The Four Roses Project

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

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

Signature: Signed by candidate Date: October 10, 2022

ABSTRACT

The Four Roses Project is an embodied exploration of the untold stories of women who were part of uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) during the anti-apartheid movement, in relation to the lives and experiences of post-apartheid South African women today. It is an intergenerational work inspired by the real and untold stories and contributions of women who were MK veterans of the Four Roses platoon, one of the few all-female platoons in existence during South Africa's liberation struggle in the 1960s. As a young Black South African woman, I am interested in what the seeds of activism sowed by these MK women in the past can reap for post-apartheid South African women in the present and future.

Utilizing African philosophies, autoethnographic and arts-based research methodologies to embody and respond to the interview narratives of three female MK veterans of the Four Roses platoon, this creative research sought to explore the following questions with eight participant dancers between the ages of twenty and thirty-seven: 1. How do the struggle narratives of women of uMkhonto we Sizwe find resonance in my present lived experiences as a post-apartheid woman?; 2. What is my modern-day battlefield and what is my chosen weapon of resistance?; and 3. What alternative futures and possibilities may be generated by the post-apartheid South African woman through the excavation and exploration of this previously unrevealed knowledge? Though primarily explored through dance-based methods of movement improvisation, dance making and performance, the research methodology also included participant observation, written reflections and previously recorded interviews with MK women. Thematic analysis of the MK veterans' narratives along with participants' reflections on their own lived experiences as women in post-apartheid South Africa and their embodiment of the MK narratives generated these dominant themes: 'A culture of silence'; 'Strength, courage and determination to act'; and 'Gender challenges and adaptations'. These findings will be disseminated aesthetically through a live audio-visual dance performance experience and witnessed by audiences.

This research has illuminated that excavating the untold stories of women's participation in resistance movements in South Africa not only breaks the culture of silence and erasure around

women's contributions to nationhood but, when embodied, can evoke meaningful, inspiring and transformative work in present and perhaps future generations of women. This research in centering the voices and experiences of women of South Africa may appeal to feminist, decolonial and critical scholars and practitioners.

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I dedicate this work to all the women who came before us, who without hesitation gave and continue to sacrificially give their lives for the upliftment and well-being of future generations of women. I want to specially mention Koko Die Ma, Gogo/Auntie (Sannah Nkomo), Koko B, Aunt Marjorie, Aunt Patricia, the original Four Roses and all the 'Flowers of the Nation', and my mother Dr. Renosi Mokate.

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[1] Flowers of the Nation was an expression originally coined by Olivier Tambo (Rose 2, personal interview, 2018 February 12; Makau, 2009).

force for creative inspiration. A true partner in my life and craft. To my unborn child, may you always know who you are and from where you come. Aluta continua!

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis shares the untold narratives of women who were actively involved in the anti-apartheid movement as members of uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the paramilitary wing of the African National Congress (ANC), and their impact on post-apartheid women. Post-apartheid women are defined in this study as women whose lived experiences have largely been in the political period of the new democratic South Africa. This project has been developed through coursework, a minor project, medium project and solo project, and encompasses both practical and theoretical components. Research data for this project was generated through first-hand accounts in the form of previously recorded interviews with MK veterans, movement and dance explorations involving the researcher and participants, group and individual participant reflections and secondary sources. This thesis is an explication of my creative research Four Roses Project. It maps the various steps and creative/embodied processes through which the research questions were explored and explicates how the culminating performance was conceptualized. It also reveals findings related to the impact of the untold stories of the female MK veterans on the post-apartheid female participants and the kinds of alternative or re-imagined pathways and futurities these participant women generated for themselves from the processes of engaging with and embodying the narratives first-hand. For ethical reasons all participants and interviewees have been given pseudonyms.

The first chapter looks at the impetus and historical context of this research, providing a brief history of uMkhonto we Sizwe. Chapter two discusses the historical roles and experiences of women within the MK through a review of the available literature. Chapter three addresses the theoretical frameworks of this research, namely Ubuntu philosophy, Afro-feminism and Africanfuturism, and explains how they relate to understanding and addressing the research problem. Chapter four discusses the research methodologies undergirding this project, the research limitations and challenges encountered during the arts-based research process. Lastly, chapter five outlines the findings of this research, more specifically its emerging themes, and the creative and decision-making process of weaving these thematic threads into a final aesthetic performance.

CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

"I was born in exile."

1.1 Background & Rationale

I was born in 1984 in Wilmington, Delaware, USA where my South African parents were exiled. My parents had been part of the struggle movement of their generation that opposed and fought against apartheid. Growing up in a politically active family I always believed that I was relatively in tune with the socio-political and historical context of South Africa, my identity as a young Black South African woman and the societal roles and expectations around that identity. In 2016, however, after an intergenerational conversation between my mother, myself, and a close family friend, whom I call Auntie P, much of what I understood about my role and future possibilities as a woman was altered.

During the conversation, my mom and Auntie P relayed stories and life experiences as women during apartheid which I could never have imagined either of them living. The stories and historical perspectives they shared revealed hidden aspects of the political contributions and historical roles of ordinary South African women in the struggle for freedom to which I had never been exposed. Through the conversation I encountered the untold stories and identities of women who had surrounded me growing up. Not only were they active in the anti-apartheid movement as wives/partners of freedom fighters, mothers or even intellectuals, but also as comrades in the military wing, uMkhonto we Sizwe. These women, some of whom were close family members, had contributed combatively and militarily to the armed struggle against apartheid at a time when women were primarily assigned the societal roles of wives, homemakers, mothers, and caregivers.

This revelation of my own feminine flesh and blood, whom I had known to be confident and driven but unassuming in nature, as radical gun carrying rebels and fighters unsettled my perceptions of who they were and, therefore, who I was and what made us the women we were today.

Hearing about these stories for the first time at the ripe age of thirty-two suggested that this was a well-kept family secret. Auntie P further revealed that my mom's younger sister who came to live

with us in Delaware had also been a member of uMkhonto we Sizwe. Prior to that conversation in 2016, I had never known the circumstances surrounding my aunt's arrival in the United States. This pivotal conversation opened the door to unanswered questions and unquestioned answers about my aunt's past and the role she and other women had played and perhaps continue to play in society today. As I probed further, I discovered that some of the mystery which enshrouded my aunt's history was not only unknown to me, but also to my mother and grandmother. Given that we were a close- knit family, it was strange that neither my grandmother nor my mom had ever mentioned or asked my aunt about her time in the MK. I wondered why I was the first person to take interest in these events and their potential relevance to the evolution of our family, our relationships, and our present and future roles as women both within the family and society?

This 2016 conversation, which has since spurred on more intergenerational family discussions about those "lost" years, and my ensuing reflections on the stories shared, became the genesis of my research. Recognizing its significance not only for its historical context, but also for my personal and relational identity as a South African woman born to South African parents exiled from the country due to their active role in fighting apartheid, I began this journey to further investigate these familial narratives and those of other female members of the MK.

As I reflected deeply on my family conversation and how it affected my world, I began to wonder how these stories would resonate with others in the post-apartheid generation, in particular women. I wondered how learning from the MK women themselves about their radical decision and choice to join the armed struggle, the challenges they faced, the role they played, their national contributions and hopes for the future might impact or affect other women of my generation and beyond.

Multiple African voices (Gqola, 2015; Manda & Mwakubo, 2014; Tamale, 2020; Goldblatt & Meintjes, 1997) have echoed similar sentiments that although women are central to the stability of African communities and societies, they are situated on the margins of economic and political power and memory in many African societies built on patriarchy. Consequently, their stories, lived experiences, trauma, concerns and even national contributions do not occupy primacy of place. Manda and Mwakubo (2014) add that the heavy burden of care that women carry in African societies further stifle their opportunities to pursue remunerative activities that can help narrow the gender inequality gap in Africa. What would it mean to create space for these MK women's stories

that are missing from the nation's historical archive? From an autoethnographic standpoint, could their personal narratives speak to the lived experiences of past and present generations of women in ways that provide new insights, meanings and knowledge about themselves in the new South Africa?

Gender and social development scholars in Africa such as Nigerian Chinwe Ezeifeka and Ifeyinwa Ogbazi (2016) as well as African researchers such as Ugandan Sylvia Tamale (2020), Bagele Chilisa and Gabo Ntseane (2010) of Botswana have highlighted the power of women's real-life stories to transform other women's lives. In their work they proffer that the lived stories of women, particularly when shared and explored with each other through indigenous methodologies such as song, dance and creative storytelling, bind women together and help them make sense of their individual and collective worlds.

Throughout the intergenerational conversations I could not help but wonder why these narratives remained buried in secrecy even after apartheid and the establishment of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission that was set up by the government to uncover the truths about want transpired during the country's dark period. How many more of these narratives remain hidden? What did it mean for my relatives, other MK women and their families to live with such covert identities and secrets all these years? What possibilities, hopes, dreams and wisdom remain locked underneath that secrecy? Or conversely, what shame, lies, hurts, wounds or trauma remain buried and unaddressed? What does it mean now for the MK women to voice and share those lived experiences with others?

Since receiving these historical narratives that have been in the shadows of the underground for so long, I have felt a sense of responsibility to carry these stories forward from the temporal dimensions of the past to the present, especially as the women protagonists, the central figures in the stories are still present with us. In my family, the unlocking of these secret narratives has begun a healing journey for my aunt, mother and grandmother as well as for the other women in her squad who participated in this research. They have opened the door to a deeper understanding of ourselves as a family and a community of intergenerational women as we have begun to acknowledge and collectively reflect on the potential impact of past choices and experiences during the struggle years on each other and subsequent generations.

I conducted my first interview with my aunt who mentioned that she and three other women were members of an all-female platoon known as "The Four Roses" (Rose 1, personal interview, 2017 September 26). They were a squad of four women in an MK camp of approximately fifty to sixty soldiers. The name Four Roses seemed to be a fitting title for this project seeking to engage women between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-seven with the activism narratives of the women of the Four Roses platoon.

In giving voice to the muted narratives of female figures of uMkhonto we Sizwe, the study seeks to unbury and validate the extraordinary political experiences and contributions of ordinary South African women who joined uMkhonto we Sizwe, through their own living voices. Also, it seeks through aesthetic means to ascertain how publicly sharing these stories could serve South African women today through the following main question (1) and sub-questions (2 and 3*)*:

1. What impact may the untold stories of former uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) female veterans, expressed through the voice of the protagonists and explored through dance, creative media and performance have on the post-apartheid woman?

2. What is the post-apartheid South African woman's battlefield and what is her chosen weapon of resistance?

3. What alternative futures and possibilities may be generated by the post-apartheid South African woman through the excavation and exploration of this previously unrevealed knowledge?

Having established the background, rationale, and objectives of the study, it is useful at this juncture to give a brief history of uMkhonto we Sizwe and to examine the relationship between feminism, meaning women's autonomy and power (Tamale, 2020), and nationalism. Knowledge for this upcoming section was generated from political and historical literature, as well as the oral traditions meaning first-hand discussions with former MK members who were close relatives and family friends.

1.2 A Brief History of *uMkhonto we Sizwe*

The African National Congress (ANC) was founded in 1912 under the name of the South African Native National Congress and focused on the rights of the small professional black middle class (Von den Steinen, 1999). In 1944 its elitist focus shifted with the formation of its youth league and located in its new zeitgeist were ideas of African nationalism and mass passive resistance against the racist apartheid laws. After the Sharpeville massacre of 1960 that left many Black South Africans dead, it became clear to the oppressed that the apartheid government's use of deadly force on innocent citizens meant that it was at war with the Black masses that opposed its oppressive rule. The ANC was banned and many of its members, including my father, were forced into exile over the years in order to keep the movement going. Among the ANC comrades, it was felt that these realities warranted a new political strategy, a complementary alternative to the more traditional and peaceful methods of struggle against apartheid (Saeboe, 2002).

In 1961, *uMkhonto we Sizwe* (MK***),*** or the *'*Spear of the Nation' was launched in all main urban centres across South Africa (Von den Steinen, 1999). MK was conceptualized as the military wing of the ANC, the people's army dedicated to waging a people's war for the liberation of the country (Report of Commission on National Structures, Constitutional Guidelines and Codes of Conduct, African National Congress, 1985). During the anti-apartheid movement of the 1970s and 1980s there were young men and women, as young as 16 and 18 years old, who joined or were recruited by the military wing of the ANC. These young men and women, mostly Black, but some white and of other races firmly believed that the struggle against apartheid was both an intellectual battle, as well as a struggle that required them to take up arms (Von den Steinen, 1999; Saeboe, 2002). These men and women became the volunteers of uMkhonto we Sizwe. Of significance here is that women were also recruited. The Four Roses squad leader, who had joined at the age of 16 (Rose 2, personal interview, 2018 February 10), recruited my aunt and two other women aged 18 years old at the time (Rose 1, personal interview, 2017 September 26).

They became the original members of The Four Roses squad. This strategy by the ANC to include women in its political arm transcended the tendency of nationalist organizations of struggle at the time to reinforce apartheid patriarchal structures and treat women as inferior, secondary political subjects (Hassim, 2004). Women made up a minority of uMkhonto we Sizwe's cadres and its

written military code of conduct swore in principle to protect them. In the code of conduct it was written that it was an offence to violate "the human rights and dignity of the opposite sex, whether in operational or base areas" (Report of Commission on National Structures, Constitutional Guidelines and Codes of Conduct, African National Congress, 1985, section E). Despite their pivotal roles in uMkhonto we Sizwe and the liberation struggle women's voices remain largely ignored in the MK archives (Saeboe, 2002).

The MK men and women, including the Four Roses, would secretly leave South Africa for training camps located in neighbouring countries, such as Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique, Angola, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Ghana. Countries further away from South Africa, including Cuba, India and the former Eastern European Bloc countries also played a major role in training, equipping and arming of these young men and women, who would then be deployed back into South Africa to conduct covert operations (Aunt P, personal communication, 2016 January 6; Rose 1, personal interview, 2017 September 26; Rose 2, personal interview, 2018 February 10; Women and 60 years of armed struggle in South Africa Colloquium, 2021).

Although this may have been the intended plan, Saeboe (2002) in his research into the ANC and MK in exile in Angola, paints a different picture. His research highlights immense frustration, confusion and discontent among male trained cadres in the camps in Angola and Tanzania arising from a lack of deployment back into South Africa. A situation that left them feeling dumped, stagnated and forgotten. Makau (2009) in his case study of ten MK women further illuminates that deployment to assist in operations in South Africa was even more dire for the relatively few women soldiers in the MK. Makau (2009) posits that so few women soldiers were deployed that they often felt marginalized or were made to feel incompetent or incapable of military combat. Furthermore, he reveals that female soldiers were generally assigned to administrative duties or what could be considered lesser roles and positions than the men.

Nevertheless, their intended MK training, roles and duties included: (i) infiltration, such as moving people, weapons, pamphlets on the anti-apartheid movement and other materials banned by the apartheid government in and out of the country; (ii) conducting reconnaissance missions to map potential pathways and assess security risks for future operations; (iii) and executing guerilla attacks on the apartheid government (Von den Steinen, 1999). These acts of resistance by youths both inside

and outside of South Africa ultimately contributed to the eventual release of political prisoners, such as former president Nelson Mandela in 1992, and the overturning of the apartheid government and its regime in 1994. No war, however, is without sacrifice and casualties. Many MK youths disappeared, lost their lives or were forced into exile during this time. Some never returned home having died in exile or unable to recover from the physical and emotional trauma and abuse they experienced during the years of struggle (Rose 3, personal interview, 2018 February 12). There was also notable internal strife within the MK, and occurrences of human rights abuses and violations against its army volunteers (men and women) are evidenced in several TRC reports (1998). Saeboe's (2002) argument that any attempt to understand such human rights violations and the plight of the young cadres in exile has to start with a wider systematic analysis of the context around abused cases to avoid oversimplification is a valid one in my opinion. On the flip side scholars Ellis and Sechaba (1994) simply discredit the blood, sweat and tears of the organization, taking the position that uMkhonto we Sizwe and the ANC were front organizations used by the Soviet Union to control Africa.

There is no denial that secrecy and isolation, became a huge part of the lives of MK veterans for security reasons (Von den Steinen, 1999). Alcohol, drug abuse, even suicide became a panacea for the traumatized pain and underlying emotional problems that followed on in subsequent years (Rose 2, personal interview, 2018 February 10).

1.3 Conclusion

A well-kept family secret revealed in a conversation in 2016 gave rise to this study. As someone born out of South Africa and exiled from the country by virtue of being born to parents who were in exile, the significance of this research is both deeply personal and historical. The research has a double movement, a historical and a personal one. It aims to provide primary knowledge on women's experiences in the uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) military wing of the ANC, where women were a minority and thus contribute to the sketchy and limited historical knowledge on women's political experiences in resistance movements in South Africa. It also aims to use dance performance to connect young South African women of the post-apartheid generation with these stories of the past, potentially generating deep, personal meanings, understandings, and alternative possibilities for them as women of the present and the future.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature such as Kameron Hurley's (2003) thesis titled, *The voice of Women? The ANC and the rhetoric of Women's Resistance, 1976-1989* and Hassim's (2004) journal article *Nationalism, Feminism and Autonomy: the ANC in Exile and the Question of Women* argue that women's inclusion in the political struggle for national liberation was fraught with tension on the level of gender equality. To enable the cross-generational comparative analysis this study proposes, this chapter will examine some of the very limited political and historical literature on women's experiences in uMkhonto we Sizwe as well as the gender literature on women's experiences in post-apartheid South Africa. It will also draw on the stories shared with me by the MK women of the Four Roses platoon and those shared by other MK veterans at the 'Women and 60 Years of Armed Struggle in South Africa' virtual colloquium hosted by Rhodes University, University of Cape Town and Nelson Mandela University on August 9-10, 2021. Indigenous research method scholar Bagele Chilisa (2020:194) avers through the lens of a postcolonial indigenous research paradigm that the oral tradition of stories can be drawn on to fill a knowledge gap, to provide the missing chapters on the history of a local, non-western phenomenon.

2.1 Women in the ANC and Resistance Movements

According to political scholar Suttner (2016:2), "the place of women in uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) has been one of the most disputed and controversial among scholars, critics as well as many ex-combatants." Hurley (2003), Hassim (2004) and Cock (1991) writing about women's involvement in MK have all stated that women soldiers were in the minority. While there is statistical debate around the actual percentage of women in the MK training camps, there is consensus among scholars that women were in minority and were second-class members of the ANC's patriarchal structures and operations. Von den Steinen's (1999) research into the lives of MK veterans attributes the lack of women's participation in resistance movements to their position in society, meaning their assigned and restricted roles as primary caregivers and home keepers. She further explains that their limited involvement was not because of fear of danger or a lack of desire for armed struggle, but that women were often highly discouraged from getting into politics by family members and by society.

Suttner (2016) argues that the full extent of women's role in the ANC and their contributions in armed resistance has always remained marginalized and subject to the patriarchal hierarchy dominating the ANC. Few scholars have provided first-hand, detailed accounts of women's roles, activities and lived experiences serving in uMkhonto we Sizwe, underscoring that the issue of women and gender in struggle histories has been neglected and still warrants attention. Von den Steinen (1999) attributes this absence and vagueness in the documented narration of MK operations to the need for security and women's fear of disclosure at the time such research inquiry was often carried out. The Four Roses Project hopes to partially contribute to filling this gap by building the study around the lives of women in the struggle with whom the researcher has a trusted relationship and representing their political involvement as told in their own words.

Within the existing literature, scholars Hurley (2003), Hassim (2004) and Meintjes (2011) problematize women's participation in the struggle for liberation from apartheid. They take issue with the emphasis placed on the need for female participation in the national struggle with little to no attention given to the need for women's liberation in relation to the concurrently existing patriarchal systems of the nation.

These feminist voices point out that in the anti-apartheid period it was perceived that the fight against apartheid superseded any other perceived battles, including those for women's rights and liberation. Hurley (2003) highlights that the ANC's party line throughout the struggle years touted the idea of "liberation from apartheid before women's liberation" (67) and simultaneously implied that "women's liberation was in fact synonymous with liberation from apartheid" (67). They argue that this ideological belief was misleading and dangerous for several reasons. First, as Hurley (2003) points out, it was socially expected that once the violent freedom mission was won, the women combatants would return to their docile traditional roles in post-apartheid South Africa. Second, Meinjtes (2011) asserts that while there were women's movements which challenged the oppression and marginalization of women during apartheid, the scope of their efficacy and freedom, particularly for those women operating within political parties such as the ANC, was restricted to the parameters permitted by the patriarchal frameworks within which their subsidiary organizations operated. Third, it enabled the ANC to justify overlooking the abuses and violence inflicted on women by men involved in the said struggle for liberation (Hurley, 2003; Hassim, 2004), despite their written military code of behaviour condemning such shameful conduct.

2.1.1 The Treatment of Women in the MK Training Camps

The contradictory and ambiguous position of the ANC on women's identities as caregivers and comrades can be seen in the way women were treated while in the training camps, as well as in the assignment of positions during deployment. Von den Steinen (1999), Pather (2017), Makau (2009) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report (1998) reveal that gender discrimination, biases and misunderstandings led to gender inequality being a rampant force in uMkhonto we Sizwe. Emotional, psychological, and sexual abuse of MK women at the hands of the apartheid government and their MK male comrades have also been reported in the literature (Von den Steinen, 1999; Pather, 2017; Makau, 2009; Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report, 1998). The abuse has also been corroborated in the researcher's interviews with MK women who stated that there were many unreported cases of abuse by male partners and senior members of the organization (Rose 3, personal interview, 2018 February 12; Women and 60 years of armed struggle in South Africa Colloquium, 2021). It was revealed in the TRC (1998) special hearing women's report that in instances where women soldiers reported rape and other kinds of abuse at the hands of their own MK comrades, they were often ostracized and regarded as sell-outs to the system, and that other "women were among the cruelest in enforcing such attitudes" (294, para. 46).

The history of women's involvement in the MK is not as black and white as one may believe and therefore requires deeper probing. "In reality the experiences of women were diverse" (Gqola, 2010:6). Gqola (2010) cautiones against a unified analysis of the black female identity and experience in anti-apartheid movements to avoid silencing more nuanced differences in gender, sexuality and class. Several women reported that they earned the respect of men and were treated as equals being involved in dangerous combat work as commanders and equally important but less visible activities such as planning and reconnaissance (Women in the Struggle for Human Rights, 2017). Conversely, other women expressed that they were not taken seriously by their male counterparts and were often expected to prove themselves physically and psychologically equal to the men (Makau, 2009). Some women recalled being seen as threats by their male compatriots and being given courier type work versus combat training (Rose 3, personal interview, 2018 February 12). Others as aforementioned recounted stories of sexual abuse by men who saw them as sexual objects and their natural source of sexual fulfillment. On the contrary, others encountered men in

their camps who protected them from such vulnerabilities (Von den Steinen, 1999). Some women expressed being forced to father future soldiers (Hurley, 2003), while others expressed being forced to insert an intra-uterine device to control fertility (Hassim, 2004). Some historical accounts report that there were even restrictions placed on the women dating men from outside of the ANC thus revealing the policing around their wombs, bodies and choices as they served in the MK army (Hassim, 2004).

Nevertheless, researchers and MK female veterans alike acknowledge that women as active members of the MK were a much needed and advantageous political strategy to confuse the state enemy, given women were less likely than men to be viewed by the state as suspicious or dangerous (Von den Steinen, 1999; Makau, 2009). Despite the ambiguities and contradictions in their roles and identities, what is clear, as summed up in Lynda Von den Steinen's (1999) argument, is that some of the challenges women in the MK had while finding the balance between their role as soldiers and identity as women, make their successes and contributions even more noteworthy. It has always been understood by feminists that a cloak of silence around women's lived experiences stunts women's ability to assess gender progression and development in any society. Thus, reinforcing the under- represented perspective and voices of female MK members in the literature as problematic. Feminist historian Laura Ann Stoler (quoted in Hassim, 2014: 175-176), has further argued that historians' assessment of women's efforts remains in the context of their relationship with male power, and not enough attention has been given to the ways in which these women navigated the boundaries of masculine power, "whether through resistance or accommodation or some combination of strategies." Suttner (2016) posits that such nuanced attention to the historical significance of the MK and its legacy that Stoler calls for can hold considerable bearing on what is drawn on to develop an emancipatory project for South African women today.

It is within these contextual frames that this project seeks to bring noise and light to the pauses and silences in the literature by documenting the narratives, intentions and hopes, as expressed in their own words, of more women of the MK. Illuminating the untold past of the women of the Four Roses platoon of uMkhonto we Sizwe and finding contemporary relevance in the present experiences of women in post-apartheid South Africa is the central aim of this research

2.1 Women's Realities in Post-Apartheid South Africa

With the end of apartheid, in 1994 and the construction of a new democratic constitution, women in South Africa were technically given 'equal' constitutional rights, removing many of the historical "legal and administrative impediments to women's public agency and representation" (O'Manique & Fourie, 2016: 107). O'Manique and Fourie (2016) explain that under the apartheid regime, laws had been put in place which placed many restrictions on women. These laws made it extremely difficult, if not impossible for women to carry-out basic everyday activities without the permission of their husbands. For example, laws dictated where they could work, what kind of positions they could hold and even excluded them from opening a bank account or taking ownership of the house or land they lived on (O'Manique & Fourie, 2016). Culturally those were the rights and duties of men. These laws essentially reduced women's status to that of a minor and the possession of their husbands. With the end of apartheid, new laws were put in place which lifted these restrictions and allowed women a greater sense of independence and agency. This opened the door to significantly more opportunities and futurities for women, but there has not been enough safeguarding of these rights and freedom, leaving many women still vulnerable to extensive abuse and trauma in democratic South Africa (Nyoka, 2022).

In 2021, Statistics South Africa released a report indicating that 21% or 1 in 5 women in South Africa experienced physical abuse at the hands of their partners. A study by Community Information, Empowerment and Transparency (CIET) Africa in Johannesburg in 1998 with four thousand women showed that one in every three women had been raped (Nyoka, 2022). Despite the successful strides of national liberation from apartheid, women are still awaiting their liberation. As indicated in the statistics above many women in South Africa are forced to daily navigate the paradox of being constitutionally free but not existentially free, as they live constantly under the threat of gender-based violence, discrimination, marginalization and disempowerment. Some researchers like Gorata Chengeta (cited in Nyoka, 2022) even claim that the true extent and impact of gender-based violence and discrimination is gravely misrepresented as most incidents go unreported and many women are silenced or choose to silence themselves though violated, due to fear of negative repercussions and social or economic ostracization. In the words of South African ambassador, Naomi Ribbon Mosholi, spoken at the 2021 Women and 60 years of armed struggle in South Africa virtual colloquium, "To be a woman is to carry a stone under the tongue."

Multiple scholars have sought to address and explain the persistent oppression against and lack of transformation for women in democratic South Africa. Sociologists O'Manique and Fourie (2016:109) proffer that:

> …there was no concerted movement to gender-conscientize men in the struggle beyond their role as combatants in that struggle, and well into the democratic dispensation, sex pests and even rape came to be tolerated by the ANC, which closes ranks and falls back on nationalist notions of liberation movement dynamics, rather than culturally transforming into a progressive ruling party. Consequently, misogynist and/or patriarchal cultural practices go unchallenged, as liberal feminism chooses to prioritize gender quotas in public bodies rather than exposing patriarchal dynamics in the private domain.

O'Manique and Fourie (2016) and Pheko (2012) suggest that transforming women's realities in South Africa demands understanding and addressing how all the institutions of society, private and public, from family and community to the workplace, government and private sector maintain patriarchal assumptions that obscure women's contributions and marginalize them from power and decision making. Using siloed metrics or indicators of progress for women can portray "the illusion of progress, while leaving the foundations of gender inequality intact" (O'Manique & Fourie, 2016: 98). Pheko (2012:6) further speaking to the complexities of women's realities in post- apartheid South Africa argues that any critical understanding or analysis of women's experiences necessitates an understanding that race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, national origin, and other factors intersect in determining and limiting the achievement of women's rights. Implying that policies that advance equality or meet the needs of women in the dominant group of the society may continue to marginalize other groups of women.

Multiple voices in the literature (O'Manique & Fourie, 2016; Pheko, 2012; Hassim, 2014) argue that despite South African women having more constitutional freedoms and opportunities in the workforce, an air of silent oppression still exists. There is also agreement that to address issues central to women's self- determination and equality, an approach that considers the broader socio-political, ideological, historical and material contexts that shape developmental interventions as well as the exercise of fundamental rights of differently sexed, classed, raced and gendered people

ought to be considered (O'Manique & Fourie, 2016; Pheko, 2012; Hassim, 2014). As Pheko (2012: 4) indicates, "women's lived experiences, oppressions due to gender, race and class are inseparable and policies must address all of these factors simultaneously" to not keep undermining the feminist voice.

Feminist scholar Hassim (2014) offers a similar explanation in arguing that despite South Africa's proud history of anti-apartheid women's activism, gendered activism has always been secondary and too often in service of the nationalist-political aims of the politically hegemonic ANC. Hassim (2014:176-177) argues:

> The narrative of democracy in South Africa is centred on a modernist idea in which the pinnacle is the formal sphere of the state and the constitution. The triumph of a form of feminism in South Africa that focuses only on access to places in institutional hierarchies is one instantiation of this modernist approach to containing the justice claims of women. These kinds of claims do not question the underlying structures of power in the relationships between citizens and the state, or at the very least strategically suspend those questions…From this perspective, social inequalities reflect the cultural lag between the democratic ideal of equality and the slowness of people to adjust their attitudes; it is a lag that will be resolved as institutions and norms spread more widely.

2.2 The Arts as Empowering Spaces for Women

Scholars Hassim (2014) and Hennessy (2000) posit that the arts and social spaces are where such meaningful progress for social transformation can be made, and where the mechanisms of political, economic and ideological structures intersect for revelation. Hassim (2014) and other scholars observe that while one of the dominating markers of South African democracy is the advancement and inclusion of women in the public arena, with South Africa having some of the highest statistics for female representation in formal representative bodies, as well as formal recognition in governmental policies, "the presence of the sexualized body in the public sphere evokes a discussion of gender that disrupts the narrative of a women-friendly polity" (169). As Hassim (2014) states "it is in the spaces that are carved out by women to challenge boundary making that the most profound and threatening political gestures are made" (179). She further argues "that the

most transgressive forms of feminism may indeed be found in the creative spaces in which black women exhibit levels of autonomy that are not easily expressed elsewhere" (Hassim, 2014: 179). This perspective suggests that utilizing alternative methods, such as artistic exploration and expression may be impactful in carving out empowering spaces for women (Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010); spaces where they need not fear, where they can breathe, dream, heal and transform.

2.3 Conclusion

The literature reviewed demonstrates that since apartheid ended in 1994, and liberal democracy was established, many of the legal and administrative mechanisms which hindered women's public agency and representation have been removed. Patriarchy, however, remains infused in most aspects of South African society. This unquestioned duality, which has remained largely ignored, has been complicit in the silencing of critical gender narratives and women's contribution to South African society in the past and present. To combat this and bring voice to the silenced in the present and future, further initiatives and pursuit of our untold female narratives must be pursued creatively or by any means necessary.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter will articulate the theoretical frameworks guiding this research interrogating the potential impact of untold uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) female veterans' historical narratives of resistance on the post-apartheid woman when explored through dance, creative media, and performance. Theoretical frameworks provide both direction and impetus to a research inquiry and grounds it firmly in theoretical constructs that make research findings more meaningful, acceptable, and generalizable (Imenda, 2014). This research assumes a relationality or interconnectedness between gendered experiences in the past, present and future. It also epistemologically views the creative arts, in particular dance, as legitimate modes of knowledge generation, learning and discovery and sites of struggle between individuals and their social worlds (Wilson & Moffett, 2017). It centralizes the lived experiences of women in Southern African. As such I have drawn on the following African philosophies as relevant frameworks to underpin the research problem, questions, and assumptions: *Ubuntu,* Afro-feminism, and Africanfuturism.

3.1 *Ubuntu* Philosophy

Ubuntu is a philosophy undergirded by the principle of "the interconnectedness of all things" (Tamale, 2020:21). It is an African traditional ideology of justice, fairness and care based on an epistemology of communal or collective wisdom from the physical and spiritual world, an ontology of humanness and interdependence often expressed as the dictum "I am because we are and since we are, therefore, I am" (Ramose, 2002: 230; Mbiti, 1969:41), and an axiology of respect for and care of self and Other through respecting particularity, individuality, and historicity (Chilisa, 2020).

The *Ubuntu* ethical framework asserts that "we expose ourselves to others and their lived experiences to encounter the difference and similarities of their humanness so as to inform and enrich our own" (Sindane, 1994: 8-9). At the very core of the *Ubuntu* maxim is the notion of relationality, suggesting that "a person is through others" (Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010: 619) or that "I cannot be who I am without drawing upon the sociality of norms that precede and exceed me" (Butler 2004: 32). In this regard, this proposition resonates well with the main research assumption that South African women's social realities and experiences during apartheid carry value,

significance and meaning for the evolution and self-fulfillment of South African women living in the post-apartheid era. *Ubuntu* promotes togetherness, community, human dignity, justice, and fairness (Sanni & Ofana, 2021). While there are different variations of this expression throughout the African continent, at its core, *Ubuntu* is a lived experience of interconnectedness that is manifested through the social connections of human beings to each other, including those of past and present generations and the spiritual connection of the living to their ancestors (Tamale, 2020). As a construct, *Ubuntu* though prioritizing the group over the individual, still allows the individual 'I' to access a collective consciousness ('We') that can be empowering, affirming and self- fulfilling for the 'I' (Ramose, 2002).

However, the *ubuntu* philosophical framework have been criticized by some feminist scholars for its lack of gender sensitivity and for overlooking the problem of gender-based violence within the context of South Africa. Viviers and Mzondi (2006) argue that an "uncritical acceptance of especially a traditional version of *Ubuntu* strengthens patriarchy and keeps women subdued" (2). This is because the 'I' in society is not always equal and the woman 'I' can be recognized as less than human resulting in a less flourishing life within the community. Additionally, the community position can trump the individual. Sanni and Ofana (2021: 388) explicitly states regarding the South African context that "the social reality where women are victims in a society that should protect them in the spirit of relationality cannot be ignored." This is echoed by Oelefson (2018) and Van den Berg (1999) who vehemently argue that the historical legacy of oppression and repression of women in South Africa demand a nuanced interpretation and reinterpretation of the 'I am because we are' dictum. One that would account for the problem of gender as well as gender- based violence in the theoretical framework of *Ubuntu*. To mitigate this theoretical dilemma, the research brings Afro-feminism into dialogue with *Ubuntu* to bring a more gendered perspective that captures the lived realities of women locally and would work to create spaces for the woman 'I' to mutually reinforce "we" and flourish complimentarily. Sanni and Ofana (2021) in rethinking the philosophy suggest that if 'I' mutually reinforces 'we', it is less possible for 'we' to violate, repress or violently dominate 'I'.

3.2 Afro-feminism

As aforementioned a traditional or uncritical interpretation of *Ubuntu* that overlooks imposed

oppressive cultures in the 'we' risks an asymmetrical relationality that can undermine the 'I', for example women and persons who are considered inappropriately feminine. Therefore, I drew on Sylvia Tamale's decolonial concept and projection of Afro-feminism that challenge embedded discriminations, hierarchies, and power relations against women in Africa. Afro-feminism, although sharing some values with Western feminism as a theoretical framework, grants recognition to the negative effect of patriarchy and gender inequality in ensuring women's freedom, right to expression and fulfilment within the diversity of African realities. Afro-feminism "works to reclaim the rich histories of Black women in challenging all forms of domination, in particular as they relate to patriarchy, race, class, sexuality and global imperialism" (Tamale, 2020: xiii). In naming and challenging the forces that have shaped women's participation and roles in society such as patriarchy, coloniality, legal systems, religion, gender inequality and gender-based violence, just to name a few, and working to create spaces for the woman 'I' to individually and collectively survive and thrive an Afro-feminist, *Ubuntu* can serve as a framework for African women to recover self, autonomy and agency and therefore redefine their relationships with the social world (Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010). In other words, Afro-feminism, which "emphasises the power and agency of African women" (Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010: 618-619), in dialogue with *Ubuntu* generates a relationality between the individual and the community that is not imposing, or subversive due to societal privileging of one sex over the other, but one that is a continuous negotiation. A negotiation that considers gender and various forms of vulnerability so that the identity or subjectivity of the individual and the community are mutually constitutive, rendering neither of them supreme (Eze, 2008: 388). Rather both are imbued with agency (Tamale, 2020: 234). Afro-feminism as a theoretical framework thus provides a useful lens through which to analyze the secondary research question: "What is the post-apartheid South African woman's battlefield and what is her chosen weapon of resistance?"

The *Ubuntu* and Afro-feminism paradigms not only ground human knowledge and experience within the lived realities of Africa but also create methodological spaces for indigenous knowledge systems, for example storytelling, song, oral text, art, and dance that connect with traditional concepts of justice, conflict resolution and management (Tamale, 2020). For example, scholars Chilisa and Ntseane (2010) present case studies where indigenous practices such as song and dance have been effectively used to bring African women suffering from patriarchal oppression together to collectively share their pain and heal through the knowledge of their shared experiences

and collective resistance to dominance (Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010).

The body and dance performance have long been sites of struggle, healing, hope and liberation in African worldviews. Western scholars Horosko (2000) and Cancienne and Snowber (2003), without referring to African indigenous paradigms, also present an understanding of dance performance and choreography as mediums that use the body as ways of seeing, being, challenging, questioning, knowing and facilitating discovery. Afro-feminist scholar Tamale (2020: 234) theorises that tapping into the various centres of knowledge and dialogue may lead to richer experiences for African women through deepening their awareness of both the socio-cultural reality which shape their lives and their capacity to transform that reality. African feminist researchers Chilisa and Ntseane (2010: 621) further assert that indigenous methods, such as song and dance "allow women to relive their experiences and to get in their worlds and express their innermost feelings", thus giving voice to what has been silenced or forgotten and generating spaces of healing for participants. As this research aimed to explore the research problem primarily through the creative consciousness and embodied practice of dance performance, these frameworks provided relevant theoretical underpinnings.

3.3 Africanfuturism

The third and allied construct informing the study is Africanfuturism. My research intention is to approach the historical narratives of women in the MK from a pluriversal perspective, allowing space for the recovery and re-articulation of lost or forgotten knowledge of our past while also creating visions of our futures as young South African women. I do not only seek to rewrite or recover lost history but to dream new possibilities with the hope of giving rise to alternative futurities for South African women. Impact and transformation require action. I, therefore, draw on Nnedi Okorafor's (2019) concept of Africanfuturism as a guide for conceptualizing gender futurities with aesthetic visions rooted in African, feminist worldviews, cultural experiences and histories. Africanfuturism as a creative construct is new and emerging in science fiction but its principles, however, are broad enough to be applied to any artform. Nnedi Okorafor's (2019) defines Africanfuturism as a creative approach that is "concerned with visions of the future, is interested in technology, leaves the earth (includes mystical elements drawn from actual African cultural beliefs and worldviews, versus fantasy), skews optimistic, is centred on and predominantly

written by people of African descent and is rooted first and foremost in Africa." Although not the central framework of this research, Africanfuturism as a creative practice is being utilized in this study to propel us to imagine alternate possibilities and novel worlds in which African woman-ness can exist in safety, creativity and freedom, and to establish women as female protagonists in their own stories. South African writer Mohale Mashigo (2018) in her essay *Afrofuturism: Ayashis' Amateki* advocates that in South Africa there needs to exist a place in our imaginations that is neither dystopian nor utopian but a place in-between, where South Africans are able to live in a future that is the opposite of our present reality. African futurism as a practice enables one to "reconfigure what the future is" and thus "what it can be" (Henchay, 2020). Black women artists in Africa and its diaspora have been finding their places and voices in the genre by telling stories of their past, intertwined with their complex present to see a future wherein they exist as more than just helpless victims or the help.

Like, U*buntu* and Afro-feminism, Africanfuturism is relational and also dialogic. It is, however, more forward looking, meaning it is far more concerned with what is and what can or will be, even as it also draws heavily on, grapples with and carries what has been (Okorafor, 2019). Africanfuturism as an aesthetic movement, and a movement of cultural experiences and traditions across time and generation providing the desired intellectual and aesthetic space where intergenerational conversations around common needs, issues and legacies affecting the young and old can be reexamined and reconstructed aesthetically and represented as liberated versions of the future.

3.4 Conclusion

The research study is rooted in three African based philosophies: *Ubuntu,* Afro-feminism and Africanfuturism. Each of these philosophies centres Africa's diverse and complex realities and knowledge systems. Combined, these frameworks situate women as agential, capable of engaging in forms of resistance and survivability with plenty of creativity. They encourage "herstories" in the excavation of African histographies. Thereby avoiding truncated and skewed analyses of Africa's pasts (Tamale, 2020) and creating openings for "radical new possibilities" (Okorafor, 2019: 269) towards South African women's transformation.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The Four Roses Project employed an arts-based qualitative research design that drew on embodied approaches to research. Qualitative research methodology is interested in the human subject and their subjective experiences and therefore was a more suitable choice for addressing the research questions than the more positivist quantitative methodology that deals with numerical data and statistics. With qualitative inquiry the phenomenon under study is examined through the eyes and personal experiences of individual participants (Creswell, 2009). A variety of qualitative data collection methods were used in this research, mainly grounded in arts-based and autoethnographic approaches to research. What is arts-based research? What is autoethnography as a research method?

Arts-based research (ABR) as defined by Shaun McNiff (2008:29) is "the systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies". ABR has been used by educational researchers and social scientists seeking "to elicit, process and share understandings and experiences that are not readily or fully accessed through more traditional fieldwork approaches" (Greenwood 2012: 2). Arts-based researchers such as Irwin and Springgay (2008), Barone and Eisner (2012), Wilson and Moffett (2017) and Patricia Leavy (2015) use performing arts (music, dance, theatre), visual and literary arts to access deep levels of consciousness that can lead to new insights and personal transformation. Researchers investigate a research question through artistic creating during data gathering/generation and/or analysis/translation and/or presentation. ABR with its capacity to simultaneously concern itself with knowing through aesthetic forms and exploring real-world socio-cultural experiences and issues (Barone & Eisner 2012; Wilson & Moffett, 2017) makes it an effective choice for this research. Knowledge production through artistic means resonates with indigenous knowledge systems in African philosophies and using art to heal and address social challenges has long existed in African ancestral practices (Juang & Morrissette, 2008; Daniels, 2005; Ousamare, 2000; Browning, 1995).

Autoethnography is a type of qualitative method in which the researcher uses self-reflection and often writing to investigate anecdotal and personal experience and then connects this autobiographical narrative account to wider cultural, political, and societal meanings and understandings (Ellis, 2004; Holman-Jones, 2005; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). Drawing on researchers such as Leavy (2018), Adams, Holman-Jones and Ellis (2015), and McNiff (1998) this research design blends the qualitative methods of ABR and autoethnography to allow the researcher to draw on her own lived experiences as a post-apartheid South African Black woman to understand the particular phenomenon, to recount specific memories of past personal experiences, to reflect on one's life and interaction with others to generate new insights and to write and represent research on the body in evocative, aesthetic ways.

Some of the key qualitative methods I employed in data collection were previously conducted interviews, written reflections and reflective group discussions. The dance-based methods I employed in the study were movement meditation, pole dancing, dance improvisation, embodied observation and collaborative choreography.

4.2 Interviews

Prior to any embodied work in the studios, one-to-one interviews were conducted with three female MK veterans of the Four Roses Platoon. Interviews lasted between one to three hours. The interviews were semi-structured to allow for more in-depth sharing of the women's experiences and to establish a conversational, comfortable and relaxed atmosphere given the potentially triggering nature of recalling stories of war (Wall, 2008). The interview process was very flexible, and I took on the role of listener versus interrogator to give as much space as possible for the women's previously unspoken narratives to unfold. I structured a set of questions (see appendix 1) but allowed interviewees to guide the narrative and further questions to emerge from each participant's responses. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed (see appendix 2 for sample interview transcripts). The decision to record the interviews with the participants' consent was to maintain the integrity and truthfulness of their stories and to also have the women's audible voices and texts as a layered inclusion into the penultimate performance. The data (texts) from the interviews integrally shaped the embodied experiences to follow.

4.3 Dance Methods

4.3.1 *Movement Meditation*

I chose to begin the process of embodied exploration of these untold narratives by introducing the practice of movement meditation (MM) at the beginning and end of every movement session. This practice served several functions. Cohen, Laskowki and Rambur (2008: 65) define movement meditation as forms of exercise that use movement alongside meditative attention to felt emotions and body sensations, including proprioception, interoception, and kinesthesis. This somatic practice served several functions in the study. Cohen et al. (2008) propose movement meditation as a way to heighten presence through awareness of self in relation to what's happening around you, and a first step in determining one's potential for health and healing. MM allowed the dancers to connect with themselves and the space they were occupying prior to engaging with the MK narratives. I felt that this was an important part of the embodiment process, as it worked towards bringing the dancers whole selves and their own journeys into the work so that they can be fully present. As acknowledged by South African dance scholar and choreographer Lliane Loots (2018: 62), "I come to the studio and the dance making process with an understanding that an adult dancing body does not walk into the dance studio a blank slate; that dancers come with their own history written on their embodied self". Using movement meditation as a warm-up exercise and process I was able to acknowledge and activate the dancers own presently lived narratives as post-apartheid women before addressing the content of the untold historical narratives of the MK women with them. Using movement meditation as a cool-down at the end of the movement sessions was done to release any tension, anxiety or difficult memories and emotions that this sensitive work may evoke. Caring for research participants and oneself as the researcher is an ethical responsibility of importance in autoethnographic research. Movement meditation served, therefore, to lower the emotional cost of mining and sharing personal experiences of self and intimate others during the data collection phases (Ellis, 2007; Adams et al., 2015).

My personal journey with movement meditation stemmed from my own need to process, reflect on, and heal from traumatic experiences which have caused me to question my identity and role as a woman. Further as studio dancers trained in the rigid traditions of performing and executing specific dance techniques, the impetus for our movement is often external, outside of ourselves. Through

utilizing the practices and principles of movement meditation, in my personal practice, I had found that I was able to explore my corporeal knowledge in a deeper and more meaningful way and somatically shift toward moving more authentically from the inside-out. Through dialogue with other women, I became cognizant that the corporeal, physical mental changes I experienced with MM such as shifts in my understanding of the self, my sense of self-agency and personal empowerment was not unique to me but commonly experienced by others in their practice of this method, such as Lin Hwai-min, Mamela Nyamza (Demerson, 2020) and Jay Pather (Katrak, 2021: 216).

Some participant dancers in this project in noting their experiences with MM in their post-session written reflections commented that while they had found the process of movement meditation initially challenging there were improvements in their physical health through extending the practice of MM outside the movement sessions. One dancer (Participant 1, written reflection, 2022 June 18) wrote, "I suffer from asthma…being introduced to movement meditation, its emphasis on breath and practicing it regularly helped expand my chest cavity and lungs; allowing me to breathe better". Participant 2 expressed that "practicing movement meditation at the beginning of each session opened up my body to make deeper connections with the stories physically, spiritually and mentally" (written reflection, 2022 May 24). Participant 3 noted that MM "brought a centring and an alignment that made it easier for me to relate aspects of the historical narratives to my personal experiences as a woman living in post-apartheid South Africa" (written reflection, 2022 June 18). Another dancer, Participant 4, further expressed that MM provided her with a "clean mindset in order to absorb the narrative and generate new movement vocabulary and new ways of moving" (written reflection, 2022 June 1). This is also evidence of MM helping individual participants to connect with and embody aspects of the MK narratives.

4.3.2 Pole dancing

My own initial explorations of moving meditation led me to alternative ways of moving outside of my dance training. One such alternative was pole dancing, an ultra-feminine, often chastised, and controversial form of dance, but one which has redefined how I see myself and my abilities because of the strength and agility it demands. I returned to this foundation method in my one- person solo evolution of this creative research using the dimensions of the pole to creatively explore, both

physically and internally, the emotional and psychological tensions of the MK women undergoing military training and conditions of secrecy, as expressed by the women I interviewed, in relation to my own lived experiences of duality in my identity as a woman, particularly with respect to the masculine versus feminine, and the challenges and tensions that come with fulfilling different societal roles that sometimes opposed or repressed deeper aspects of my female identity. While I had intended to introduce this method with all the dancers in earlier cycles of the process, the logistics involved in setting up and striking the pole for each movement session proved too challenging. The logistical simplicity of the one-person performance coursework allowed me to explore pole dancing as a method and to use my own body, in a kind of embodied *Ubuntu* ethnography, as one of the mediums through which the MK women's experiences are "lived, catalogued, and analyzed" (Ribiero, 2017:142).

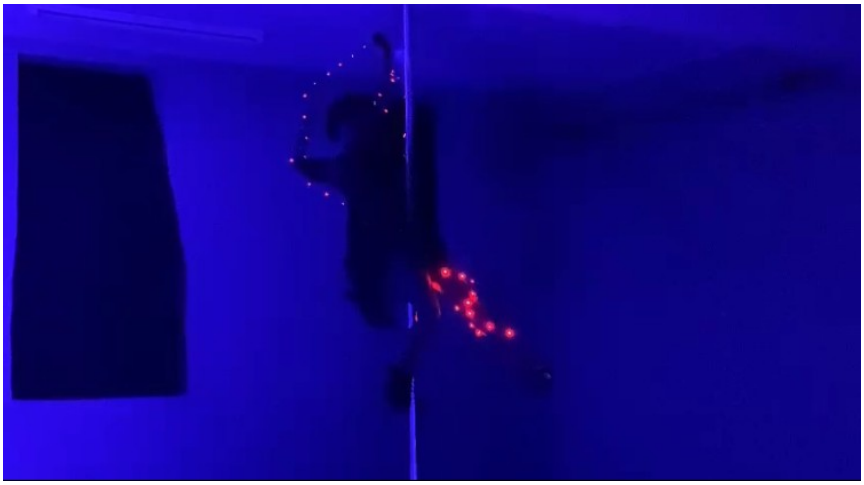

Image 1.1 Pole exploration in solo performance

Dance arts-based researchers position the body as a site of knowing (Snowber, 2018; Shapiro, 1998; Wilson & Moffett, 2017). Philosopher Merleau-Ponty (1962) has long argued contrary to the viewpoints of other Western thinkers from Plato through to Descartes that perception of the world is not through pure mental consciousness, but also consciousness that emerges from the flesh and bones, meaning the physical body. The subjective, performative body is a lived body, a way of being in and interacting with the world. Through embodied perceptions we encounter overlapping relations with each other that foster sensitivity towards and resonance with each other's lived experiences.

Pioneering pole dance researcher Holland (2010) in her book *Pole Dancing, Empowerment and Embodiment* asserts that pole classes have become shared and expressive feminist spaces where "women initiate agency and espouse liberation, and sometimes physical empowerment" take place (2). I draw on her feminist ethnographic approach in exploring the pole as an unconventional prop or object for female agency and empowerment and for excavating embodied responses to the MK narratives and the related personal stories and experiences archived in the female body.

4.3.3 Improvisation

Dancers were assigned excerpts from the transcribed narratives to listen to, explore and improvise around to mine individual interpretation of and embodied responses to them and to generate movement phrases anchored in the women's stories. While the dancers were mostly asked to work individually, some phrases/excerpts were explored in small groups and collectively as a whole group. Participant dancers improvised using text, objects/props and space/environment as stimuli generated from the women's narratives. For example, in parts of the medium project, two dancers were asked to improvise around the themes of "**secrecy/camouflage**" and "**danger**" in the context of a covert operation where a Four Roses comrade was being questioned about her activities by male authorities during a reconnaissance mission. Using another example, I asked two dancers to explore the themes of "**courage**", "**sacrifice**", and "**injustice**" through improvising around a conversation between two female friends who joined uMkhonto we Sizwe but only one returned. This improvisation was inspired by the story of Nokuthula Simelane, a young woman who was part of the underground movement, and a close friend and school mate to members of the Four Roses whom I interviewed. Nokuthula was caught, tortured and killed and the police officers responsible have never confessed to the location of her remains nor have been held accountable, leaving behind a sense of mystery and injustice surrounding her death (Rose 1, personal interview, 2017 September 26). The improvisation was utilized to build a duet for the medium project. The duet was a set of imagined embodied conversations between Nokuthula and members of the Four Roses, who still carry the weight of her unresolved disappearance and loss with them today (see *Image 1.2* below).

In groups and pairs dance improvisational tools of witnessing, mirroring and sculpting were explored. In general, improvised phrases were refined and structured as collaborative choreography (product) for the embodied performance but more importantly the act of improvising with others

deepened consciousness and understanding of the feelings, intentions and emotions of self and others (Adolphs, 2009). "Through dancing, bodies transform, hence people can transform" (Banks. 2010: 21). This is because meaning is made in the spaces between the story, the interaction of the dancers in space and the experiences that reside in the body (Banks, 2010). Dance Improvisation was a methodology of choice in this kind of relational and collective work due to improvisational techniques such as mirroring and imaginative play enabling "a subjective involvement that does not scrutinize the other dancer" (Ribiero & Fonseca, 2011:76). An improvisational approach to dance-making rather than a prescriptive one favours cooperation (*Ubuntu)*, acknowledgement of others' actions, kinaesthetic agency and empathy (Ribiero & Fonseca, 2011).

Image 1.2 Nokuthula and the Rose

4.3.4 Written Reflections & Reflective Group Discussions

Reflective practices are common to arts-based and autoethnographic research practices. Arts based and autoethnographic researchers (Ellis, 2004; Moon, 2004; Leavy, 2015; Wilson & Moffett, 2017) work to create evocative research that enable others to reflect on similar experiences in their own lives and then be able to do something beneficial for themselves and others.

The process of reflection is powerful for taking hold of individual and collective consciousness on issues related to self and others. Reflective techniques can bring awareness to the social, cultural,

political, economic aspects of one's own background, experience, and embodied presence in the world, and how these may shape one's orientation and worldview in the present and future (Chilisa, 2020). In this study written reflections and post-rehearsal/process group discussions were designed into the project to capture the impact of the MK narratives on the dancers individually and collectively and to excavate any personal struggles with fighting and resisting gender oppression or any resonance with the themes emerging from cyclical, inductive analyses of the interview data.

From these reflections emerged personal discoveries and new insights about the self as women in the here and now, as well as dynamic pathways for the future. As facilitator of the movement sessions, I could witness the impact of the stories on the dancers through their bodily gestures, body states, moods and facial expressions. The additional group discussions provided me with opportunities to share my observations with the dancers who then either extended my thoughts or redirected them. In the group discussions, as a group of women with shared stories we also could find collective support to think deeply through and carry the weight of these gendered experiences.

Written reflections which were guided by a set of researcher prompts and questions gave the dancers the opportunity to look back at the embodied experiences individually, away from the collective workspace and find deeper, personal resonance between the female MK veterans and their own individual realities. It allowed them to note how a particular experience affected them and what they intended to do with the new awareness gained from it. The written reflections also allowed them to look to the future. Drawing onAfrican wisdom that tells us that we look back so that the view looking forward can be clearer, engaging written individual reflections as a data collection method enabled the dancers to think in the spirit of Africanfuturism, meaning like a chameleon, keeping one eye on the past and the other on visions of their future (old Malagasy proverb).

4.3.5. Collaborative Choreography

Improvised materials from the embodied explorations were videorecorded throughout the process to be able to return to those moments given the ephemeral nature of dance. Improvised phrases were then selected, refined and structured into set choreography using a collaborative methodology of dancemaking. Participant dancers selected which of their sequences they wanted to offer to the final product after the overall concept of the final product was shared with them by me, the researcher. The choreographic

concept with its various sections was shaped by the dominant themes emerging from inductive analyses of the women's stories in the interview data and the participant dancers' reflections on their embodied processes. In using this approach of collaborative choreography, I reference the work of South African choreographer Lliane Loots who in her practice as choreographer/autoethnographer, employs choreography as "a creative dance space to negotiate the dialogues of collective, divergent and multiplicitous storytelling" (Loots, 2018:62). In this collaborative or communal choreography, I construct on and am constructed upon by other bodies (the dancers) while constructing on my own body. Meaning that the work is a collaboration of my own stories and the stories of other bodies leading to an embodied dialogue of storytelling.

4.4 Limitations in Methodology

Some of the limitations I encountered while conducting my research were related to time and distance. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I was unable to travel to South Africa and this limited the time I had to carry out the project with the South African participants. The dancers only engaged with the MK women's stories as a group over two production periods (4-6 weeks each, twice per week), which were approximately six months apart. This meant that our opportunities for face-to-face engagement, discussion and reflection were relatively intermittent and distanced. I believe that a longer, more frequent and consistent process with the material would have deepened the dancers' embodiment of the narratives, leading to a more substantive measure of the impact of the MK women's narratives on their personhood and lives. Covid-19 protocols also influenced some aspects of the study. Another limitation in this study was that participants were all women of colour, able-bodied and within similar age ranges, yielding a narrow sample of post- apartheid South African women. This was again due to limited time on the ground in South Africa which resulted in selecting dancers who were conveniently available to me, the researcher/choreographer, rather than being able to broaden the scope of the work to include post- apartheid South African women in their wide diversity, and to represent a more nationalistic and transformative essence of *Ubuntu*. This certainly is an area for future development of the project.

4.5 Ethics

The ethics committee of the Centre for Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies granted permission

for execution of the study. Participation in the study was voluntary and dancers were selected for the study based on their availability and on the recommendation of my supervisor and dance associates. The nature of the study and the level of commitment that was required by participants was explained to the participants prior to the study but had to be revisited and renegotiated during the study due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic that prevented social contact for a long period of time. Dance participants provided written consent to the usage of their images, creative ideas and intellectual thought for research purposes. During the execution of the investigation, each participant was always respected, and participants' physical and emotional safety were prioritised. As part of relational ethics associated with autoethnographic research (Ellis, 2007) care was taken when writing about family members to safeguard their dignity and respect. Pseudonyms are used in the thesis to protect the identity of the narrative subjects. To that end I consider this study to have been conducted ethically.

CHAPTER 5: CREATIVE MAPPING

"You feel the potential of a feminist - of color future; you feel it gaining material substance; you feel time veering off from the linear expectations of capitalistic coloniality that have tried to determine future paths. You feel the pressure of normative structures that desire you to respond with fear. You do not fear. You are part of communication studies at a time when it desires change—when desire is change. You feel the immanence of freedom dreams. You desire change. You are change. "*So, what will you do?*"

(Okorafor, 2014: 113).

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will outline the main themes and concepts emerging from the creative process and qualitative data through the lens of the research layers and questions. It will also map how these ideas will be woven into a cohesive performance piece that serves to disseminate this arts-based research to a wider audience.

I began this journey to excavate and document some of the stories of women in my family and close community who contributed to the liberation struggle in South Africa through their involvement with the Four Roses platoon of uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the military wing of the ANC. I consider this to be the foundational layer of the research. Through interviews, I have been able to document their experiences, intentions, reflections and hopes for the future. An inductive analysis of the MK women's interview transcripts yielded a set of recurring ideas and common patterns that were categorized into the following themes and sub-themes.

5.2 Findings

5.2.1 *Themes and Sub-themes*

Inductive analysis of the MK women's interviews revealed the following themes and sub-themes:

- **Living with danger and constant threat**

-
    - Violence & Abuse
    - Trauma
    - Stress
- **A culture of silence surrounding women's lives**
    - Secrecy
    - Camouflage
    - Seen vs Unseen
- **Courage and determination to act**
    - Agency
    - Empowerment
    - Resilience
- **Sacrifice**
    - Disappearance and Loss
    - Discomfort
    - Gender Inconvenience
- **Burning desire for change**

- Necessary fight for freedom
- Lack of Justice.
- Hope for a better tomorrow for South African women

- **Unity and comradery**

Although in a post-apartheid dispensation with different political realities, the experiences and reflections of the dancers who participated in this project resonated with some of these themes. Similar ideas emerged in the dancer's reflections on their embodiment of the MK narratives evidencing a tangible connection between the experiences of the MK women and women living in post-apartheid South Africa. These similarities and the relational impact of the stories on the participants will be discussed in this section.

Most of the dancers reported that they had no extensive knowledge of the military role women had played during the anti-apartheid movement. Upon learning of their involvement, dancers reportedly found the scale of the women's involvement, in relation to the circumstances of the time "incredible", "inspiring" and "liberating" for themselves as post-apartheid women. Some articulated both during creative development discussions and reflections that the "strength and confidence", "courage and resilience against odds" and "achievement" that the MK women exhibited in their stories made them feel and or desire to be equally "fearless and confident". The "freedom and privileges" which the MK women fought for resonated deeply with them and brought meaningful contextual knowledge and connections regarding the opportunities and rights they have today. For example, one participant reflecting on the MK women's liberation struggle connected her ability to attend a school of her choice to the sacrifices and battles fought by these women of the previous generation and communicated her felt responses of "gratitude" and "respect" for their lives as women. These values resonate with Afro-feminist version of *ubuntu* philosophy 'I am because we are".

The importance of female agency, unity/comradery and representation as tools to bring about the socio-political change women wish to see happen personally and collectively, also resonated with the participants who unanimously agreed that too little attention is paid to women's roles in the struggle and their vital contribution. The dancers acknowledged that while progress has been made, they too find themselves silenced or marginalized at times and thus agree that "while legislature may have changed, inequality and the structural power that keep women of colour in disadvantaged positions are still in place" (Participant 2, written reflection, 2022 May 24). Thus, underscoring the need for "the female voice to be heard, acknowledged and respected" (Participant 1, written reflection 2022 June 18), and the need for the continued role of women as activists and struggle comrades. They expressed that while the kinds of fears or wars which existed for women during apartheid may not all be present today, some such as gender-based violence remains a concern. They expressed that women and children continue to be victims in a society that should constitutionally and humanely protect them. Participant 5 expressed that as women "they continue to live with a real and constant threat of being violated" (written reflection, 2022 November 26) and therefore need to take up arms "to protect and safeguard themselves against such scourge" (Participant 6, written reflection, 2022 November 26). They too, like the MK women, however, still carry hope and optimism for change and better possibilities for themselves and other women in the future as they develop new perceptions and worldviews of themselves. As one dancer directly expressed "Women are capable of being leaders and change makers!" (Participant 2, written reflection, 2022 May 24). This could be interpreted as a point of rediscovery or a counternarrative to deficit notions of womanhood. That which is clear through the frameworks of *Ubuntu and Afro-feminism* is that women's social realities and experiences during apartheid can carry value, significance and meaning for South African women living in the post-apartheid era.

An inductive search for patterns in the written responses of the dancers on how they were individually impacted by the MK women narratives revealed four areas of impact on the levels of emotions, thought and perceptions, imagination and action:

- **Awakening inner strength and power;**
    - Resilience

- Inspiring confidence and self-belief

- **Raising critical consciousness around the socio-cultural realities which shape their lives as women and their capacity for action to transform that reality;**

  - Conflict of constitutional rights and women's daily experience
  - A tendency to be erased/ silenced
  - A tendency to be policed/violated/punished rather than protected
  - A need to fight together for visibility and voice
  - A need to protect oneself

- **Imagining new possibilities and identity constructions as women;**

  - Women as multi-dimensional and dynamic
  - Women as leaders and gamechangers
  - Women as warriors/freedom fighters
  - Women as bearers/ carriers of other women's stories

Though the Four Roses women in looking back questioned themselves regarding if they "did too much or did too little" (Rose 2, personal interview, 2018 February 10), what is undeniable is that their stories carry the potential for impact on future generations of women as revealed in this study. The MK narratives inspired and generated new emotions, thought, imagination, and action in the post-apartheid women's understanding and perception of self and capabilities. The young women's written, verbal and embodied responses revealed that the untold stories functioned as a bridge

connecting their personal experiences to the larger social world enabling a more critical, holistic and agential understanding of themselves as African women. This resonates with the assertions of African women scholars Chilisa and Ntseane (2010) and Tamale (2020) who aver that through the *ubuntu* philosophy and ontology of humaneness and interconnectedness women can be edified and reconstructed as holistic human beings imbued with autonomy and agency.

Due to the limited scope of the paper, I have selected prominent themes emerging from a comparative analysis of the lived experiences of the MK women interviewed, and the participating women's experience to comment on in this section and to map how they were addressed in the creative process.

5.2.2 The culture of silence

Though the socio-political contexts were different I argue that the secrecy of the MK women's history, and the silent oppressions and oppressive silence that shroud the post-apartheid South African woman today are different shades of the patriarchal system that govern South African society. I realized that though the air of secrecy around the lives of the MK women and their activities had previously existed due to concerns around safety in a time of full-scale armed struggle, this cloud of secrecy had persisted after the end of apartheid. Addressing the issues of concern to women was once more side-lined or superseded by the national challenges of a new post-apartheid South Africa, once again suggesting that women and nation are either mutually exclusive or that women's issues were synonymous with national issues. The effect of which is that women continue to be convinced that part of their duty for the betterment of the country and society is to remain silent and not disrupt the stability of our evolving society.

The dancers, though born into democracy, equally expressed that as young women navigating a patriarchal society, they sometimes choose to silence themselves as a means of security, even when violated. Participant 4 wrote in their reflection (2022 June 1):

> In these moments of self-silencing, I would often ask myself, "Why did I choose to remain silent? Where did the belief that disguising the truth was safer than revealing it originate?"

As I reflected on the culture of silence, I found myself immersed in, as a South African woman, and some of the narratives I have encountered in my research of the history of the MK women, I realized that as women who were part of the MK during the anti-apartheid movement their lives depended on their ability to hide their true thoughts or intentions. The lives of post-apartheid women, however, are forced into silence, not because we do not have something to say, but because the societal spaces we occupy are not always safe to express ourselves without prejudice or repercussion. Thus, we hold our tongues and find or create spaces in which we can collectively give voice to our stifled thoughts and experiences. For the women who have participated in this work, the performative space has become such a space and dance has become our chosen voice of expression. As articulated by one of the participants, "dance has always been a medium to unleash different personality traits that I want to use in the real world" (Participant 6, written reflection, 2022 June 14). The need to voice rather than silence the embodied language and communication of each dancer was one reason for applying the more freeing structures of improvisation as guiding movement principles for the dancers' exploration of themselves and the MK narratives than fixed dance traditions. Along with movement meditation, it allowed the dancers to embody and voice their own truths as well as create a safe space in which to find and release habitual tensions and blockages that may diminish their power to speak to their social worlds through their bodies.

One aspect of the culture of silence we were not able to address as a group of women, but cannot deny, is the deafening silence of men who see and hear about gender violence and oppression against women but do not speak up on these matters or engage in critical self-reflexivity. That in itself, has its own complexities, but is a critical component to women's transformation in South Africa, as outlined by Afro-feminist philosophy (Tamale, 2020). Given that men constitute part of the 'we' in *Ubuntu*, it seems logical as Ofana (2019) has expressed that interventions to address gender-based violence and oppression not only concentrate on supporting victims but also focus on instilling ethical values in men who grew up with a distorted understanding of manhood.

5.2.3 Strength, courage & determination to act

A repeatedly echoed phrase by all the interviewees, and again reiterated during the Women and 60 years of armed struggle in South Africa 2021 Colloquium was "We did what had to be done" (Rose

2, personal interview, 2018 February 10). The MK veterans all expressed a courage and determination to join in the action to change South Africa. The women expressed that they did not have time to think about what participation in the anti-apartheid struggle meant for them or their families. "All we knew was that we had to take action for ourselves and for future generations" (Rose 1, personal interview, 2017 September 26).

This drive to take action expressed their sense of determination, strength and courage both mentally and physically. "It made us resilient, resourceful and adaptable both in the camps and in the field…we endured challenges as a minority in male dominated camps, matching and sometimes outdoing our male counterparts" (Rose 3, personal interview, 2018 February 12). When asked about their activities in the camps, they commented that though they were a minority, they felt they were treated with care and generally as equals to the men. They were given their own sleeping quarters and for the most part all the privacy they needed. However, one of the Four Roses commented that on their first night in the camps, the men played an initiation prank on them claiming that the camp was being raided:

> As a result, we all ran out in our night dresses to find the men laughing hysterically as they asked us what we would have done in nothing but our nighties had it been a real raid. We the women took the lesson amicably and understood it to be in good fun.
>
> (Rose 3, personal interview, 2018 February 12)

Rose 1 stated:

> When we woke up to jog, everybody jogged; or if we did exercises, everybody did exercises and when we would go out to the range to shoot…AK's and other smaller guns. We also learnt how to prepare bombs, for example dead letter bombs, dig trenches, learned various concealment techniques and had mock raids in preparation for potential attacks.
>
> (Rose 1, personal interview, 2017 September 26)

Rose 2 indicated that Rose 3 was particularly strong in all the physical activities. About her own deployment, Rose 2 shared:

> In one of my missions, I was responsible for mapping and gathering information for an

> escape route to smuggle some high-ranking members out of South Africa. At the time, I was 7 months pregnant, and so it was agreed that I would pass the information on to my husband at the time and he would complete the mission. When we reached the crossing, however, we realized that our plan had been compromised and it would be necessary to utilize an alternative route. My husband tried to insist that he go alone due to my pregnancy, and I responded by asking him 'But where are you going, because I am the one who knows the routes?' (laughs). He then argued that 'If anything happens it's going to be husband and wife that get arrested', and I responded, "But there's no husband and wife here, we're all comrades here.
>
> (Rose 2, personal interview, 2018 February 10)

The display of determination, sacrifice and courage in the face of grave danger and threat by these women, is consistent with other accounts of women who were immersed in the struggle of the anti-apartheid movement and communicates a compelling sense of agency and will power. The dancers while admiring their courage and sacrifice wrestled with this against society's seemingly continued lack of will to protect women from gender-based violence and discrimination. In their own reflection, the MK women articulated that while not all that they had hoped for has come to fruition, and that they believe there is still much work to be done, they are still hopeful for a better future.

5.2.4 Gender Challenges & Adaptation

The narratives included varied accounts of challenges the Four Roses faced navigating a male dominated environment. Some challenges were a singular issue such as not having appropriate clothing or basic needs for feminine hygiene. Other accounts were of a more sinister, complex and serious nature. Rose 1 recalled "We would have to dig holes to bury our sanitary pads as there was no place to dispose of them" (Personal interview, 2017 September 26). Rose 3 further recalled "I would have to find a stick in the bushes to dig the hole" (Personal interview, 2018 February 12). They expressed, however, that they adapted to the conditions rather than have their biological gender differences eliminate them from the armed resistance.

Rose 2 in her interview spoke of how a male soldier was once sent to purchase underwear for the camp and had been too embarrassed to purchase underwear for the females. As such, "the women were forced to wear male underwear" (Personal interview, 2018 February 10). Both Rose 2 and Rose 3 also recalled the uniforms they wore were large men's sizes, made to fit the male physique. Rose 2

referred to the uniforms as "ugly" and "heavy" while Rose 3 commented that the "oversized uniforms" made them look "clownish" and made the gruelling activities even more challenging. She remembers somehow finding a belt or something similar and trying to use it to tie up some of the bulging layers of additional fabric. She further lamented how Rose 2, who was particularly small in stature, was utterly and hopelessly engulfed in the fabric of the uniform, commenting that the uniforms were nothing more than "functional" (Rose 3, personal interview, 2018 February 12).

Further discussions about women's experiences on the camps revealed that while their squad was well treated, abuses and assaults by male superiors, counterparts and sometimes partners in the MK on women did occur, and in some of the other camps women were sometimes told that it was part of their duty to "service the men". This corroborates other research into MK women's experiences such as Von den Steinen (1999) that suggest that the experiences amongst MK women were diverse, ranging from normal to abusive.

Comparatively, the dancers explored gender challenges relevant to their existence in South Africa. Some of the gender challenges the post-apartheid women articulated included being marginalized, sexualized, policed and silenced, as well as always threatened and therefore needing to exist in a state of vigilance always. As embodied intervention, they charted Africanfuturist pathways to overcome them mentally, physically, emotionally and collectively. The dancers found excavating and embodying the stories of these women to be "meaningful" and "empowering". On reflecting on their futurity, dancers indicated that engaging with and embodying the narratives of these MK women altered their perspectives on the possibilities for their futures as evidenced below in narrative and poetic form:

Dance Participant 1 narrated:

> It was really meaningful…listening to the interviews and then working on embodying them. There was this undeniable strength and confidence in the way they spoke about what happened that made me want to be just as fearless and confident in my movement…I realised that there are systematic obstacles in my way to achieving my goals, but also, I have unique experiences as a woman of colour (and as a descendant of other women of colour) that give me a sense of inherent strength and motivation to do whatever I can to affect change to whatever degree I am capable of. I think that our strength as women lies in how multidimensional we are – we are both strong and vulnerable, intelligent, wise and

> compassionate, selfless and self-aware. I think that these traits, which are brought about by my experiences in this body, and my history, is what will influence my future for the better.
>
> (Participant 1, written reflection, 2022 June 18)

Dance Participant 2 (written reflection, 2022 May 24) poetically expressed:

WO(FUTURE)men

Women,

We are the future,
The future is not men,
We create men, We support men, We mould men
BUT
We are also scared of men.

So I'd like to wake up to a future where
Women have power
Power that creates safety
There is safety in numbers
But nothing is for certain
Although one thing is certain
Women, we are the future

Dance Participant 3 (written reflection, 2022 June 18) further stated:

> To see/hear of other women and their achievements, celebrating them and learning from them is a life-changing/perspective-changing experience. It altered the way I viewed myself as a dancer and as a woman who can have many roles and achieve many things. My biggest takeaway from this experience would be to learn from and be inspired by the South African women who came before us. Women are still fighting, in various ways, to address various socio-political issues. The experience was definitely meaningful.

5.3 From Creative Process to Production

Based on the common emerging themes, between the narratives of the Four Roses and how they relate to post-apartheid women, Four Roses has evolved into a four-part production. Section one will focus on the theme of silence. Section two will be centred around the telling of the untold narratives, giving voice to the female veterans' experiences, and revealing layers of oppression and resistance hidden beneath the silence. Section three explores how the post-apartheid women participating in this creative process find their own voice of resonance against the backstories of the MK women and manifest their weapons of resistance in the gender struggles they face today. The final section looks to the future and adapts these weapons of resistance as tools and building blocks to build alternative possibilities for our futures.

Having explored the guerrilla stories of the Four Roses, the dancers were asked what they considered to be their modern-day battlefields. The dancers indicated that although they could not relate to having to spend time in the bush, to some degree everywhere was a battlefield due to the risks of gender-based violence, or gender discrimination. Fortunately, most did not feel the threat of violation at home, though there was indication from one participant that she was intimately involved with a controlling partner who scared her, and who would often try to diminish or manipulate her. Most, however, admitted feeling threatened when entering public spaces. For example, when entering work or school environments they felt they faced the threat of gender bias or marginalization and the risk of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation in all environments was very real. Hence, they lived in a constant state of anxiety and high ready to fight or flight to protect themselves. For the purposes of the production, I felt it was important represent the duality of these battlefields being located both in urban environments as well as outdoor, thus I have chosen to use both indoor and outdoor locations for my production.

5.3.1 Section 1

I have chosen for this section to be an audio-visual experience, with spoken word, dance video, white noise themed audio for the background and pole dancing as the movement expression. This

section of the work evolved from the story of Nokuthula Simelane as told by the one of the Four Roses. Her largely untold story and unresolved murder is a representation of the many women whose lives and sacrifices during the anti-apartheid struggle have gone overlooked or forgotten. In subsequent research and discussions with the Four Roses regarding her story I learned that not only are her friends and family still waiting justice for her death, or the location of her body to be revealed, but that even the 2009 statue that was erected in honour of her memory in Bethal Cultural Precinct in Mpumalanga has since been vandalized numerous times.

I have chosen to represent the assault inflicted upon Nokuthula and this continued assault inflicted on the representation of her body in the form of a dance video, in which the female body appears in obscured, segmented parts which appear to be submerged. The white noise audio background is a representation of the continual omission and silencing of the stories and voices of women such as Nokuthula, while the names of the forgotten women will be called back into remembrance. The pole, as mentioned in Chapter 4, is a representation of femininity. It is a representation of feminine strength, resilience and the determination to transcend beyond adversities faced. As such, this section will be represented by a single dancer. Use of audible and inaudible/stifled breath will be a key factor in relation to the execution of movement as the dancer draws the strength to lift herself up the pole, defying and sometimes being taken in by the pull of gravity. Lighting will be used to highlight the concepts of secrecy and camouflage hidden beneath the layers of silence and omissions.

5.3.2 Section 2

Section two also will be an audio-visual experience that continues to break the silence with overlaid audio excerpts from the interviews with members of the Four Roses. Throughout the creative process we have explored different ways in which these interviews could be creatively utilized to tell this story. This will be the first-time audience members get to hear these untold narratives as told by the women themselves, giving voice to these women's stories. Initially, the interviews were only heard by the dancers performing the work in rehearsal and used a prompt; however, by the performance of the first and second iterations of this work during is development process, the interviews had been incorporating into the musical arrangements for the performance.

For this final production, however, I have decided to utilize the interviews without any musical accompaniment to give more power to the women's voices. During this section, dancers and audience members will be surrounded by pieces of lingerie and men's underwear, as dancers put on or take off pieces of clothing and/or remove or apply make-up to represent the multiplicity and often layered, camouflaged and contested identities assumed by women then in the armed resistance and now. This will be the first group section, with individual dancers breaking away from their process of removing or adding layers of clothing and makeup to respond to assigned excerpts from the interviews. The choreographic phrase will be derived collaboratively based on an improvised response to the excerpt in relation the dancer's own lived experience.

5.3.3 Section 3

In section three, we collectively begin to choreographically explore our weapons of resistance, generated from how we were individually impacted by the women's stories. Choreographically this will be an energetic display of power, jarring resistance, skill and versatility at the dancers freely wield their weapons of resistance in and among the audience; leading them to the final setting. The weapons of resistance emerging from the creative process included the sjambok, pepper spray, doek/scarf, rope, stick, pen and the womb. The sjambok and doek are two interesting choices in relation to the South African context. The sjambok is like a whip, traditionally meant to use to discipline dogs or chase them away. However, during apartheid it was commonly used on black people and at times even in reference to domestic abuse. It has become a symbolic expression of disciplining someone or "putting them in their place". In reference to its use as a weapon of resistance, the dancer indicated that it was a symbolic tool for self-reclamation as she fought to protect herself at home from the threat of gender-based violence.

The "doek/doekie" is a scarf worn on the head by many South African women, mostly black and coloured women, often while doing housework and to maintain a particular hairstyle while sleeping. The dancer selected this as she felt it was a symbol of "beauty, self-care and femininity" (Participant 1, personal communication, 2021 November 26). She also felt that it was something that could not easily be torn or broken and therefore represented the resilience and adaptability of women to seek

alternative pathways, spaces and opportunities for themselves. The rope carried a similar meaning of resilience and versatility, but also represented the dancer's concerns around mental health and cultural beliefs or practices within the black community around traumatic experiences. For example, the ongoing debate within black South African culture on how to address issues of mental health, through medical science or witchcraft, and whether mental illnesses like depression are even considered true illnesses.

The stick was a weapon of choice selected by myself and another dancer. Sticks are known weapons of attack in South African repertoire of protest and resistance. They symbolize fight and aggression. As I continued to work with and carry my stick in everyday life, I found it made me feel safe and powerful. With the stick, I felt empowered to define my own boundaries in public spaces. People, in particular men, who would have intimidated and shamed me before were now the ones who were intimidated. It became a symbolic act of ultimate defiance against the norms and social constructs expected of me as a woman. The stick communicated that I was a force to be reckoned with and not to be underestimated. This sentiment also resonated with other dancers who explored the stick as a weapon of choice.

Two dancers selected pepper spray as their weapons of resistance, identifying it as something they could carry with them everywhere as a first line of defense against any physical assault. The last weapon of resistance chosen was the pen. I found this to be an interesting one, as again it resonated with the narratives of the MK women, as stated during one of the interviews "I felt strongly that there was no reason why you couldn't use a gun in one hand, and a pen on the other hand" (Rose 2, personal interview, 2018 February 12). The dancer who selected the pen similarly articulated that she did not feel that writing was in any way a less consequential method of resistance than through physical violence, and that it in fact has the capacity to be more consequential as it gives the writer a voice to speak from their inner truth without being erased.

In a post-performance discussion after the last iteration of the work in progress, one of the dancers reflected that they also considered the womb to be a weapon of resistance. Again, I found this to be an interesting choice in relation to the overarching themes of my research. The womb represents

something that is physical, but spiritual. It cannot be seen or touched from the outside but holds so much life-giving power in African cosmology. Its functions, however, can be controlled. It is in many ways an ultimate representation of the female identity, and during apartheid was considered to be a potential weapon against the apartheid regime and erasure of black people, as it enabled black people to continue to procreate despite the apartheid regimes attempts to control this by removing black women's wombs or putting them on birth control to limit population growth.

Image 1.3 Weapons of Resistance

5.3.4 Section 4

The final section of this production looks to future feminist possibilities and alternatives we hope to manifest and build for ourselves. This section is a performative process of re-imagined construction through the literal bringing together of our weapons of resistance into an installation and the weaving and moving of our bodies in various configurations to symbolize alternate visions of ourselves. In this section, the dancers come together to build alternative pathways with our weapons of resistance, to ascend to our new possible futurities. This will require the dancers to creatively explore new and alternative ways of working together in relation to the "scaffolding" which represents both the alternative routes or roadblocks one may cross in life.

Throughout the work, viewers will be guided through each section by an alternative futurist female warrior I have developed throughout the creative process of this work. She is a futurist amalgamation of the past, present and future. She is a stick carrying figure, cloaked in a hooded dress made of camouflage material which allows her to conceal herself, obscure her face or reveal herself at will. Her movements will at times be feminine and nurtures, while aggressively powerful and intimidating at other times. She will at times assert recognition of her presence and human existence, while at other times devolve into a mass almost unrecognizable as human. The dress also has lights inside as a symbol of the illusion she carries with her, into the shadows or silences, which she illuminates in her wake.

Image 1.4 (a) Africanfuturistic Warrior Woman

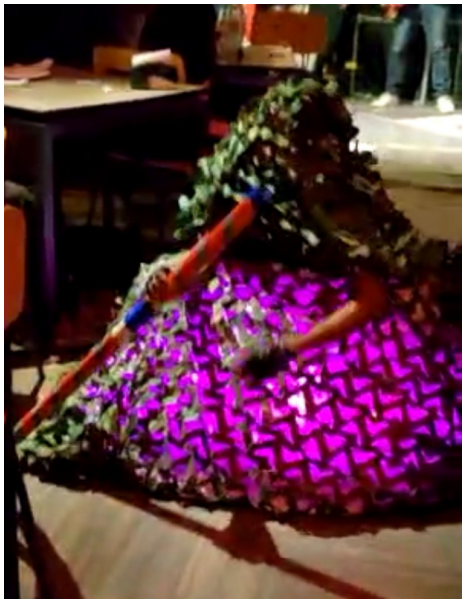

Image 1.4 (b) Africanfuturisic Warrior Woman-Creature of Illumination

CONCLUSION

I began this journey because I wanted to know more about my aunt, one of the Four Roses, the woman who had held me close to her chest as an infant and had loved and supported me as my own mother, Mmangwane. I wanted to know who she had been before I knew her and what had made her the person I knew today. In my research, however, I found so much more. I found a generation of women who had carried so much love and hope for future generations that they were willing to stake their lives on it at any cost before we even existed. I encountered a generation whom to this day continues to be willing to walk that line of danger and resistance, carving out paths, and challenging systems and norms that we have yet to encounter. This research was birthed in a family conversation that revealed a well-kept family secret and mystery. As more was revealed to me my desire to share this untold history with other post-apartheid South Africans, particularly women, increased. Conceptualizing this Four Roses project, opened new channels of intergenerational conversation among us as a family, allowing for greater understanding of why and who we are and can be as women and providing opportunity to heal from old unspoken scars. It has also reopened communication among the Four Roses themselves, allowing them to excavate and share buried memories in hope that "young people of today can learn from their stories and understand that women were equally involved and equally important to the struggle" (Rose 2, personal interview, 2018 February 12).

As the choreographer, I have found that exploring and embodying these stories through dance not only empowered and promoted self-confidence among the dancers both as performers and storytellers within the work itself, but as professionals and individuals. I found that the dancers found a deeper connection to and appreciation for their female identity and felt more confident in taking ownership of their feminine energy through this process of putting flesh and bones to stories that centre women's experiences. This could be seen in shifts in their embodied language and expressions as well as read through their written reflections and discussions.

I, therefore, conclude that it is meaningful, inspiring and transformative work to excavate the untold stories of women's participation in resistance movements in South Africa. It breaks the silence of erasure and invisibility of women's historic contribution to nationhood. It breaks the silence on

issues of gender affecting women in the past and present as women of younger generations engage with those narratives. Explored through the body and dance movement practices, such narratives can empower women by raising as well as deepening individual and collective awareness both of the socio-cultural realities which shape women's lives in South Africa and beyond and their capacities to transform those realities. As previously mentioned, South African ambassador Naomi Ribbon Mosholi stated at the Women and 60 years of armed struggle in South Africa virtual colloquium held on 9-10 August, 2021 that, "To be a woman is to carry a stone under the tongue". The persistent presence of patriarchal structures and attitudes in South African society and social institutions that maintain masculine power and dominance over women as indicated by South Africa's high rate of gender-based violence makes it necessary, by any means necessary, performance making and otherwise, to orient every generation of women to their capacities to remove the stone from under the tongue and carry it in their hands. Aluta continua!

Engaging audience participation with the work is an idea for further development of the performance project. My hope at the beginning of the project was that there would be an opportunity for the work and discussion to extend beyond our collective as performers, and the narratives and our relationship to the narrative would reach audience members. However, the feasibility of this was limited throughout the process due to Covid restrictions. My hope is that in the upcoming production, we will have the opportunity to collectively share our individual transformative experience with a live audience to spread the impact of this relevant work.

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APPENDIX 1- INTERVIEW QUESTION FOR FOUR ROSES

1. How old were you when you left home?
2. What made you decide to leave?
3. Did you tell your family?
4. How did your family feel about you leaving?
5. How long were you in the MK forces?
6. Where were you stationed?
7. What were the first days like? How did you feel?
8. How many women were there in your camp?
9. What was training like?
10. What was it like staying in the camps?
11. Did you ever go on missions?
12. What were those like?
13. How did you feel about your time in MK?
14. Looking back on it, how do you feel about the time you spent in MK now?
15. In hindsight, would you do it again? What would you do differently?
16. Can you share a story with me, one of your most memorable experiences, good or bad?
17. What lessons did you learn from your experience, how did it shape/influence your life and the person you are today?
18. What do you think women of today can learn from your experiences?
19. Are there any women who's stories may have been lost or forgotten that you feel deserve mention?

Thank you for your time and contribution!

APPENDIX 2- EXCERPTS FROM INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

List of Interviewees:

Order	Name	Year	Type of Interview and Place	Duration
1	Rose 1	2017	One-on-one, In-person at home	44min
2	Rose 2	2018	One-on-one, In-person at Rose 2's office	1hr 9min
3	Rose 3	2018	One-on-one, In-person at home	2hrs 49min

Excerpt: Rose 1 Interview Transcript 2017

01:13

I joined the ANC and I was recruited by a very dear a friend of mine. That was in 1979…we were at varsity together so she said to me she wanted to start a study group. So I said oh ok study group and we were just studying politics, since we're both in the same field, so I said cool. And eh she said to me in that case I want you to meet a friend of mine, who's going to help us, and low and behold that meeting was then a formal recruitment into the ANC. And of course, I mean, it was something I didn't have to think about it, it was just something I was eager and ready to do. For me, it was a must do. It wasn't something, I didn't even think about the dangers, think about what it would mean in terms of how it would affect my life and how it would affect my family. I guess for me, the important thing is to be part of a team of dedicated who were standing for justice. Who were standing for rights. We wanted to change lives in South Africa. So that for me was the most important driver whatever else came with it was neither here nor there.

03:09

How old were you?

03:11

I was 18

Excerpt: Rose 2 Interview Transcript 2018

When did you join the Mk and why?

01:07

I left the country in 1977. At the time, I wasn't sure. Well, I knew that if I stayed on, I would be arrested because I was part of the student movement. I was part of the Soweto Representative council. So I left 1977. And at the time I was what I knew for a fact was that I did want to go to school. Because my mother had always said to us, the only thing that can take you out of poverty is education. And I came from a poor background. So for me, education was just as important. But I didn't understand enough in terms of what it is that I needed to do. So when I left went to Swaziland tried to find a school I couldn't find a school because at the time in Swaziland, the security forces there their schools view if it was a public school, it was the only place I could have

potentially went to, gone to because I couldn't have gone to a private school…was that the schools in Swaziland were not accepting South African students because of the view that we are troublemakers for lack of a better word.

Excerpt: Rose 3 Interview Transcript 2018

How was training was it difficult?

1:25:19

I think everybody had they have strengths like for instance I think she's just saying that because I used to hit the bullet well and target practice I didn't miss, I didn't miss, so but what she's forgetting is I seem to remember that when it came to the things like you know, during the booby traps and she was particularly good there

1:25:53

Oh really?

1:25:55

Uh huh, And then **Rose 1** was good at map reading and so on so you can be sure you will never get lost, no seriously, so I think each person had their own area I you know, their own strengths. Things that were really their strong points. Ah no, she'll find a place very quickly and…

1:26:24

So at the different places that you were stationed how many men how many women were there

1:26:37

well mainly the people that we worked with were mainly guys and interestingly in our in our case, even when the roses you know…well we didn't really split, did we split? It's just that different ones had to leave at different times for different places. We would still recruit women into our unit then there would be a second generation of Roses, if you like, who come up like the twins…

APPENDIX 3- POST-PRODUCTION REFLECTION QUESTIONNAIRE

Four Roses participant follow up questionnaire

1. Before participating in Four Roses, did you know anything about the history of women in Umkonto we Sizwe? If yes, what did you know?
2. What did you learn about these women by participating in Four Roses? What did you learn from them as a post-apartheid woman?
3. What aspects of the women's stories resonate with your life as a South African woman, today?
4. What aspects of the women's stories do not resonate with your life as a South African woman, today?
5. Has learning about these women impacted your present and future perspective on women in South Africa? If yes, how?
6. Reflecting on the MK women's stories as well your own life, what future would you like to see for women in South Africa? Your response can be a drawing or a poem.
7. What was your weapon of choice for Four Roses and why?
8. If you could change your weapon of choice now, would you, what would it be and why?
9. What was your overall take away from this experience?
10. Did participating in this experience impact/change your life/perspective on being woman in South Africa in any way? If yes, how?
11. Do you think it is important for South Africans, in particular women, to engage with this history? If yes, why?

12. Before participating in Four Roses, had you ever practiced moving meditation?

13. What was your experience of practicing movement meditation? Did it benefit you and how?

14. Did practicing movement meditation help prepare you for embodying the narrative presented? If yes, how?

15. What was your experience of embodying the narratives of these women? Was it meaningful to you? If yes, why and how?

APPENDIX 4- TABLE OF EMERGING THEMES

MK women	Dancers
Seen vs Unseen (Silence)	**Seen vs Unseen (Silence)**
Safety/Protection	Safety/Protection
Protect self	Protect self
Resourceful	Resourceful
Freedom	Freedom
Weapons of resistance	Weapons of resistance
Strength	Strength
Kidnapping	Kidnapping
Unity	Unity
Role of women then (Professional gender inequalities)	Role of women now (Professional gender inequalities)
Never doubted capabilities	Relatability to shared gender identity
Significance of mental health/ trauma	More freedom
Pen	Pen
AK 47	Rope (significance of mental health)
Sticks	Stick/Pole
Stones	Sjambok
Sjambok	Mace (Dry shampoo)
Womb (weapon)	Womb (weapon)
	Scarf
	Should question roles capable of
	Remembrance
	Archiving on the body
	Rejection of disempowerment

APPENDIX 5- TABLE OF ANALYSIS FOR WEAPONS OF RESISTANCE AND BATTLEFIELDS

Participants	Battlefield	Weapon of resistance	Meaning
Dancer 1	Difficult Personal Relationships with male lovers	sjambok	To protect myself from any harm or abuse To fight for self-reclamation
Dancer 2	Threat & fear of rape/GBV	Pepper spray	To protect oneself from physical assault
Dancer 3	Gender Inequality, Sexism & Glass Ceilings	Scarf	To generate alternative pathways, spaces & opportunities for mobility as a woman
Dancer 4	Not being heard, being silenced by religious & cultural laws	Pen	To write my own story, to give voice to my inner truth. To speak with ink is to resist being erased
Dancer 5	Gender & racial Stereotypes, biases as a Black women	Stick/Branch	Power, strength, intimidation and ultimate defiance. A tool for safety and boundary defining
Dancer 6	Public spaces (Threat of GBV)	Rope	Versatility and adaptability. Fight for mental health
Dancer 7	Work space (Glass ceiling)	Womb	Physical and spiritual weapon. Untouchable