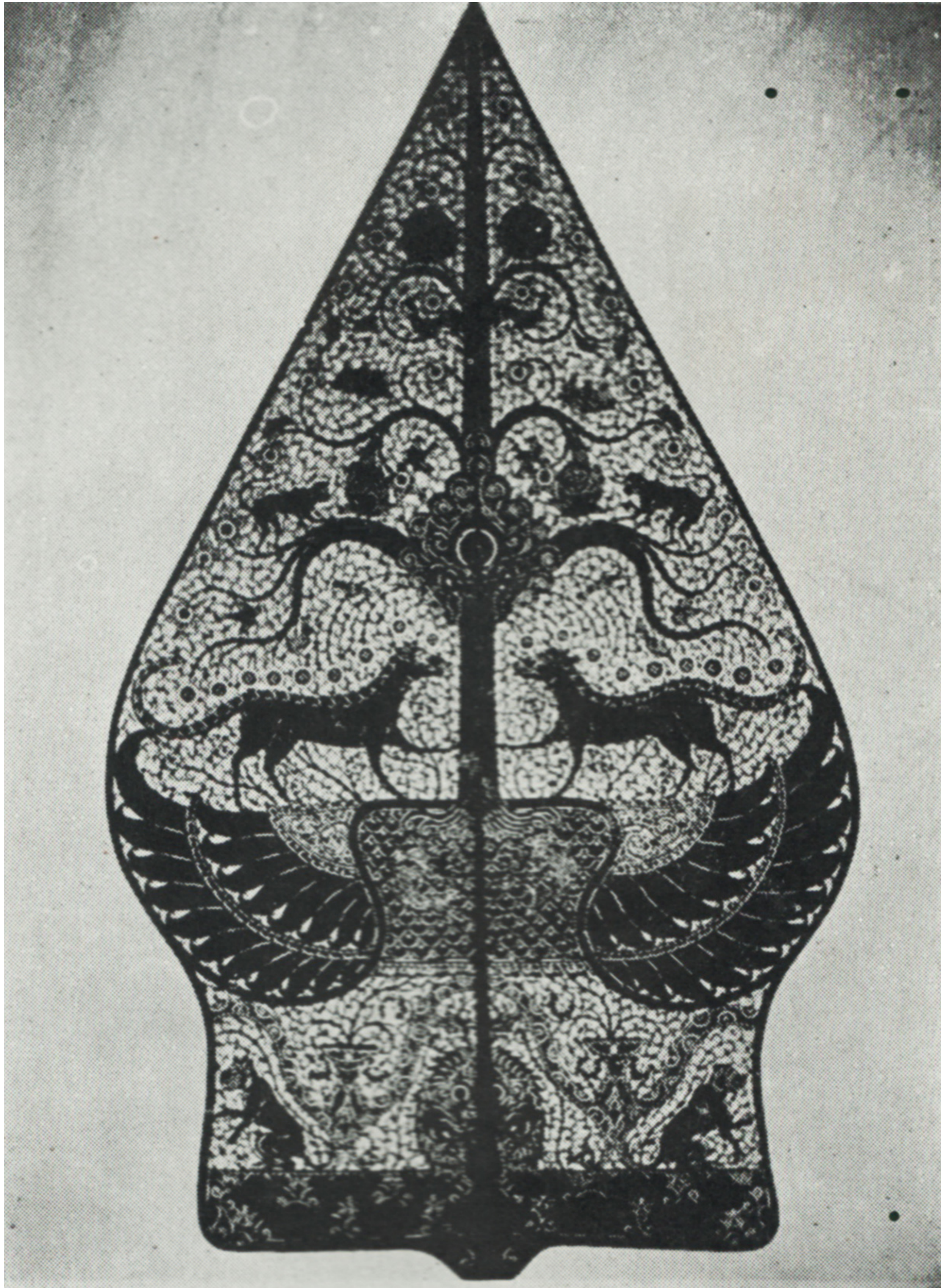
Theresia Sri Kurniati dances the Ocean's Lament with a mask or *topeng.*

Dorothea Quin Haryati's solo dance.

Lanjar Sarwanto on the aerial trapeze.

Cass Abrahams cooks her poem while Wahyu Widayati tells *Bawang Mera.*

Wahyu Widayati in her final *voorloper* dance.



An Example of a Shadow Puppet Gunungan or Tree of Life. Source wikicommons. (File:Gunungan (kayon) in Yogyakarta (credited to Budaya), Kota Jogjakarta 200 Tahun, plate before page 161.jpg)

The Kraton Solo or Sultan’s Palace in Solo. The tower is where the Sultan is said to meet with the goddess of the South Sea. (Source wikicommons) (File:COLLECTIE TROPENMUSEUM De tweede poort van de kraton van de Susuhunan van Solo met daarachter de toren Panggung Songgo Buwono Soerakarta TMnr 60001432.jpg)