Working from the inside/out: Participatory popular theatre in the negotiation of discursive power and patriarchy in Female Prisons: The example of Westville Female Correctional Centre, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa 2000 - 2004.

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The research project was approved by Head Office of the Department of Correctional Services, Pretoria. See Appendix A.

All photographs were taken in compliance with regulations stipulated in the agreement and are for research purposes only. Offenders signed consent forms which are housed at Westville Female Correctional Centre.
Declaration

I, Miranda Eleanor Young (student number 921316972) declare that this is my own work, except for the acknowledged supervision and referred citations. It is being submitted in fulfilment of a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College Campus, South Africa. It is submitted as 100% of the degree.

It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination, or to any other university.

Signature…………………………… Date…………………………..
### Acronyms, terminologies & abbreviations

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACD</td>
<td>Arts and Culture for Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIDS</td>
<td>Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome</td>
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<td>AMPS</td>
<td>All Media and Products Study</td>
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<td>ANC</td>
<td>African National Congress</td>
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<td>ARV</td>
<td>Antiretroviral</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCMS</td>
<td>Graduate Programme for Culture and Media Studies (UKZN)</td>
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<td>CCCS</td>
<td>Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (Birmingham)</td>
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<td>CD4</td>
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<tr>
<td>CTO</td>
<td>Centre for the Theatre of the Oppressed, Brazil</td>
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<td>DCS</td>
<td>Department of Correctional Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>HIV</td>
<td>Human Immunodeficiency Virus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HMP</td>
<td>Her Majesty’s Prison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JIP</td>
<td>Judicial Inspectorate of Prisons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Medium B’</td>
<td>Male Maximum Correctional Centre, Westville Correctional Facility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Member’</td>
<td>Correctional officer (colloquial)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NALEDI</td>
<td>National Labour and Economic Development Institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TDN</td>
<td>Theatre for a Developing Nation (level 1 course)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TFD</td>
<td>Theatre for Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TiPP</td>
<td>Theatre in Prisons and Probation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TO</td>
<td>Theatre of the Oppressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAR</td>
<td>Participatory Action Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPP</td>
<td>People’s Palace Projects</td>
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<td>PPT</td>
<td>Popular participatory theatre</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAARF</td>
<td>South African Advertising Research Foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>SABC</td>
<td>South African Broadcasting Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sangoma</td>
<td>Traditional healer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shabeen</td>
<td>Tavern</td>
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Toyi-toyi  A dance of protest performed at protest rallies and marches
UND  University of Natal, Durban (UKZN prior to merger)
UKZN  University of KwaZulu-Natal
‘Westville Female’  Westville Female Correctional Centre
YOT  Youth Offending Teams

This thesis has where possible adhered to the terminologies preferred by The Department of Correctional Services, South Africa. Specifically the terms ‘Correctional Centre’ and ‘offender’. The term ‘prison’ has been used when referring to established genres e.g. Prison Theatre and when engaging Michel Foucault’s (1970) intellectual conception of historical institutions of discipline and punishment.
Abstract

The period of transition in South Africa from apartheid to democracy offers a unique opportunity for broadening “the ongoing debate on the continuity of culture before and after decolonisation” (Gainor 1995: xv). This thesis attempts to provide new gendered dimensions to this dialogue through the analysis of popular culture generally and popular participatory theatre (PPT) specifically over a period of 5 years at Westville Female Correctional Centre. As such it is positioned within a Post-colonial Feminist (Mohanty 1991; Spivak 1988) imperative to create spaces for third world women to legitimise experience and explore possibilities for their own lives.

Incarcerated women globally are a small and specific community who experience and have experienced the multi-dimensional operation of patriarchal oppression (Agozino 1997; Carlen 1990, 2002; Worrall 1990, 2002). Thus the thesis also contributes to furthering the debate around female incarceration while responding to the real need to work against oppression from the inside out.

The introduction of performance-based recreation into the South African Correctional Facilities in 1996, offered new opportunities for partnerships between The Department of Correctional Services (DCS) and outside institutions such as Drama and Performance Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). Popular participatory theatre was introduced in Westville Female Correctional Centre in 2000. The theatre form evolved through this collaborative process to be reflective both of the academic facilitators’ influences of theatre for social change (Freire, 1970, 1974; Boal 1979, 1992; Mda 1993; Kamlongera, 1988) that is in essence dialogic (Freire 1970, 1974), and the inmates’ influences of African popular culture (Barber, 1997). The theatre is described and theorised debating issues of form and intention.

However to what extent are democratic, liberatory processes possible within a Correctional Centre environment? While post-colonial approaches are considered (Mbembe 2001), a Fiskean (1989) reading of the popular is useful here in its articulation of the ongoing
negotiation between the power-bloc and the people. This analysis demanded an expansion of the scope from Prison Theatre to prison as theatre as the Correctional Centre became the stage for ‘guerrilla tactics’ through the renegotiation of identity and its performance. Specifically issues of motherhood, femininity, sexuality, abuse and health (HIV/AIDS).

In form the thesis is essentially theorises the narrative and the narratives of five central women as they evolve over a period of five years. It pivots on how the women at Westville appropriated and used the Prison Theatre in the negotiation of discursive power and patriarchy: as democratic communication, as propaganda and in the (re)negotiation of Zulu identity all of which are motivated primarily by the political desire to self actualise and generate self-esteem. The analysis complexifies any attempt to position the women as either colluding with the status quo or resisting it.
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To Joyce
One Sunday in 1999 I was sitting in a cold London bed-sit with a cup of Twinings and The Independent. My now husband and I were one of the many over-qualified South Africans doing menial jobs in London to earn those precious pounds for travel, security, consumables and First World affirmation. I was a customer service agent for a small telecommunications company and listening to irate customers fighting for a few pence or a free phone card was starting to wear me down. Surely there was something more meaningful I could be doing than negotiating phone bills?

There is nothing quite like a white South African with a social conscience (white guilt?). Democracy was new. South Africa was ‘alive with possibility’ (as the slogan goes), and here was I sipping camomile, thousands of miles away. It was in this frame of mind that I opened up the paper and an article instantly caught my eye. It was a piece on a theatre company called ‘Geese’ who were using theatre to rehabilitate offenders. The excitement I felt when reading this article was overwhelming to the point that I would risk the raising of a sceptic eyebrow and say it felt like ‘a calling’. I had no idea how I was going to work in prisons but I knew instantly it was a point of passion. Three years later I would be travelling back to the United Kingdom to spend time with the company for this research. I cut out the newspaper article and put it away safely. It travelled with me all the way back to South Africa.

A year later I was sitting in Ruth Teer-Tomaselli’s office at the Graduate Programme for Culture and Media Studies (CCMS) at the then University of Natal. Prof. Tomaselli was kind enough to offer me a job there after a carefully penned e-mail where I complained about a country obsessed with Tabloid news. Ruth and I were discussing some work related matter when in walked Chris Hurst of the Drama and Performance Studies Programme. His effusive energy was intriguing. “We are running a first year course on Prison Theatre and I need someone to run the theatre projects in Westville Female Correctional Centre” he said to her – hardly noticing me at all. I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. I felt like everything in my

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1. To reiterate, the use of the term ‘offender’ as opposed to ‘inmate’or ‘prisoner’ is the DCS designated terminology and other terms may not be used. My use of it therefore is a requirement according to my contractual obligations with the DCS.
2. The University of Natal of Durban and Pietermaritzburg (UND/ UNP) has since merged with the then University of Durban Westville (UDW), Edgewood teachers training college and the Nelson Mandela Medical School to become the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). The name was officially changed in 2005.
life had been directed towards this moment and I was about to blow it. I think I said something about how interesting that sounded. He left, I thought for good, but two days later he walked into my office asked me to join the team and work with Female inmates at what is now termed The Westville Female Correctional Facility.

In ending, in order to begin, it is fitting to say that my way inside required that I first go outside. I had to remove myself from the familiarity of my South African (Durban) context in order to see clearly and from a distance what it was I felt strongly about which in turn set in motion the events which lead to the work and to this thesis. There has always been a political motivation; however my initial politics were far less radical than they are now: The inmates of Westville Female have taught me well; but ultimately it is about (yes, I will risk the raised eye-brow again) love. For love, as Paulo Freire (1970) and bell hooks (1994) agree, is the ultimate “practice of freedom” (hooks 1994) and where better to start than in a prison.
CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Setting the Scene

Because Africa is moving in several directions at once, this is a period that, at the same time, has been is
not yet, is no longer, is becoming – in a state of preliminary outline and possibility. The mirror reflects a
figure that is in the present yet escapes it, that is, at once, in front and behind, inside and outside, above
and below, in the depths, and is hard to nail down because, at some point, it participates in a phantastical
sequence…that makes the power of obscurity shine forth at the very moment it proceeds to multiply the
sign and to stereotype the mask, its counterfeits and its horrors.  

(Mbembe 2001: 241)

We are much less Greeks than we believe. We are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage but in the
panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of its
mechanism.

(Foucault 1977: 217)

Freedom is acquired by conquest, not gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is
not an ideal located outside of man [sic] nor is it an idea which becomes a myth. It is rather the
indispensable condition for the quest of human completion

(Freire 1972/2000: 47)

And like any artist with no art-form she became dangerous.

(Morrison 1973: 121)

Setting the scene

Equidistant from one of Durban’s most prestigious suburbs, Westville – to the North; and the
highly politicised land that is now the informal settlement, Cato Manor – to the South (home
to some of Durban’s poorest communities), lies Westville Correctional Facility. In a bizarre

---

3 Cato Manor has a turbulent history. It has been the site of much political and social upheaval that dates back
to the 1940s and 50s. Originally occupied by mostly Indian families from 1932 onward, the land was then
leased to other Indians, Africans and coloureds. Although these communities (mostly) peacefully co-existed, in
1949 black on Indian violence erupted as news broke that a young black child had been assaulted by an Indian
man. In 1958 the area was declared ‘white’ under the Group Areas Act as it was seen as prime land, although
ironically whites never lived there. People protested against the forced removals that ensued and despite some
violent uprisings it was all in vain. The residents were mostly relocated to KwaMashu Township north of
Durban. In 1983 it was declared an Indian area and after the abolition of the Group Areas Act in 1986 people
started resettling. It is now home to over 90 000 inhabitants. In the last five years the Cato Manor Development
Agency (CMDA) has been established to try and formalize the area.

Due to the history of the land, there has been quite a lot of foreign money invested in this area, which has been
quite significantly transformed. It is still however home to the poorest of the poor. (www.sahistory.org.za;
europa.eu.int/comm./development/body/publications/courier; www.travel-2-africa.com/kwazulu)
postmodern twist, the Correctional Centre is mirrored to the East by the enormous homage to consumer capitalism ‘the Westville Pavilion’ (shopping centre), known affectionately as ‘The Pav’. Architectural studies (Slessor, 1995; Van Heerden personal communication 2004) have noted uncanny structural similarities between the Correctional Centre and the shopping mall, which comments on the notion of ‘freedom’ in a neo-liberal world which positions us all as consumers. Although Westville Correctional Facility is situated just out of plain view behind a hill, from the Female Correctional Centre windows you can see the flagged turrets enticing you in. It is a common fantasy amongst female inmates, to spend the afternoon languishing in *its* over-lit halls.

Westville Correctional Facility houses in total around 12 000 inmates (statistics provided by Westville Prison), which makes it one of the largest prisons in the Southern Hemisphere, if not the world\(^4\). The complex houses five Correctional Centres: Medium A (Awaiting trial/Remand), Medium B (Maximum security male), Medium C (Minimum Security Male), Youth Centre (Young men between the ages of 16 – 18) and Female. The Female Correctional Centre, which is the space that the drama of this thesis unfolds, is home to both young women and old; those with maximum sentences for capital offences and those with minimum sentences\(^5\).

Westville Correctional Facility also has subsidised staff housing available, a club and a cafeteria. Consequently, many of the staff also live most of their lives behind the razor wire and armed guards. At first glance it appears as if the primary difference between the inmates

\(^4\) In visiting prisons in the United Kingdom (UK) and Brazil, the comparative size of prisons in the West as opposed to those in the ‘Developing’ world was apparent. In the UK the largest prison is Manchester (Strangeways) and houses approximately 1269 offenders while majority of the 152 prisons hold well under 1000 offenders some as in the case of Askham Grange holding as low as 128 offenders (www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/prisoninformation). Brazilian Prisons tend to be larger. The infamous Carandiru (which finally shut its doors in 2002) in its heyday housed over 8000 offenders. Youth and Female facilities are smaller.

\(^5\) Correctional Services keep maximum and minimum security offenders as separate as possible by confining them to separate sections of the Correctional Centre. They are also allocated different tasks. Offenders with minimum sentences are allowed to work (for little money) in the clothing workshop on site, while maximums are not allowed to. It is perceived that the more ‘serious’ criminals would have a bad influence on the (often younger) less criminally minded offenders. While I cannot speak for the Male Correctional Centres, in the Female Correctional Centre this assumption is largely unfounded. Social workers and Correctional Services Staff (members) observe that the women with longer sentences tend to be less disruptive. It is often the younger women, who are in and out of prison who tend to be more disruptive to Correctional Centre routine. It will be discussed in further detail later in the dissertation how three older women in the drama group, who are serving maximum sentences, became mother figures for many of the younger women – both maximum and minimum.
and the staff, who live on the premises, is that the staff can go to The Pavilion while the
inmates only dream about it.

The Correctional Centres themselves are surrounded by well manicured gardens of marigolds
and daisies, which privileged male offenders, who are nearing their release are allowed to
tend. Female inmates are not allowed to do work in the grounds, as male and female inmates
are not allowed (physical) contact\(^6\). Male inmates far outnumber the female inmates
(approximately 5:1), nationally there are 158 115 male inmates and only 3 550 female
inmates (Judicial Inspectorate of Prisons (JIP) 2007). This regulation prejudices female
inmates who are rarely – if ever – in contact with the natural environment. However their
board and lodging, although a far cry from the five star accommodation conservatives would
have us believe, is a notch up.

Westville Female Correctional Centre, used to be the old ‘white’ prison during apartheid.
This means that rather than the overcrowded dormitories of three rows of bunks, three bunks
high that are home to the male inmates in Medium B\(^7\), the female inmates share cells
designed for single (white) inmates. There are usually two to three inmates per cell, but some
inmates have the privilege of having their own small cell. Whether you have your own
private cell or a bunk in an overcrowded dormitory, what is striking is how each inmate will
personalise this space. Photographs of loved ones and religious icons, and certificates
carefully covered in protective plastic adorn the walls. Many beds are covered with
personally embroidered pillow cases and duvet covers (from home?).

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\(^6\) Female and Male (youth and adult) offenders alike spend a great deal of energy and focus trying to initiate contact with offenders of the opposite sex. The Female Correctional Centre fronts onto the back of the Youth Centre and an elaborate system of signage has developed to allow (usually young) female offenders to speak to and develop relationships with young men from the Youth Centre. Many of the younger women frequently proposition me to try and organise for the drama groups from the respective Correctional Centres to meet, particularly the men, from Medium B (as opposed to the boys from Youth). On three occasions female and youth offenders were allowed to interact on performance days under close guarded supervision. Many female offenders also have ‘pen pals’ from Medium B.

\(^7\) According to the latest annual report on behalf of the JIP by Judge Nathan Charles Erasmus (2007), offenders on average have less than 1.2 m\(^2\), the size of an average office desk in which they must eat sleep and spend 23 hours a day.
I have chosen to introduce the thesis in this way – without as yet explaining the nature of the research question for a number of reasons. First, it theatrically appropriate (theatre being a central aspect of this dissertation) to ‘set the scene’ before revealing the plot. Space is also one of the essential demands/ingredients for theatre to exist along with actor and audience (Brook, 1968/1994; Grotowski 1968/1994). It was through the reconceptualisation of the relationship between these three elements that the primary intention of this project, on which the research is based, was able to be realised: This being the facilitation of dialogic popular participatory theatre with inmates (and students, for the purposes of theatrical ‘exchange’ or “barter” (Barba 1985) within the parameters of the projects). In addition, this dissertation is theoretically rooted in an awareness of the politics or history of space-time (Massey 1993). Thus, although the primary area of investigation in this thesis is who and what the priority, for the time being, has been given to the where and when: Westville Female Correctional Centre, Durban South Africa; 2000 – 2004.

The experience of working – in my case workshopping popular participatory theatre projects in a (female) prison brings sharply into focus the acute and complex interwoven relationship between identity, power, and the bizarre space-time continuum which form the theoretical basis of the thesis. Theatre practitioner Augusto Boal, (2002:5) who began working in prisons in Brazil, and whose work has been influential in the Westville Correctional Centre theatre projects (Hurst and Buthelezi 2003; Young-Jahangeer 2004a, 2004b), observed that outside prison, we are prisoners of time and space appears infinite, inside prison, you are a prisoner of space and time appears infinite. When ‘doing time’, time is experienced in such an altered way that its very existence (at least as a separate predictable entity) is brought into

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8 As Brook famously stated in his seminal book The Empty Space (1986: 9) “I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all I need for an act of theatre to be engaged.”
9 This thesis will explore in some detail notions of popular participatory theatre in Chapter 3. At this point To use Marianne Drag’s definition is useful: “Popular theatre refers to the use of the multiplicity of dramatic expressions that exist at grassroots level, and that are used to investigate and analyse development problems and to create a critical awareness of them and a potential for change them” (1993: 155). ‘Participatory’ implies a commitment to a Freirean (1970) dialogic approach as essential to facilitate consciousness-raising through a “problem-posing” (Freire 1970) pedagogy.
10 The performance projects existed primarily within the course-structures of under and post-graduate teaching in the Drama and Performance Studies Programme, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College campus. A more detailed explanation of the structure and evolution of the projects which created the space and opportunity for these theatrical interventions are explained in the methodology.
question: An inmate once described prison to me as “Hurry up! And wait”. For me this common phrase perfectly encapsulates this strange dance between, space-time, power and identity, that plays itself out in the prison.

The assertion, that space has a political dimension, however cannot be assumed. In fact as Doreen Massey (1993) points out many of the current (and often conflicting) definitions of space “deprive it of politics and of the possibility of politics: they effectively depoliticize the realm of the spatial” (1993: 142). Michel Foucault (1977, 1982) and bell hooks (1991) also emphasise the importance of the spatial and the politics implicit within it – their propositions will be picked up later in the dissertation (primarily Chapter 4 and 5).

Doreen Massey’s argument however is particularly useful: Drawing on feminist theory as well as radical geography and physics, she postulates that the polarisation (or separation) of space and time creates a dichotomous dualism which is “at heart problematical and a hindrance to either understanding or changing the world” (1993:147). It is precisely through this kind of structural (and patriarchal) thinking that, feminist Hélène Cixous (in Moi 1985: 102-127) sets up male/female as hierarchical binary oppositions, with the associated positive/negative attributions they then incur. In the separation of time and space, time is masculine and is associated with presence, dynamism, politics; space is feminine and is associated with absence, stasis, and depoliticisation. She therefore argues for space-time as opposed to space/time and this conception will be adopted here. In addition the A; Not-A understanding of time/ space is to deny the element of the social which for Massey and others (Stannard 1989:33 in Massey 1993: 154) is crucial: “it is not that the interrelations between objects [or individuals] occur in space and time; it is these relationships themselves which create/ define space-time.”

Reconceptualising space-time in this way has also important implications for debates in cultural identity and popular culture – since the social is spatial – which feed directly into this research. Most significant is the realisation that identity and by consequence difference – since identity is exclusionary – is being constantly created and recreated in the ‘vanishing present’ (to use the title from Gayatri Spivak’s (1999) book). And that identity, it will be shown is negotiated through the application of popular culture which exists in ‘the zone between’ (Barber 1997:1).
Extending the notion of space and time into the social, cultural and political realm, there is a tendency, which Homi Bhabha (1990: 207 – 21) points out, to represent ethnic identities as archaic rather than emerging “out of a particular political state that is functioning very much in our time.” This understanding will prove particularly relevant when looking at constructions and reconstructions of female identity (specifically around ‘Zuluness’) within the Correctional Centre.

The application of this theory in practice points to the significance of the transitional moment in South African history (from authoritarianism to democracy) in terms of this thesis and its findings. It documents how the impact that transformation made at governmental level is able to facilitate the renegotiation of the identity of the nation and the individual. Raymond Williams’ concept of ‘Structure of feeling’ (1958/ 1971) is useful in this regard. In South Africa, Prison Theatre as an emerging new area of theatrical intervention was made possible primarily due to the post-apartheid shift towards rehabilitation\textsuperscript{11} within Correctional Services.

**Transitional Moments**

During the apartheid years, the DCS (Department of Correctional Services) were under the jurisdiction of the army and were marked by secrecy and lack of accountability that the states of emergencies sanctioned by the then government, afforded them. Their approach to incarceration was consequently authoritarian and castigatory, imbued with the legalised racism of the regime. Detention without trial being one of the most infamous and iniquitous hallmarks of the apartheid government carried out by its henchmen the police and the army (under which DSC fell).

However with the new dispensation, came the new image of Correctional Services, one that spoke of ‘rehabilitation’ and ‘transparency’. According to the revised Correctional Services Act (1998: 16), the purpose of the correctional system is to contribute to maintaining and protecting a just, peaceful and safe society by:

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\textsuperscript{11} Although ‘the drama projects’ are positioned as education and therefore rehabilitation, Chris Hurst and myself are weary of making such bold claims. This would also implicate the ‘success’ of the projects in terms of recidivism (although there have been success stories which I will document) which is hugely problematic. In addition, the notion of rehabilitation points to the pathology of the individual (Foucault 1977) and not of the society.
(a) enforcing sentences of the courts in the manner prescribed by this Act;
(b) detaining all prisoners in safe custody whilst ensuring their human dignity; and
(c) promoting the social responsibility and human development of all prisoners and persons subject to community corrections.

Of particular relevance to the proposed introduction of theatre workshops/interventions in Westville Correctional Centre, was the department’s commitment to “social responsibility and human development” and of course “human dignity” (1998: 16).

This overnight transformation (personal communications Pooben Pillay 2003), which moved Correctional Services out of the jurisdiction of the army, opened possibilities for practitioners, who were now permitted access in order to fulfil the department’s mandate. Consequently, in 1996 Correctional Services (DCS) allowed recreational activities to be introduced into the prisons for the first time. The University’s proposition met the requirements of a broadly educative and rehabilitatory programme that had no budgetary impact on the Department\(^\text{12}\).

Using Westville Female Correctional Centre as my example, in the years that I have been researching and working in the Correctional Centre, some of the recreational/ development projects and events have included a gospel choir (which wins many nationwide competitions and are busy cutting a CD), \textit{ingoma} dancing, beauty pageants, sewing, netball, writing projects, ‘The art of living’ life-skills programme, flower arranging, aerobics, yoga and most notably the introduction of a school. The introduction of a school is significant as male inmates were prioritised in terms of education. When I began working at Westville Female in 2000 there was no school. A school was introduced in 2003\(^\text{13}\).

\(^{12}\) The discrepancy between policy and ability to implement policy due to budgetary constraints remains a dilemma in DCS. In a recent symposium (March 2008) held at Medium B organized by Chris Hurst and myself this was a topic under discussion.

\(^{13}\) The introduction of the school at Westville Female was in part possible due to the fact that a number of female offenders – who were key figures in the drama group – had tertiary education. One woman, who is significant for this research and shall be known as Virginia, was a headmistress of a school prior to incarceration. Her presence and power in Westville Female Correctional Centre is noted and will be unpacked at various points in this thesis.
While this list does seem somewhat impressive, the national reality is slightly more bleak. The 2007 report for the period 1 April 2006 – 31 March 2007, noted that “only about 11% of sentenced prisoners were actively involved in rehabilitation and vocational programmes” (Erasmus 2007: 21). This, despite the fact that policy approved in 2007 as part of the Directorate for offender sport, recreation, arts and culture states:

> Participation in sport, recreation, arts and cultural activities should not be regarded as an optional extra to the list of offenders/detainees. It should in fact, be central to the rehabilitation plan of each offender in order to assist them to re-order their lives is a positive manner, taking their social, economic and cultural backgrounds into account. (DCS pamphlet from the Directorate: Offender sport, recreation, arts and culture 2007)

Thus there is clearly a discrepancy between what appears as revised policy and what is actually (able to be) implemented on the ground.

In a recent interview with journalist Shaun de Waal (2008), Feminist and Prison activist Angela Davis raises two points of direct relevance here. First, the issue of transition (are we still in transition and what does that mean?) and secondly its impact on institutions such as prisons. She observes of South Africans: “the way people refer to apartheid here...often makes it sound as though apartheid ‘happened long, long ago – but it’s been barely a decade” (Davis in de Waal 2008:7). South Africa is therefore still very much a society in transition. She urges South Africans to remember history and “to attend to what it means to be in transition, in the aftermath of apartheid, which clearly left its imprint.”

For Davis, transition is a slow process, which happens far slower in institutions than it does in individuals. In the carceral regimes of the US, she notes (Davis in de Waal 2008:7) “there are traces of slavery, the sedimentations of slavery from 100 years ago, and if such structures persist in such institutions, why not in South Africa’s penal system?” Davis clearly would be sceptical of Pillay’s claim to an ‘overnight transformation’ being much more than the cosmetic changes of perhaps a new dress-code. She continues, “We have to take into consideration the ghosts that still haunt us today. Repressive institutions often have very long memories, regardless of what the individuals who are their agents know or don’t know. The memory of those institutions is inscribed in its practices and its regimes. The prison functions just like it did before” (Davis in de Waal 2008:7).
This thesis takes Davis’ point and is not naïve about the role of prisons within all ‘democratic’ societies which function to ‘discipline and punish’ the incarcerated: through the control of the body in space through time; and the ‘free’, though fear of this punishment (Foucault 1970: 104). Nevertheless, the key role that transformation within Correctional Services has had on allowing and ultimately promoting the projects and the research – at least at the level of policy – must be noted. One aspect of the South African prison system which has remained constant since even before the advent of apartheid is that of the Prison gangs. The gangs have a profound influence on the operations of the Correctional Facilities in South Africa.

**Prison Gangs**

An introduction into a thesis involving a South African Correctional Centres, power and identity would be incomplete without a discussion on the prison gangs. Although the Female Correctional Facilities are not dominated by gang activity, gang membership is not restricted by gender and the control of sexual intercourse and the exchange of cash and drugs, which are the gangs core businesses, remain a primary area of focus for the Correctional Centre authorities in the Female Correctional Centre. Female inmates will seldom admit to being gang members (in my 10 years of working there only one inmate told me she was a 28) yet these ‘illegal’ activities continue. Further, since participation in such activity is seen as delinquent and placed on record thus affecting parole, it can be regarded as an act of defiance and resistance to the authority of the institution.

**The Numbers**

South Africa’s prison gangs – known as The ‘Numbers’ gangs – because all five gangs are represented by a number – are national. They began on the mines at the turn of the century by a mythical figure known as Nongoloza (Steinberg 2004: xiv). They revolve around the modes of currency: sex, drugs, valuables and money. They are highly organised and “operate along quasi-military lines that mimic colonial, militarised institutions” (Gear & Ngubeni 2002: 4). An example of a popular rank would be a fighting general. The hierarchies and

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14 Although homosexuality is legitimate and legal according to the constitution, within the Correctional Centre it not considered ‘legal’. When I challenged this as unconstitutional, she told me that the “Prison had their own rules” (personal conversation 8 October 2009). The justification was that these women are actually not homosexual, but get involved in sexual activity in the Correctional Centre. Correctional Facilities are strongly religious institutions where homosexuality is seen as a moral wrong. Relationships, which in a Correctional Centre are inevitably same sex, are seen as promoting disruptive behaviour and are therefore a security risk.
ritualised codes of conduct are detailed. Once you are initiated into the gang you bear its mark (literally tattooed onto you) and it stays with you. Inside or out, Pollsmor or Sun City (ironic prison slang for Johannesburg’s central jail), you slot in where your rank dictates.

The 28s are the original ‘number’ and are the most powerful and prolific, “the objective of the 28s is to pamper, protect, and organise catamites or ‘wyfies’ [wives] for sex” (Gear & Ngubeni 2002: 5). These men – and women – do not identify themselves as homosexual. A relationship between a husband and his ‘wyfie’ is highly over-determined along traditional gendered lines. The ‘wyfie’ must submit to the will of ‘her’ husband in exchange for consumables such as food, marijuana, and cigarettes (Gear & Ngubeni 2002: 11; personal conversation with inmates at Medium B).

The second most powerful and established ‘number’ are the 26s. Their domain is physical goods (such as drugs and cigarettes) and money. There is co-operation between the different gangs as they perform different functions and all respect ‘the number’. The 27s are a small gang aligned with the 26s that are associated with ‘blood’ or assault. They offer protection to the 26s in exchange for goods. Some say that have merged into the 26s, who are also known for physical violence (Gear & Ngubeni 2002).

The 25s – or Big Fives – are collaborators with the Correctional Centre Staff and authorities. Men in Medium B told me that some staffs are also gang members. Their collusion with the Big Fives would indicate that possibility. The last two gangs, Airforce 3 and 4 (also known as 23s and 24s) have one aim – and that is to escape from prison.

Gang members insist that joining a prison gang is voluntary and there are some inmates who are non-gang members. However once entering prison the uninitiated inmate may fall prey to one of many manipulations disguised as favours which may find him in an invidious situation. Accepting a cigarette for example may require pay back… or else. A play that was facilitated with inmates at Youth Centre in 2001 explored this. In prison, there are also many benefits to being in a gang, such as security, a sense of belonging, acquisition of goods and sense of identity and power that are hard to resist. Particularly since the stigma of ‘criminal’ saps one of respect and agency within society, the gangs provide a means to access lost power.
The experience of prison is a form of institutionalised infantilisation. You are told when to
eat, sleep, clean, learn, work and wait. You must always ask permission. Lower your eyes.
Grovel. In the Female Correctional Centre I observed how the women learn to defer to
members and older more powerful inmates, literally calling them ‘mummy’. Although this is
in part cultural, ‘Ma’ being a term of respect for an older woman, this usage was practiced by
inmates of all cultural groups becoming clearly part of ‘prison culture’. The transformation
from ‘ma’ to ‘mummy’ is also clearly indicative of the infantilising nature of the
environment\(^{15}\). The gangs exist to counter this process, turning boys into men (or women)
and girls into women (or men). Yet ironically this is done by using the same structures that
oppressed them. As Steinberg notes “what better way to retrieve the adulthood prison has
stolen than to borrow the agency of one’s custodians?” (2004: 220).

Having engaged the social and political scene, I will now expand the stage to a brief look at
the specific genre engaged here – that of Prison Theatre – and how it has manifest by key
players around the globe\(^{16}\). This is necessary in order to understand how and why Prison
Theatre in South Africa, due to the social and political aspects engaged previously, is
different.

**Prison Theatre: scoping the scene**

Prison Theatre is a new and fragile area of activity. Globally it exists as a marginalised
discourse defined alone by the space that it occupies rather than by any aesthetic or
philosophical unity (Thompson 1998) apart from a broad belief that theatre can have a
positive effect on the lives of individuals (Heritage 1998, 2002; Thompson 1998; Young-
Jahangeer 2004).

That the space/place is the descriptor for this form of community theatre is significant.
Typically theatre concerned with communities of people, such as South African ‘Workers’
Theatre’ for example (Von Kotze 1987) are defined by the group involved in its creation. In
the case of Prison Theatre it is defined by the rather oppressive envelope and the space

\(^{15}\) This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

\(^{16}\) Prison Theatre is a growing area and there are many theatre groups, and individuals in both Europe and
America that do Prison Theatre work that are not engaged with here (see Balfour 2004; Thompson 1998). This
thesis has chosen to focus on those more established groups in the United Kingdom that fall within the scope of
theatre for development (in the broadest sense): social personal or psychological.
United Kingdom-based prison theatre practitioner and academic James Thompson (1998: 15) attempts to explain why this is so: “the identification of our work as theatre in prisons, rather than theatre with offenders… alters both its scope and how it is practiced.” ‘Theatre with offenders’ necessarily shifts the imperative towards ‘the offender’, the individual in the system as part of the system – that means rehabilitation. And in so doing limits the theatrical forms and intention. ‘Prison Theatre’ is more inclusive.

In addition, through its spatial focus, it acknowledges the power of space, both prison space and broader context, to inform and shape the nature and experience of the interaction that occurs within it. As Michael Keith and Steve Pile (1993) argue “space cannot be dealt with as if it were merely passive, abstract arena on which things happen” (Keith & Pile 1993:2). The space itself is a protagonist. Indeed Foucault’s (1970) seminal text on the prison ‘discipline and punish’ draws on Jeremy Bentham’s (1791) concept of the panopticon to demonstrate how the prison is spatially constructed to control, primarily through surveillance.

The other ‘protagonists’ are of course the individuals (both inmates and practitioners) that create the work. In this sense it becomes perhaps more appropriate to extend the focus beyond space, to ‘place’ since it incorporates the human element. Place, Thelma Golden (2001:20) writes is a concept “inherent in the local… a portion of the land/town/cityscape seen from the inside [my italics], the resonance of a specific location that is known and familiar … [and often] entwined with personal memory.”

The engagement with the personal here is to draw in debates around the individual (practitioner/ inmate) in relation to and constitutive of the broader context. O’Sullivan defines context as the “social, political and historical circumstances and conditions within which certain actions, processes or events are located and made meaningful” (O’Sullivan et al 1994: 63)17. This brings together the geographic and the ethnographic as central players in cultural production. Theatre as a cultural mirror is reflective of this.

In attempting to understand the broader field of Prison Theatre and how it exists globally, my research has taken me to the United Kingdom (2002) and Brazil (2004). To expand in too

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17 This overriding commitment to a radical contextualism embraces what Lawrence Grossberg (1993) calls ‘the practice of cultural studies’ (in Storey 1999: 166).
much detail however would be to divert focus. An earlier version of the thesis did have chapters on both Prison Theatre in the UK and Brazil but I received the comment that it was like going off the freeway onto an interesting detour and then not knowing where you were when you joined the main road. Although the point is well taken, I do however feel that some precedential discussion of these contexts are important as they go some way in explaining why Prison Theatre in Durban, South Africa has manifested in that way that it has. Essentially we are speaking spatially: South/ North and South/South.

**Prison Theatre in the United Kingdom: At her majesty's pleasure/ strange penitentiary practices**

The Prison Theatre scene in the United Kingdom is fairly recently established (developing rapidly from 90s onwards), broad, yet interconnected field. Although its use is as varied as the intention of its practitioners, I will focus more specifically on its use as – and in – education and rehabilitation / therapy\(^{18}\).

**Clean Break**

Two female inmates established *Clean Break Theatre Company* at HMP Askham Grange in 1979. A veritable success story it now exists as a well funded\(^{19}\) registered charity with offices in Kentish Town under the Executive Directorship of Lucy Perlman and with a permanent staff of fifteen (www.cleanbreak.org.uk). It describes itself today as “UK’s only women’s theatre company for ex-offenders, prisoners, ex-prisoners and/or women with experience of the Mental Health System”\(^{20}\)” (Clean Break prospectus 2002/3).

Clean Break’s aim in terms of social impact is primarily to build confidence and self-esteem through providing a space to meet new people and expand the educational and employment opportunities of women who feel/ are socially excluded. In this way theatre is seen as a stepping-stone for change. It is seen as a constructive use of time, for women who may be habitual criminals or depressive. It is also something new and different for most women and

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\(^{18}\) These categories are of course not discrete. That which is ‘educational’ can also be considered ‘rehabilitative’ and that which is entertaining, can also be educational and rehabilitative.

\(^{19}\) Initially funded by the lottery (Carlen 1990) its donors now include London Arts, The European Union, The Paul Hamlin Foundation, Camden Council, Lloyds Bank the Youth Justice Board and the Department for Education and skills amongst others. Patron’s, who support and profile the institution, include Dame Judi Dench, Emma Thompson, Janet Suzman and Baroness Vivienne Stern.

\(^{20}\) The inclusion of the Mental Health system as part of their scope is interesting. It points to an understanding of the experience of institutionalization which Michel Foucault is most notable for exploring – his Madness and Civilization (2001) and Discipline and Punish (1977).
is therefore stimulating and has the added benefit of promoting effective communication (Clean Break prospectus 2002/3: 5). Annually it reaches about 100 women (Anna Herman, Head of Education Clean Break, personal communication 2002), (which in comparison to the Westville Correctional Centre Projects is quite small).

Clean Break began with the intention of empowering women affected by the criminal justice and mental health systems. The aim has stayed focused, still catering for their target community; yet they have chosen to empower primarily through formal education – and specifically education around performance – where prospective participants are asked to ‘unlock their creative potential’. They also see their role as encouraging awareness around the issue of women and crime and therefore contract a female playwright each year to write a play on the subject.

Theatre in Prisons and Probation Centre (TiPP)
The Theatre in Prisons and Probation Centre (TiPP) was founded by in 1992 by Paul Heritage (then of Manchester University Drama Department) and James Thompson, Director of Apt Theatre – and visiting lecturer within the Department, essentially marking the beginning of the formalised integration of arts into the prison system. Heritage is now head of People’s Palace Projects (PPP) based at Queen Mary College, London. The PPP is the case-study for the ‘Brazil’ section of this chapter. James Thompson is now director of the Centre for Applied Theatre Research at Manchester University Drama Departmen in which he undertakes and evaluates Arts and Culture for Development (ACD) projects.

The TiPP Centre exists today as a professional organisation, headed by Simon Ruding\(^2\), which has two intersecting functions. First, it is contracted by Drama Department at Manchester University to run the second and third year Project Course on Prison Theatre and the MA in Applied Theatre (Prison and Probation) (Peaker 1998). It is, according to my research, the only other example of University Drama Department collaboration with Prisons where students go into prisons as part of a structured course besides UKZN. Secondly it is contracted by Prison and Probation Services and outfits that fall under that umbrella such as

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\(^2\) Simon Ruding has also been a director of Geese Theatre which will be discussed next.
Youth Justice System\textsuperscript{22} to provide theatre based workshops for inmates regarding offending behaviour. It is, as Peaker states “a very symbiotic relationship which is sometimes difficult for outsiders to fully comprehend: In practical terms the division is often between professional work and supervised student course work” (Peaker 1998: 199).

\textbf{Geese Theatre Company}

The Geese Theatre Company is the most established and reputable theatre company working in the Criminal Justice system in the United Kingdom and the United States. Founded in 1980 by British expatriate John Bergman in the US, the UK company was started by US company member Clark Baim in 1987 (Mountford & Farrell 1998: 109). Based in Birmingham, it is now operational in over 14 counties through-out the UK “providing input into offending-behaviour, sex offender and violent offender programmes” (Mountford & Farrell 1998: 111).

Geese Theatre company positions itself firmly within the area of psychodrama and thus with the notion of therapy for rehabilitative purposes. Its key theoretical underpinnings are Social Learning Theory (Bandura 1977 in Baim, Brookes & Mountford, 2002: 19); Cognitive Behaviouralism (Beck 1976 in Baim, Brookes & Mountford, 2002: 20) and Role Theory (Moreno 1993 in Baim, Brookes & Mountford, 2002: 20). Geese Theatre has a repertoire of workshops looking at different aspects of the offender personality profile and experience each of which employs different strategies to engage offending behaviour. Most notable however is the use of the mask as a theatrical device. Participants are then taught to manage the impulse to offend personified in the mask entitled ‘death bird’.

\textbf{Commentary}

The above discussion is brief; however my wider research into the area positioned Prison Theatre in the UK as predominantly within the ambit of Liberal Humanism (a contextually specific paradigm). Liberal Humanism acknowledges ‘the arts/drama as ‘civilising’ (Sneddon 1981 in Dalrymple 1987), in its ability to promote specific ‘moral’ codes and common decent values in society (Bennett 1982; Barry 1995). As such Prison Theatre in the United Kingdom is by and large unable to escape a focus on ‘the individual’ and tends to be a

\footnotetext{22}{The Youth Justice System has been running for the last seven years and is dedicated to the prevention of Youth Offending in Britain. It is run by the Youth Justice Board and manages both the custodial sector and what are known as Youth Offending Teams or YOT’s, who work with young people at risk of (re)offending.}
broadly charitable middle-class enterprise concerned with ‘standards’ and the promotion of effective skills and behaviour. In addition, as Paul Heritage admitted in an interview “Prison Theatre in the United Kingdom supports the structure [and function] of the prison and therefore legitimises it” (Interview with Paul Heritage 11 May 2007).

Drawing on Foucault (1970) Heritage (1998: 37) argues further that focusing on the individual working within the group environment in order to learn supposedly quantifiable skills, which is what Prison Theatre in the UK tends towards, “moulds itself very comfortably into the ideological framework of a punishment system that concentrates on reforming an individual whose presence is considered both a danger and a disease within the social body”. This might explain to some extent why he no longer works in Prisons in the UK and chose to move his expertise to Brazil. This focus on individual pathology, in the first instance and the subsumption of the creative enterprise into the disciplinary structure becomes far more problematic when addressing spaces of the South. I will now discuss Prison Theatre in Brazil as an example of Prison Theatre in the South with close historical, cultural and economic similarities to South Africa.

Brazil: Revolutionary dreams

Prisons in Brazil are mostly like repositories of humans who stay there and do nothing – which is like having a hospital and slinging sick people into it together, without doctor, nurse, or even medicine: how could we expect the sick to be healed in such a scenario? Our prisons are factories of hatred. (Boal 2002: 5)

Research in Prison Theatre in Brazil essentially means researching People’s Palace Projects (PPP). PPP is the brainchild of Paul Heritage, director and James Thompson, (now ex-) associate director. It is a registered charity based in Queen Mary’s College, London. Although it shut its doors in Rio at the end of 2006, for 10 years it was a highly successful in delivering Prison Theatre programmes that embraced a Boalian imperative.

23 People’s Palace Project (UK) is still operational however and maintains links between Brazil and the United Kingdom. Their primary current project is entitled From the Favela to the World and involves collaboration between PPP and Rio based hip-hop band Afro-Reggae. Afro-Reggae are a socially committed initiative from the favelas and have 65 social projects around Brazil. In attempting to explore an inverse model of development (inside-out), which supports and grows peripheral popular initiatives for social change, rather than imposing from the outside-in, PPP now see their role as “making links between socially engaged art [from the margins] and arts institutions [from the centre]” (Heritage interview 11 May 2007). PPP have linked Afro-Reggae with the Barbican where they will perform annually until 2012. For more detail on this project see
The initial theatre based projects in Brazil were run through TiPP (discussed above) while Paul Heritage was there. Methodologically the TiPP work conducted by Heritage (1998a) in Brazil was informed by the techniques of Augusto Boal (1979, 1992) and Paulo Freire (1970) discussed above. Appropriated from Brazil to Britain and then returned through a British run project. The result – a theatrical form “cooked from foreign and native ingredients…but [which] became peculiarly Brazilian” (1998a: 36). This was largely due to the influence of Brazilian popular culture such as tele novellas, capoeira and carnival.

Nevertheless responsible and ethical management of ‘development’ based initiatives whose aim is the conscientisation of the target community demands a more sustained commitment from the practitioner (Mda 1993: 184). Consequently, when Heritage moved to the school of English and Drama at Queen Mary’s College, University of London, he established together with James Thompson25, People’s Palace Projects. With a fully equipped office in Rio, headed by Magno Barros (Executive Director) and with a staff of at least six full-time contracted members, PPP was then able to manage the projects on site. People’s Palace’s use of forum theatre as their chief technique, is indicative of their intention to raise-awareness and empower offenders.

Funding was sourced on a project by project basis – mostly by UK agencies. People’s Palace Projects defines itself as an organisation that “puts theatre research into action [and] manages a wide range of projects that find practical application for academic scholarship” (PPP prospectus 2001). Its aims are broader and are centred on the areas of practice, research, training and publication in the area of development communication (Mda 1993: 1 – 5): The objectives of this paradigm being the democratisation of communication in order to “increase participation, achieve self-reliance, promote equity and close communication gaps” (Hedebro 1982 in Mda 1993: 1). Forum theatre (Boal 1979) is used primarily as the medium of choice to facilitate the realisation of these ends.

Although PPP has shifted its focus somewhat from prisons, Heritage states that PPP has never been about reflecting the identity of the prison, rather it is about tapping into the “energy of the periphery” (Heritage interview 11 May 2007) and thus has a broader, multi-layered focus.

24 A fuller discussion of Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the oppressed (1979) will be discussed in Chapter 3
25 James Thompson, as alluded to earlier, no longer holds the position of associate director. He is however an active member of the board (interview with Paul Heritage 11 May 2007).
Their focus is international, striving (successfully) to form partnerships with people and organisations around the developing world to initiate theatre projects with them. PPP have worked with theatre groups such as Atelier – Théâtre Burkinabe in Birkina Fasso, Centre for the Theatre of the oppressed (CTO) Brazil, and the Royal National Theatre in the UK. In their work they aim to research and develop appropriate theatrical methodologies and train individuals and organisations in the participatory theatre techniques used in this work (PPP prospectus 2001). As part of the process of initiating these kinds of partnership projects, emphasis is placed on the creation of ‘active dialogue’ between the role players which may include NGOs, government agencies working in the area of development and practitioners. They state “we aim to raise awareness of the possibilities and practicalities of using theatre for development agencies” (PPP Prospectus 2001).

Although, as evidenced above, PPP have worked in other countries and in the UK, the majority of the work has taken place in Brazil. The projects have mostly been large scale with Staging Human Rights affecting in the end up to 30 000 offenders and guards across 6 states (Heritage 2004). The Brazil initiatives have been: Projecto Drama (1997 – 2000); Changing the Scene 1 & 2 (1999 – 2000), which were conferences on Theatre and Social Development (1999) in Rio and Theatre Building Citizenship (2000) in Recife; Direitos Humanos em Cena [Staging Human Rights] (2001 – 2002), and a Youth Justice Project also entitled Mudança de Cena [Changing the Scene] (2003 – 2005)26. When we visited PPP in 2004 ‘Changing the Scene’ was in full swing. We were able to accompany the facilitators’ to six of the 16 institutions for Young offenders in Rio as participant observers and occasional facilitators.

**Commentary**

My inclusion of precedents has been to demonstrate what I feel is the inevitable and essential influence of the context (the space/time) on the form and intention of Prison Theatre. Further, the manifestations of different ‘theatres’ sets up a relationship – a dialogue – between these ‘theatres’ and so, meaning is made. This dialogue takes place on the global stage across the hemispheres. What is has shown is that while the South and the North do not always speak the same language, the South has many cross-overs and commonalities with

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26 The conferences ‘Changing the scene’ (I & II) were funded by the British Council. They gathered together such well known academics and practitioners as Augusto Boal and Maria Rita Freire amongst others.
other countries of the South, which manifests in Prison Theatre with similar form and objectives. This of course is owing to the similar histories (of colonisation) and presents (of poverty, wide disparities between rich and poor and other social ills such as HIV/AIDS). This makes Prison Theatre for rehabilitation problematic since it places all accountability with the individual and their pathology. Prison Theatres of the South have therefore focused on socio-drama which includes dialogue in the rehearsal for change (Boal 1979).

**The protagonists: Offending Women**

My opening, as previously emphasised, has been a spatial one, starting from the immediate geographical and personal landscape of one’s own bed and pillow, I then engaged broader (political) and global context of Prison Theatre itself. By describing the personal space of the women I have been working with since 2000 – the protagonists of this piece – there is also a deliberate attempt to humanise (Freire 1970) – right from the outset – these ‘criminals’. Criminality and embroidery do not typically share association! In fact, as Rozilika Parker (1984) argues “embroidery has become indelibly associated with stereotypes of femininity” (1984:2) and evokes images of ‘home’ and ‘virgin’ – a far cry from perceptions around ‘women who kill’ – or as Ann Worrall (1990) calls them: “offending women”.

Thus, in response to the post-apartheid South African context, with its increase in crime and conservatism so prophetically outlined by Franz Fanon (1965/1990), one of the primary motivations for the theatre work in the Correctional Centre – and particularly in the exchanges that involved both students and offenders, has always been to challenge stereotypical perceptions around criminality (and stereotypes generally). Informed by the writings and problem-posing pedagogy of Paulo Freire (1970), the battle against the dehumanisation of men/women by other men/women – and particularly the dehumanisation of women in (a post-apartheid/ post-colonial) society, is a primary political imperative which underpins both the theory and practice this research.

However, while I seek to challenge perceptions around criminality, it is as important to note that the intention is not to romanticise these women who “defy description” (Worrall 1990:1)
with a universalising multicultural\(^{27}\) and Liberal Humanist agenda so perfectly encapsulated in the South African Broadcasting Corporations (SABC) ex-channel one slogan: *Simunye: we are one!*\(^{28}\) To do this would be to deny them status as complex human beings – to depoliticise them. It would also detract from the profound effect that the Correctional Centre – and the broader society – has on the (re)formation of identity, which this thesis seeks to investigate. Nor is the intention to trap the women within the binary of (most) ‘oppressed’ within our society\(^{29}\). I will hope to be going beyond Freire (1970) in this instance, who has been criticised for his use of oppressed/ oppressor as monolithic categories which deny the interconnectedness and interplay of power dynamics (primarily race, class, gender, sexual orientation) that make up identity (Agozino 1997; Davis 1989; Hall 1996; hooks 1989). In addition, this thesis in its analysis supports a Foucauldian (1984) conception of agency as always present (baring instances of torture and execution) and resistance as possible. Nevertheless, the reality of the majority of these women’s lives is marked by the struggle to survive within oppressive hegemonies in which they are and have not been the beneficiaries of power and influence: apartheid, patriarchy, prison\(^{30}\) and for most – poverty.

The complexities of trying to understand and personally negotiate and position (post-apartheid) South African female offender identity are evident from the brief discussion in the above paragraph (and which will be teased out in great detail in the thesis). This dilemma is well articulated by Feminist Criminologist Ann Worrall (1990) when she asks: “Who [then] are these women? Who have deviated from the patriarchal conception of what a woman a

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\(^{27}\) Multiculturalism is best encapsulated in Bishop Desmond Tutu’s famous phrase “The Rainbow Nation” to describe a cultural vision for post-apartheid South Africa. It is predominantly this approach that has been the mainstream governmental line in imaging, writing and performing the ‘new’ democratic South African nation particularly around arts and culture policy (Department of Arts, Science and Technology 1995; Degenaar, J 1995). Interculturalism (Bharucha 2001) and more specifically the intracultural (Bharucha 2001: 8) which he defines as “[cultural] dynamics between and across specific communities and regions *within* [his italics] the boundaries of the nation-state”, is the form of cultural engagement which most typifies the work conducted in the Correctional Centre.

\(^{28}\) As part of the Public Service Broadcaster’s nation-building mandate, their lead channel SABC1’s slogan in the years succeeding the 1994 elections was famously: *Simunye* [meaning] we are one! The slogan introduced clearly with the ambition of uniting a divided nation, can be critiqued for its homogenizing of a population with vastly different class, gender and ethnic subjectivities.

\(^{29}\) It could be argued that South African women of colour have endured a double oppression of apartheid, which involved both race and class oppression, and patriarchy. Female offenders are even further oppressed, since as offenders they are stripped of their civil liberties.

\(^{30}\) The demographics of the women involved in the drama projects is more representative of the overall population and this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2 however, the vast majority of women are women of colour (black, Indian or coloured).
woman should be? Are they martyrs to the Radical Feminist cause or are they the embodiment of the extremity of powerlessness and voicelessness?” It is essentially this question that the thesis attempts to answer through my role as participant observer and through an analysis of the plays which thematically focused on dynamics of identity. The topics for the plays, which were devised in consultation with offenders included: addiction, HIV/AIDS (illness in prison), racism, classism, abuse of women, why women undermine other women, motherhood, on release, crime and sexual orientation. Implicit within the imperative to discuss and negotiate these issues is the understanding that the way that women are perceived (and treated) – and perceive themselves in society (identity) is related directly to existing power structures within the given society.

The proposition of the present research therefore is that (workshopped) popular participatory theatre is a means of understanding the dynamics, which lead to women’s disempowerment among offenders both in terms of their prior situation and in incarceration itself. It is through this popular medium that women are able to unpack issues of power and patriarchy, through the issue-based/ focused narratives and characterisation involved as well as through the process (Freire 1970, Boal 1979, Kidd & Byram 1982). The thesis describes and analyses how the tools acquired through involvement in the theatre interventions (practical – skills based, intellectual – consciousness-raising methodology and social – ‘feelings’ based) have been used for the negotiation of discursive power personally, and within the Correctional Centre, since to repeat the feminist adage ‘the personal is political’.

At least eighty percent of incarcerated women – both in South Africa and abroad (Carlen 1990; Faith, 2000; Hafferjee et al 2005) have been victims of physical, emotional, verbal and/or sexual abuse at the hands of men. This statistic can be accurately applied to the women who I have worked with at Westville Female Correctional Centre (personal communications with offenders and Correctional Centre social worker 2001/2). In addition, in the drama group, around half the women were imprisoned for murder and half of those (one quarter of the total) women were imprisoned for violent crimes against the claimed

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31 International research conducted in Britain and America (Faith 2000; Carlen 1990) done on the correlation between criminality and abuse in woman has revealed that around 80% of incarcerated women have been victims of abuse. Discussions with women in prison and with social workers supports this statistics but with South Africa’s rape statistics being amongst the highest in the world this statistic is clearly conservative.
perpetrators of their abuse. This introduces the possibility of Radical feminism since it creates a distinct correlation between women’s crime and patriarchal oppression such that crime amongst women, it is argued here, is by and large a consequence of patriarchal oppression. From a radical feminist perspective the murderous act would represent the ultimate expression of feminine rage.

Yet whatever ‘feminine rage’ brought them consciously or unconsciously to their criminal acts/activities, on beginning this project, most of the women exhibited very low self-esteem (Hurst, Nkala and Young-Jahangeer: 2001, 2002; Young-Jahangeer 2003a, 2003b) and occasionally demonstrating (particularly in the earlier projects) resistant behaviour (Young-Jahangeer 2004a). It is the position of the dissertation that this can be primarily attributed to two fundamental reasons. First, the often very damaging life experience described above marked typically by a history of abuse and racial discrimination (most of the women are old enough to have lived through the height of the apartheid regime – some have never experienced a democratic South Africa on the outside). For this reason popular participatory theatre is therefore seen as an appropriate avenue for conscientisation (Freire 1970) and self-empowerment, through creating a space where the women can speak and be heard (Spivak 1990).

Post-colonial feminists Gayatri Spivak (1990) and Chandra Mohanty (1991) and others (hooks 1989, 1993; Davis 1984; Lewis and Mills 2003, Rich 1984) speak of the importance of creating spaces for ‘third world’ women (they uses this phrase intentionally) to speak their own (popular) histories based in popular memory. Post-colonial feminist contributions are central to the theoretical base of this thesis and will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5. Their foregrounding of ‘third world’ women as both “an analytical and political category” (Mohanty 1991: 4) is particularly useful for this debate. The interventions, (which pre-existed any research) were seen as a response to this call: not simply that we have a right to speak, but that we all have a right to be seriously listened to (Spivak 1990). Examples will be given,

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32 This is a conservative estimate as the specific details of the women’s crimes are confidential. This figure is based on the voluntary testimony of the women concerned and supported by Correctional Centre records.
33 The cultural appropriateness of dramatic expression as a medium for predominantly Zulu women to speak out will be outlined in Chapter 5 (Magwaza 2001).
34 Questions as to how the popular participatory theatre projects in Westville Female Correctional Centre are able to encourage self-empowerment and build self-worth/esteem will be discussed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 5.
which will demonstrate how the dialogic popular methodology built a social cohesion amongst the group which enabled the women to speak out with confidence and clarity to those who had it in their power to affect change at an institutional level. Implicit within this work is of course the underlying belief in the power of cultural action to transform individuals/ cultures/ societies (Freire 1970; Davis 1983).

**All the world’s a stage**

The second significant reason that this researcher felt contributed to their low self-image of female offenders, pertains to patriarchal impositions of hegemonic masculinity and femininity (Prinsloo 1999), which position female criminality as being not only a moral wrong but somehow ‘unnatural’ (Worrall 1990). It will be argued here that imprisoned women as both constituted in and by this ideology and who have appropriated these (cultural) values, often internalise this perceived failure. The (in my view) schizophrenic prison mandate which is simultaneously punitive and rehabilitative feeds into the desire for Female offenders to reclaim their status as ‘natural’ (and therefore more or less ‘approved’) women which they lose upon incarceration.

A growing and conscious trend promoted by dominant women in the drama group, to ‘reconstruct’ and reclaim the position of ‘natural (Zulu) woman’ has been observed and will be discussed in Chapter 6. This has primarily (although not exclusively) occurred though the appropriation/performance of behaviours that connote ‘the good woman’. These behaviours include things such as carrying a bible (in what I shall describe as a ‘performance of the moral’) practicing embroidery, or dressing/acting in a feminine way. Other examples

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35 This schizophrenic nature of the prison system is in no way unique to South Africa. However, the transitional state that South African Correctional Services finds itself in moving from an exclusively putative to a rehabilitative system has made this particularly apparent. However it is important to note – and this will be discussed later in this section – that this transitional moment also enabled unprecedented opportunities for intervention that this project benefited from.

36 It must be noted the approval from authorities can impact directly on the lives of the women and is therefore a powerful motivation. The parole system rewards positive behaviour with the temptation of early release. Good behaviour (non-confrontational or conflictual) also is (inconsistently) rewarded in the Correctional Centre with privileges. Change of status from Maximum to Medium is the most significant.

37 It must be noted that embroidery as an ‘activity’ for female offenders did predate my entrance into Westville Female Correctional Centre. Many women were already highly skilled embroiders and seamstresses before they were incarcerated and brought that skill into the Correctional Centre. Nevertheless the extent to which this activity is deemed appropriate for (fallen) women and associations of embroidery and femininity (Parker 1984) is notable.
include events which promote hegemonic femininity such as fashion shows, beauty pageants and a fascinating co-option of Women’s Day\(^{38}\), which I provide an account of. A return to essentialised beliefs around gender and ethnicity it seems requires a deliberate socially constructed effort!

It has therefore been necessary to expand the basis and subject of the research beyond the formally theatrical (as in the process and product of workshopped popular participatory theatre) to a broader understanding of the performative aspects of “the presentation of self in everyday life” (Goffman 1959) in Westville Female Correctional Centre as ‘site’. Since, as Baurrault points out “Drama is as old as man [sic]: it is as closely linked to him as his double, for the theatrical game is inherent in the existence of any living being” (Barault 1961 in Hodgson 1972:17).

It will be proposed that the theatre interventions, which were distinctly dialogical in nature (Freire, 1970; Boal 1979), provided social and practical skill as well as the empowering feeling of social cohesion (discussed above). In addition mere association with the projects gave a positive profile to the offenders involved\(^{39}\). These factors afforded an agency that ultimately facilitated the desire to claim back ‘lost’ identity initially as women but ultimately as ‘Zulu’ women (even amongst women who were not Zulu), within a transforming space of Zulu (patriarchal) hegemony. Although the Zulu culture is widely acknowledged to be patriarchal traditionally there is a female domain/space where agency – however limited – does exist (Faubion 2000; Magwaza 2001).

**Way Forward**

In summary, this thesis is based on a five-year relationship with a core group of women at Westville Female Correctional Centre. In responding to the politics of space/time, it will

\(^{38}\) In 2001 Women’s Day was used for the Justice for Women Campaign’s drive to push for the release of women who have received maximum sentences for the murder of abusive spouses. Theatre was used by the women involved and this will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3 and 5. In 2003 Women’s Day was primarily used to promote heterosexuality.

\(^{39}\) Due to hierarchical binaries that exist within South African society and which have been hegemonically solidified by apartheid, association with a university (which connotes class and education), with a white woman (race hierarchy) and with an outsider (criminal/ non-criminal) gives status to those associated with the project. Although this is not unproblematic, and will be explored in the thesis, as a researcher I cannot ignore the power dynamics that articulate in the environment that surrounds me and defines me.
explore within a Post-Structural (hooks 1989; Foucault 1975, 1984) and postcolonial feminist (Lewis and Mills 2003; Mohanty et al 1991; Spivak 1998; Spivak 1999) framework (since a feminist agenda informs this work) how power and identity is understood, challenged and negotiated primarily through popular participatory (prison) theatre – both in process and performance. It is proposed that the prison theatre as it is manifested in this example is “radical performance” (Kershaw 1999) despite the problematics around this naming, due to the fact that it is not simply about resistance (‘freedom from’) but is also transgressive (‘freedom to reach beyond’) (Kershaw 1999: 18). As such this thesis is not simply interested in how “radical performance might represent such freedoms, but rather how radical performance can actually produce such freedoms, or at least get a sense of them, for both performers and spectators 40, as it is happening” (Kershaw 1999: 19).

The first Section entitled ‘Working from the Inside/Out’, includes two chapters that define and describe the research and the project as a whole. This is necessary to engage prior to analysis. Chapter 2 will describe the methodology of the thesis in terms of the research design and the elements of the research. Chapter 3 provides a historical theoretical review of Theatre for Social Change (Freire, 1972; Boal 1979, 1992, Mda 1993, Kamlongera, 1988, Kidd & Byram 1982) before engaging the specifics of the theatre at Westville Female Correctional Centre.

Section 2 ‘Prison Theatre, Prison as Theatre: Popular appropriations and negotiations of power and patriarchy in Westville Female Correctional Centre’, is comprised of the last three chapters. Chapter 4, ‘Meaningful expressions: A theoretical orientation of the popular performance of the self’, as the title explains involves a theoretical analysis of popular culture (Barber 1997; Fiske 1989; Mbembe 2001) in the post-colony and argues for the extension of the theatre per se to include the Correctional Centre as a ‘stage’ and the offenders as performers of the self. Using a postcolonial feminist underpinning (Loomba 1998; Mohanty 1991; Rich 1984; Spivak, 1990) Chapter 5, provides a political context for the thesis. Drawing examples from the research, this chapter engages the issues of third world women generally and incarcerated women specifically (Agozino 1997; Carlen 1990, 2002; Worrall 1990).

40 In Prison Theatre at Westville that distinction does not exist and as such extends the notion of radicalism to a reconceptualisation of the audience/ spectator binary.
The final chapter describes and analyses the ultimate appropriation of the theatre/popular culture in the negotiation of identity, specifically Zulu female identity in a post-apartheid/post-colonial framework.

In essence then, this thesis takes as its starting point the notion that Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The House of the Dead* noted when he wrote: “the degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering the prisons”. Thus, Correctional Centres and the Correctional Centre community reflect and magnify the problematics and imbalances of power that exist within the wider society (which goes to the use and necessity of this study). Popular workshopped theatre provides an excellent medium for participants to express and rearticulate these imbalances of power.

Yet, the claims are modest: to paraphrase Eugenio Barba (1985 cited in Watson 2000: 246), theatre cannot change society, but through a focus on process rather than product, it has the potential to change both those who do it and those who have made theatre the focus in their lives. The research involved in this thesis has, rather sentimentally, been a life altering journey, one that I will ask you to come on with me as I observe the endless negotiations of power between offenders and other offenders, offenders and warders/ the Correctional Centre and society at large.
SECTION 1

WORKING FROM THE INSIDE OUT

The scene has been set. We can now get to work…from the inside, out. The notion of inside / out is a concept that provides the over-arching frame for the thesis. It is first and foremost a spatial concept: of containment and release. It also evokes a sense of non-conformity and with that perhaps some confusion. Confusion that might lead to questions. Questions that might lead to answers. It is also a term that engenders/invites the imagination to think of possibilities of alternatives and of freedom.

This, the first section of the thesis will first engage the methodology of the project. Necessary to that explanation is some discussion of the background and how Chris Hurst and I actually ‘got inside’. The research design posed some problem. True to the integrated nature of this thesis was the nature of the research. What began as Participation Action Research (Chilisa & Preece 2005; Merriam & Simpson 1995) extended to ethnography (Gray 2003) as I became more and more ‘integrated’ into the Correctional Centre and into the lives of the women. Ethical research requires political understanding of the currency of body and of the role of the researcher who inhabits that body. I therefore interrogate my role as ‘white woman at the centre’. However, the process has always been, from the start, a dialogue. The prison theatre work therefore has been co-created, co-facilitated with four remarkable women. I discuss them here.

The elements of the research outline the details of the project: on what is the research based and how was the information gathered.

The second chapter specifically looks at the example of theatre at Westville Female Correctional Centre. It positions the work historically and theoretically. The pedagogy of Paulo Freire (1970) is engaged as is the work of Augusto Boal (1979), both have informed the work at Westville. I debate the notion of ‘radical’ in this example. This is a key question since it points to the appropriation of the theatre. Is asks to what extent the theatre work has been able to negotiate change – to bring about the revolution it promises.
The chapter also extends the scope to look at global trends in the area of Theatre for Social Change and offers a description of what the theatre at Westville Female Correctional centre actually looks like.
CHAPTER 2

Working from the inside/ out: Methodological approaches to working/ researching in Westville Female Correctional Centre

If you have come here to help me,
You are wasting your time.
If you have come here because
Your liberation is bound up with mine,
Then let’s work together.
- Lilla Watson, Aboriginal ex-offender
(in Faith 2000: 167)

To locate myself in my body means more than understanding what it has meant to me to have a vulva and clitoris and uterus and breasts. It means recognising this white skin, the places it has taken me, the places it has not let me go.

(Rich 1984/ 2003: 32)


[Adults like numbers. When you speak to them about a new friend that you’ve met, they never ask you the essential questions. They never ask you: How does her voice sound? What are her favourite games? Does she collect butterflies? But instead they ask you: How old is she? How many brothers’ does she have? How much does she weigh? Only then they seem to recognise her. Adults are like that. One must not hold them accountable for it. Children just have to be lenient with adults. – [translation Doung Jahangeer]

The following chapter will engage the methods and methodology of the research conducted in Westville Female Correctional Centre from 2000 – 2004. As Ann Gray clarifies “method
refers to those different techniques of research which any researcher employs in order to construct data and interrogate its sources, while methodology describes the overall epistemological approach adopted by the study” (Gray 2003:4). The issue of ‘approach’ is a much larger concern and points to not only the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of research but ‘why’. It asks questions like: What is the purpose of research? What is the role of the researcher? What is the relationship of the researcher to the researched? What is the most ethical and most honest way to conduct research? Is ‘truthful’ research possible and are reliable findings probable? And indeed in investigating axiological assumptions: What is research? (Chilisa & Preece 2005; Gillham 2000; Gray 2003; Holman-Jones 2005). Depending on the paradigm from which the research emerges, the answers to these questions may differ.

The most significant division in the approach to research, which for now can be broadly defined as that which is concerned with the creation of new knowledge (Gillham 2000: 2), is the split between the positivist methodology adopted by the social/ natural sciences with more the “naturalistic style” (Gillham 2000: 2) of the Human Sciences. Positivist philosophies are largely concerned with “only observable and verifiable, phenomena” (Gillham 2000: 2). Unverifiable or subjective phenomena are deemed unscientific and therefore bogus. This is not the approach adopted in this thesis. Methodologically this research rejects the notion that the detached objectivity is possible let alone ethical. Further, as Gillham (2000: 10) points out all research results whether generated in a controlled environment or in situ, whether quantitative or qualitative have to be described and interpreted. This calls into question claims around pseudo-scientific ‘objective’ research and research methods deemed superior to the ‘soft’ approaches employed in the human sciences.

This research is a case study that has adopted a qualitative methodology (although I have inserted some quantitative information). As such it seeks to investigate “human activity embedded in the real world” (Gillham 2000: 1). The assumption being that such activity can only be studied or understood in context and at the moment of happening such that time and place merge in a way that makes precise boundaries difficult to draw. My presence in this context for the duration of the research and beyond, honours this commitment to the impact of space-time on research: the researcher and the researched.
In describing what qualitative methods enable the researcher to do, Gillham (2000:11) comes up with six central points, which clearly highlight the appropriateness of this approach to this thesis:

- To carry out an investigation where other methods – such as experiments – are either not practical or not ethically justifiable.
- To investigate situations where little is known about what is there or what is going on.
- To explore complexities that are beyond the scope of more ‘controlled’ approaches.
- To ‘get under the skin’ of a group or organisation to find out what really happens – the informal reality which can only be perceived from the inside.
- To view the case from the inside out [my italics]: to see it from the perspective of those involved\(^{41}\).
- To carry out research onto the processes [his italics] leading to results…rather than into the ‘significance’ of the results themselves.

Although all applicable to this study the relevance of point five, in the light of this thesis ‘working from the inside out’ indicates a striking suitability. It emphasises the ambition of this initiative to empathically try and understand how the politics of everyday-life is perceived by a group of incarcerated women in Westville Correctional Centre, KwaZulu-Natal South Africa during a time of historical transition. Further, to re-iterate point six, the process of doing the research – the process of spending time, sharing time, putting time in is what is valued. It is the experiential that is privileged here since it is the experiential that is transformative and generative.

To expand further, qualitative methods are also informed by the philosophical base that “human behaviour, thoughts and feelings are partly determined by their context” (Gillham 2000:11). In a prison this reality is intensified as the environment is so dominant and oppressive. In striving to conduct research which is reliable and accurate, we must learn to know and understand the context of the research. We must become insider/outsiders in order to comprehend people in real life and the impact of the context on them. It is essential,

\(^{41}\) It is debateable whether this is even possible; however one could attempt an empathic approach informed by hands on experience gained through immersing oneself in the context.
stresses Gillham (2000: 12), that in order to really understand how people feel, think and behave, we must “get to know their world and what they are trying to do in it”.

This research examines the popular “meaningful expressions” (Mbembe 2001: 6) or “texts and practices” (Gray 2003: 12) of women incarcerated at Westville Female Correctional Centre who participated in popular participatory theatre interventions from 2000 – 2004. As such it views culture – everyday life and living – as the object of analysis from which conclusions regarding how people think and feel, what they do and why, can be elicited. It therefore goes beyond the text, recognising that texts must be understood within particular material conditions (Gray 2003: 13). The study is therefore situated more specifically within Cultural Studies and thus adopts a Cultural Studies approach. Ann Gray (2003:12) expands on the perception of culture within this oeuvre:

> Here culture is not a free-floating set of ideas of beliefs, nor is it exemplified only by a canon of great works of art or literature. The meanings, processes and artefacts of culture are produced, distributed and consumed within particular material circumstances. In other words, texts and practices are both products of and constitutive of the social world.

However as Ann Gray (2003: 5) notes “Cultural studies has become notorious for, among other things, its neglect of considerations of method and methodology”. This is primarily due to a methodological eclecticism which has brought it into disrepute by those other more ‘disciplined’ researchers in the natural and social sciences.

However, Gray continues “in looking at the often innovative research methods which have been adopted by scholars, I regard this methodological eclecticism to be a strength within the field and evidence of the energy and dynamic nature of much of what we would describe as cultural studies” (Gray 2003: 5). This research design has drawn on two methodological orientations which will be outlined in the first section of the chapter: Freirean Action participatory method (1970; 1974) which falls within the Emancipatory Paradigm (Chilisa and Preece 2005: 33) and performance/auto-ethnography (Gray 2003; Holman-Jones 2005) that falls within the Interpretive Paradigm (Chilisa & Preece 2005:28).

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42 In embracing the argument proposed by Handel Wright (1998; 2003) my Cultural Studies approach is not an homage to Birmingham. Rather it acknowledges the multiple routes of cultural studies its different intellectual influences and the different ways it has manifest in different contexts.
In reflecting the eclectic methodological orientation, the second section of the chapter will outline the diverse Elements of the Research. It will look at what was researched, the texts and practices and how the data was gathered.

**Going in: Research Design**

How to begin a story about how? Let’s start at the very beginning.

I went to prison today, for the first time. It won’t be the last. As I write this I am in my suburban bedroom looking through bars, but these bars are to keep people out, not to keep me in. We live in a world with bars and sections and where there are no physical bars we create them with our own minds. Offender, criminal, thief, murderer, this is where you belong! Barriers of difference, bars that make us sleep better at night.

The women we met were hollow. All their eyes were the same colour, all their skin was the same colour. Dull, dead, dead and dull…but they tried, they tried. I scanned eyes for smiles and I found some. A connection that said I see you, you see me – for now, for this moment it’s okay. (Extract from notes 4 September 2000)

The above excerpt articulates my first impression of entering Westville Female Correctional Centre in September 2000. The physical, emotional and psychic experience of being in a prison cannot be under-estimated. I am still not used to it. Over the years working inside/out I have found it to be an experience typified by a bizarre push and pull that both drains and stimulates; confuses and enlightens; repels and attracts. It is consistent only in that it is constantly challenging (emotionally and intellectually), and unpredictable.

A first insight reveals a powerful politicising experience that expresses a willingness to reach out and to connect, which in many ways over the following four years I was able to achieve. It demonstrates the power of the prison space in its effect on the women who occupy it – the sameness of the other which the prison manufactures as does society. In its stark and unapologetic architectural reality it confronts us with our fearful need for division, power and control: Societies desire to dehumanise but equally the desire to see the ‘other’ within the ‘same’.

It was this experience which informed the methodological approaches used, and which I will now describe. As part of the design I will also discuss the depth and duration of the
research and the **subjects of the research**. This will then lead onto a debate around the **role of the researcher** as I have perceived it. First however I will provide a brief background illuminating how it all began.

**Getting In: A brief background**

In 1999 Chris Hurst was approached by Qiniso Khumalo of Westville Correctional Centre to assist in directing a play *Shabobo 2000* written by Khaba Mkize. The play was a success and travelled beyond the Prison walls to the Bat Centre and even made it onto the SABC News. From that, relationships were forged which allowed for the possibility of developing a continued theatrical exchange between Westville Correctional Facility and the University of Natal (now UKZN).

The Prison Theatre Project at Westville Correctional Facility ran for the first time in 1999 in Medium B Correctional Centre only. From the outset it involved an initial partnership of representatives from all three stakeholders: Chris Hurst, from Drama and Performance Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College Campus representing the University; Clement Ntuli an ex-Drama student based at Pietermaritzburg campus then serving time at Medium B Correctional Centre representing the offenders and DCS member Qiniso Khumalo.\(^{43}\)

The resulting project was designed to benefit all three parties: The University through research and through providing a ‘community’ for Applied Theatre courses in Drama and Performance Studies, Howard College Campus; the offenders through informal education (a certificate is awarded) and an improved social climate and the Correctional Facility through fulfilling their mandate, reports, which could inform policy and public relations opportunities (Hurst, Nkala, Young-Jahangeer 2001; Hurst, Nkala, Young-Jahangeer 2002; Young-Jahangeer 2003). Evaluations also revealed unexpected significant benefits such as reduced levels of boredom which in turn reduced levels of aggression in the Correctional Centre for the duration of the interventions (for more detailed discussion of benefits see Hurst, Nkala, Young-Jahangeer 2001; Hurst, Nkala, Young-Jahangeer 2002; Young-Jahangeer 2003).

\(^{43}\) Sadly Qiniso Khumalo passed away unexpectedly in 2001. Since then there have been many collaborators from within the walls of Westville Correctional Facility who have assisted us with our projects. Most recently Khumalo’s sister Veli who has assisted me greatly in Female Correctional Centre. We are indebted to all of them.
In 2000 the interventions were extended to two further sites: Female Correctional Centre and Youth Centre. For reasons of gender sensitivity, I was invited to work with the women at Female Correctional Centre: facilitating the offender plays (initially) over a six-week period and managing the intervention and performance day.

The Emancipatory Paradigm: Participatory Action Research

The Emancipatory paradigm is a term adopted by Bagele Chilisa and Julia Preece (2005: 33) “to denote a family of research designs influenced by various philosophies and theories with a common theme of emancipating and transforming communities through group action” (in Mertens 1998). It emerges out of a politics that has noted the marginalisation of African and Female communities’ “ways of knowing” (2005: 33) in light of the domination of white males in academia which have shaped official accepted methodological and intellectual approaches. These, Mertens (1998 in Chilisa & Preece 2005: 33) observes have often been biased in terms of race. In acknowledging the interconnectedness of power dynamics (hooks 1989), and the historical male dominance in academia, I include gender.

As part of its design therefore, methodologies which fall within the Emancipatory Paradigm, would only pursue projects deemed relevant to a community beyond the whims of the researcher and would by extension build in benefits to the researched community. Benefits that would, through their honouring of indigenous knowledge systems, transform and empower these individuals and communities “through a realisation of their potential as teachers, renewed confidence in their culture, its values and what they already know” (Chilisa & Preece 2005: 34). Thus, the potential for transformation is explored through the rehearsal of choice. Further, Chilisa and Preece (2005:34) emphasise that within this paradigm the purpose of the research also aims to destroy myth, illusion and false knowledge. In this sense it involves the conscientisation (Freire 1970) of the community. Discussion below and throughout the thesis expands on these aspects and explains how the Prison Theatre projects were devised with a pedagogic intent that was Freirean (1970). They were thus conceived around mutual benefits, the celebration and affirmation of Zulu culture and the exploration of choice.
Sharan Merriam and Edwin Simpson (1995: 121) in their *Guide to research for educators and trainers of adults*, group together four “less conventional” research methodologies, situated within the Emancipatory Paradigm. They are united in their conceptualisation of the role of research in the pursuit of knowledge, the purpose of knowledge and in the defining of valid knowledge in terms of “those ‘doing’ the knowing”. These are Action, Participatory, Critical and Feminist methodologies (1995: 121).

Without expanding in too much detail, Action research is typically used “to solve specific practical, social, or individual problems that may be found in a community…The researcher must create a change and then observe the dynamics and effects of that change” (1995:122). The research design is looser with the problem/s emerging while the research is in process rather than before. These aspects were embraced in this study.

Community based Action Research has much overlap with Participatory Research. Participatory Research is intended to address human inequality and “focuses upon the political empowerment of people through group participation in the search for acquisition of knowledge” (Merriam & Simpson 1995:125). This echoes Chilisa and Preeces’ (2005) more general description of Emancipatory Research Methodologies. Where it differs from Action Research specifically is in the role of the researcher; in participatory (action) research (PAR) “the one conducting research activities plays an active part and is not just an objective observer of data” (Merriam & Simpson 1995: 126). For much of the research process I was directly involved in the facilitation of the plays and the interventions.

Further PAR the researched community play an active part in gathering research material and in the process of the research. Inmate facilitators were directly involved in furthering the research through their conducting of post-performance discussions and in providing insight and context to the broader issues in the prison and society in general.

Another distinguishing factor of participatory research (PAR) is that is has a political purpose. Participatory research is considered “a tool for people working in groups to address problems of social inequality and to curb exploitation of those persons with less economic and political power” (Merriam & Simpson 1995: 126). For this reason, Paulo Freire is regarded to have made a significant contribution to the concepts and methods of participatory
research, in particular through the introduction of terms like “conscientisation”, “thematic investigation” and “problem-posing” (1995: 127). The processes of Freirean critical pedagogy as well as the political intention are the very same processes adopted in PAR. Freire’s (1970) pedagogy directly influenced the work in the Correctional Centre and his ‘method’ – relevant to this research is expanded on below.

Feminist research is categorised not so much by the methodology employed but the purpose of the research “the study of phenomena from women’s perspectives [in order to] discover and/or create new intellectual constructs other than those developed by men” (Merriam & Simpson 1995:135). In its focus on the views, opinions, experiences and expressions of incarcerated women in Westville Correctional Centre (KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa), the political intent of this research, which is a prerequisite of participatory action research, is clear. The centrality of this imperative is expanded on in Chapter 5. Thus with the partial exception of the Critical approach, which I will not delve into here, this research design brings together all four methodologies in its use of Popular Participatory Theatre focused around the exclusive empowerment of women.

Popular Participatory Theatre is able to claim a space and a platform for women, who are constrained socially, culturally, politically and institutionally to articulate a view of the world and in so doing express and explore their (his)stories, their present and their future selves. It affirms the creative and cultural within. I consider it an extremely appropriate medium for the conducting of Feminist Research within a post-colonial context.

PPT is therefore to be understood as both a primary methodology (which extends PAR into theatre) and the form of Prison Theatre as it is manifest in Westville Correctional Facility; thus blurring the distinction between theory and practice. Although conceptually interesting this becomes quite structurally problematic when we consider the need to engage with both Prison Theatre (practically informed theory) and PPT as methodology (theoretically informed practice) separately in the thesis, since both have as their theoretical and practical underpinning the approaches devised by liberatory educator Paulo Freire (1970). Further, Prison Theatre in Brazil in its use of Theatre of the oppressed (Boal 1979) is also inspired by Freire. In my discussion I have disaggregated Freirean theory engaging those aspects relevant to the separate areas. I have been concerted in my attempt to avoid repetition unless
necessary for the logic of the argument. I am also aware that Freirean philosophy is quite well known, I have therefore spared the reader too much explanation. Nevertheless, as Freire is the invisible thread that informs much of the theory, practice and politics of this research together, it is essential that he be engaged.

**Pedagogy of the oppressed**

Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1921 – 1997) has had a profound effect on the fields of education, Applied Theatre (Boal 1979; Kidd and Byram 1982; Dalrymple 1987) and methodology (Chilisa & Preece 2005). In brief Freire (1970/ 1993:35) describes the pedagogy of the oppressed as “the pedagogy of people engaged in the fight for their own liberation.” It therefore arose through his desire for ‘the oppressed’ of post-colonial societies to become liberated from economic, social and political domination and to break the culture of silence which perpetuates it.

He observed that dehumanisation was a pervasive element in post-colonial societies since dehumanisation marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it (1993: 26). For Freire an act of dehumanisation is any act which prevents one from becoming “more fully human” (1993: 26) which is our (humanities) ontological vocation. As a Christian Marxist his humanism (not humanitarianism) emphasises an evolution of the body, mind and spirit that is infused with revolutionary love: a desire for a fair and just – and ultimately ‘free’ society.

Further, it was his conviction that it is the oppressed who must liberate both ‘the oppressor’ and ‘the oppressed’. Any gesture of ‘generosity’ on behalf of the oppressors can only be false since it is unlikely to genuinely aim to transform the structures of the oppression.

Freire’s contention was that one of the primary mechanisms for the perpetuation of the oppressor/oppressed binary was the traditional colonial model of education which simply reinforced the class (and race/gender) hegemonies established by the elite colonials. This system, aside from promoting passivity – of key benefit to oppressors – was responsible for instilling a duality within the oppressed through the promotion of an oppressor consciousness, which becomes internalised. Consequently while the oppressed realise that
without freedom they cannot exist authentically, they fear it (1993:30). This is a fear of freedom. Freire (1993:30) explains:

The conflict lies in the choice between being wholly themselves or being divided; between ejecting the oppressor within or not ejecting them; between human solidarity or alienation; between following prescriptions or having choices; between being spectators or actors; between acting or having the illusion of acting through the action of the oppressors, between speaking out or being silent, castrated in their power to create and re-create, their power to transform the world. This is the tragic dilemma of the oppressed which their education must take into account.

The relevance of this quotation in light of PPT, if not already apparent will be made clear in the description of the form in Chapter 3.

His critical pedagogy proposes a dialogic approach which is problem posing. This is an active departure from the presentation of information as a lifeless and static narrative, which Freire contends is indicative of the traditional or banking approach (Freire 1970/1996:52-67) to education. Dialogic education promotes cooperation, unity, organisation and ultimately cultural action (Freire 1996: 148-164). These elements are essential for any effective revolutionary transformation of self and society. The effects of this process are discussed in examples throughout the thesis.

Central to his methodology is the re-imagining of the hierarchical teacher/student binary. Students are no longer docile but are “critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher” (1970: 62). In this sense it is a pedagogy that must be forged “with, not for the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity” (1993:30). This introduces three important points; first that it is consciously anti-hierarchical where ‘teacher’ and ‘student’ learn from each other and second that while liberatory

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44 With the popularisation of his early works (in particular, beyond Education as a Practice of Liberty (1967) and Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1969) 1970 in English) and consequent elevation of his status to that of ‘guru’; Paulo Freire became increasingly uncomfortable with others’ labelling of the ideas and beliefs he espoused as his ‘methodology’, ‘philosophy’, ‘theory’ etc. In an interview with Rosa-Maria Torres he is clear to point out: “I didn’t invent a method, or a theory, or a program, or a system, or a pedagogy, or a philosophy. It is people who put names to things” (Torres 1986: xx). In my discussion of Paulo Freire’s work I have attempted where possible to avoid such terminology; however, it is difficult to engage Freire’s work without such descriptors. Therefore, when they have been used, I have used them with awareness of, and I hope sensitivity to his humble uneasiness. Perhaps it is about shifting emphasis from his methodology, to simply his methodology.
educators can facilitate freedom in a sense agency must always lie with ‘the oppressed’. This however does not mean that the pedagogy is not directive, which introduces the third point: For the liberatory educator there is a clear objective of conscientisation through ‘educational projects’ (1993:36) which are ‘cultural action’ (1993: 160-164).

Essentially his approach is a praxis which Freire defines as “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (1970: 33); thus his pedagogy is revolutionary in its aim to transform – and free – the individual and society in accordance with Marxist Christian principles.

My explanation here directly supports the relevance of this research design and those elements of a Feminist Participatory Action Research of consequence to my methodological approach to the prison work. Let me briefly trace the connections:

Without wanting to create a monolithic and ‘othering’ conception of third world (post-colonial) women, it is safe to state that incarcerated women of the third world understand the experience of oppression (this is argued in more detail in Chapter 5). Further, as incarcerated women, they both desire freedom and fear it (this too is expanded on in Chapter 5). The applicability of Freire’s (1993:19) ‘fear of freedom’ is clear. Prisons by design are dehumanising institutions (Abu-Jamal 1995; Agozino 1997; Carlen 1990). A methodology whose political understanding acknowledges this and aims to counter dehumanisation through its praxis is therefore appropriate.

The process is, as mentioned anti-heirarchical and celebrates the knowledge systems of ‘the oppressed’ rather than validating those of the ‘oppressor’. This dialogical approach is this termed ‘Emancipatory’ (Chilisa & Preece 2005; Merriam & Simpson 1995). In a country like South Africa where we are still submerged in an ideology of difference, a dialogic approach is invaluable in its ability to open up discussion to challenge perception.

Prisons are divisive environments. Problem-posing education is able to foster co-operation, unity and mobilisation through cultural action, something greatly needed amongst women

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45 Conscientisation, is a key concept in Freire’s Problem-Posing Education. It essentially describes a state of raised political awareness. This is discussed more fully in Chapter 3.
particularly, who endure the divide and rule tactics of patriarchy. This essentially describes the process and intention of PPT.

The Interpretive Paradigm: Ethnographic Research

Popular participatory theatre (PPT), as part of the Emancipatory Paradigm has been the primary medium through which this exploration has taken place; however I have not based my research and analysis exclusively on information elicited from the plays (process and product). Much of my interaction with the women involved simply ‘being there’ (Gray 2003:86) a central aspect of participant observation as part of Ethnographic research. As I would visit the women in between projects I was in a unique position to observe a far broader range of activities, interactions and behaviours and draw on other sources on which to base conclusions.

As my involvement in the Correctional Centre intensified I came to understand ‘performance’ as part of everyday practice (Goffman 1969; Kershaw 1999; Williams 1983) and therefore broadened my scope from Prison Theatre to Prison as Theatre. Performance Ethnography (Holman-Jones 2005: 770), as a form of ethnographic research is grounded in two central ideas; first “that our identities and daily practices are a series of performance choices (conscious or unconscious) that we improvise within cultural and social guidelines and [second] that we learn through participation or through performance” (Jones 2002:7). These are two tenets that this research embraces.

The overarching impetus behind the Interpretive Paradigm and ethnographic research is to understand people’s experiences (Chilisa & Preece 2005:29). Ann Gray (2003:23) narrows this somewhat describing the research focus within this paradigm as the examination of “human beings and the meaning they make of and invest in their daily lives.” In so doing there must be an awareness of the power-relations that exist at all levels. These concerns express the thrust of this research and are engaged with later in the chapter.

Research within this paradigm holds firm the belief that knowledge is socially constructed and therefore subjective: “there are as many intangible realities as there are people constructing them” (Chilisa & Preece 2005:29). Hence the model emphasises
‘interpretation’. ‘Truth’ is understood as a relative concept (Gray 2003:21) which lies within the human experience. It is therefore “culture bound and historically and context dependent, although some [truths] may be universal” (Chilisa & Preece 2005:29). Thus research within this paradigm does not aim to discover or present ‘the truth’ but a version of the truth from a specific social and cultural vantage point, “one which we present modestly for others to consider” (Gray 2003:21).

At times the methodology (and the thesis), in keeping with its Emancipatory emphasis has a deliberately conscientising (post-colonial Feminist) agenda; however the interpretation of the findings as stated, although fully theorised does not presume to present any essentialist conception of ‘truth’ divorced from my subjective framework (as stated); nor is it my intention to declare any definitive ‘proof’. Its ambition is rather, in working from the inside/out, to provide a platform for the voices of South African women who have something to say: For the offenders through their theatre and through their voices and writings that have been included here, as well as through my re-telling of their stories; and for me, the researcher through my stories, interpretations and analysis.

Stories, are regarded within ethnographic research (Gray 2003) – specifically autoethnography (Holman-Jones 2005: 763-784) and subsequently performance ethnography (Holman-Jones 2005: 763-784) as having an important social role. They are seen as “part of the flux and flow of identity, everyday life and the social” (Gray 2003: 109). Further, stories/autoethnographic texts “point not only to the necessity of narrative in our world but also the power of narrative to reveal and revise our world” (Holman-Jones 2005: 767). Stories also value emotion as important in understanding and theorising the relationship among self/power and culture (Holman-Jones 2005: 787). Emotional states, as will be revealed, have central importance in the lives of the women at Westville.

Post-colonial Feminists (Mohanty et al 1991) make the point that certain stories are more powerful that others and are subsequently ‘heard’, while others are silenced. This research method and purpose is hinged on women’s story-telling through dialogic theatre with the purpose of imaging other possibilities. Women tell a collective story through theatre and the post-performance discussions create further space for stories and imaginings.
However, it is the collective story-telling, which employs the collective ‘I’ rather than the totalising ‘we’, that makes this distinct from a western concept of ‘personal narrative’ which autoethnography tends to involve. Interestingly Holman-Jones (2005) proposes a departure from this stating that stories “must be situated in larger contexts and shared histories” – this is something that African popular performance and these PPT performances express.

The methodology straddles the line between postmodernity and the more modernist utopian conception of an ‘ideal’ for which to strive. This ‘straddling’ is a consistent thematic throughout the thesis and no less in the methodology. In this instance the dialogic method and integrated style of writing up which utilises narrative and narratives is a textual strategy which aims to give the so-called ‘other’ equal voice in the text (Gray 2003:177) while strengthening and enlivening the theory.

**Depth and duration**

This research has isolated 5 years 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004, out of a much longer relationship (nine years), on which to base the findings. This time frame has involved the facilitation of 8 separate PPT interventions, the history and complexity of which will be expanded on in Elements of Research.

There is much debate around how long a researcher needs to engage with the subjects of the research for the researcher to have an in-depth understanding (Gray 2003). The ethnographic mode has been criticised by anthropologists for not spending sufficient time with the ‘community’ and in the context (Gray 2003:17). Cultural theorists respond that the research question, which within cultural studies concerns “meaning in relation to the construction of social and cultural identity…Arguably requires periods of intense investigation into meaning production, rather than extended observation” (Gray 2003:17).

In relation to the research conducted at Westville Female Correctional Centre (2000-2004), on-going long-term commitment to the project – to the women, I would argue was not only ethical but pivotal to the success of the research and the theatre projects. In this sense the research is situated more within an Emancipatory framework than an Interpretive one (Chilisa & Preece 2005; Merriam & Simpson 1995). I took my lead from the community: In follow up interviews in 2001 the women have drawn specific attention to my continued reliable
presence as an important positive aspect of the project: “you were always here when you were supposed to be here” (offender interview 24 October 2001). After the first project in 2000, which ran for 8 weeks, I did not return at all to the Correctional Centre until the following year. This was adversely noted by an offender “This year I think we did it well cause last time we make the drama until we get our certificates and then you ran away, you didn’t come back, but this year [you did] and we did well” (offender interview 24 October 2001). From 2001 onwards even when there was no project running for several months I would always make a point of going in at least once a month to visit with the women. The concern was not for how long I would be away, but that a date for my return was established and that I was kept to my word.

Issues of ‘intrusion’ into a community by the researcher, a concern articulated by ethnographers (Gray 2003:17), were null and void in this case. These women looked forward to my presence, actively seeking it out and at times demanding it.

This attitude of the women towards me I feel can be attributed to various factors: First, as incarcerated women they are often neglected by friends and family (Carlen 1990) and crave outside company. Second, my presence was affirming. I always made an effort to treat each woman with respect and to make them feel good about themselves. I also genuinely liked the women that I have worked with so was happy to see them. Thirdly was the research methodology which positioned me as active and participating rather than simply a participant observer. As mentioned, I became accepted into the community as an insider/outsider.

My worry as the years went by was more a case of how to manage an exit strategy in the future – a question asked of me by Prof. Tim Prentki at the 2004 Dramatic Learning Spaces Conference held in Pietermaritzburg. His question gave me perspective – It almost felt like he was giving me permission. The Theatre for a Developing Nation project in August/September 2004 was the last time that an intervention was held in Female Correctional Centre until June 2008. The exit happened gradually with me still going in

46 As many of the women are second language speakers, direct quotations may appear to the reader to be confusing and perhaps unclear. However, based on the conversational context and having developed a finely tuned ear to second language Zulu-English I am very confident in my understanding and interpretation of what the women were trying to say. Where I have been uncertain, I have always asked for further clarification or translation by a more fluent speaker.
occasionally to connect with the women. Ties were not completely severed. I prepared the women and they were surprisingly not that upset. I suspect I was becoming a bit of a routine – no longer the novelty I once was.

The women: Subjects of research

It cannot be denied that in this inquiry the researched community was ‘captive’; however involvement in the theatre initiatives has always been voluntary. The women whose voices are heard through this research are those who chose to participate. In this sense the sample was random.

All research has been conducted with the knowledge and consent of the participants. In prison this consent is taken very seriously and offenders must sign indemnities. Their identities are also legally protected.

A variety of reasons have been given and surmised for involvement in the projects: To alleviate boredom (have something to do), to have an opportunity to demonstrate good behaviour which could impact release, to get a certificate, to increase chances of employment when released or simply to do drama (discussions with offenders 2000 – 2004). Subsequent evaluations (Hurst, Nkala, Young-Jahangeer 2001; Hurst, Nkala, Young-Jahangeer 2002; Young-Jahangeer 2003) reveal that far more was gained from the experience than originally anticipated by the women. Of particular noteworthiness was how the experience made them feel about themselves. This will be discussed later in Chapter 5 and 6.

The success of the projects is evident in the high rate of returns despite the instability of the population. Participants were both maximum and medium sentences offenders. A number of offenders were released over the course of the projects although the projects did attract more maximum sentenced women. Over the eight projects 73 women involved themselves at least once. Forty-nine participated at least twice. Thirty-four over three times and 14 voluntarily involved themselves over six times.

Although the research is based on a random group of women in a South African Correctional Facility it interestingly did turn out to be representative in terms of age, race and level of

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47 Prison Theatre has been re-established in Female Correctional Centre with two projects happening in 2009.
education. Demographically, Westville Female Correctional Centre is more representative of the South African population (this is unlike the male Correctional Centres which are over 90 percent black African) and the prison drama group reflects this. The drama projects have always included white, black, Indian and Coloured members. Multicultural involvement is significant as recreational ‘clubs’ in the Correctional Centre are often defined along cultural/ethnic lines. The drama group in Medium B is 100% Zulu and is perceived as such by the prison population and is therefore a ‘closed’ group (Hurst unpublished dissertation 2009).

The ethnic breakdown of the 73 women who participated in PPT interventions is as follows:

- 59 black South African – this is split amongst Zulu, Xhosa, Sesotho with a large Zulu majority (over 90%).
- 3 white women.
- 4 Coloured women
- 5 Indian women
- 2 black non-South African (1 Tanzanian and 1 Mozambican)

In a detailed prisoner profile given in 2002 of 30 women, 20 had a standard 8 (grade 10) education or above. This indicates that two thirds of the women were literate with a high school education. Competency in English was high.

This above information is relevant only in that identity is a central concern of this thesis and race and education/class are the primary vectors, along with gender, of identity. They also point to a broader significance with regards to the politics of incarceration (Agozono 1997; Parenti 2000a, 2000b; Worrall 1990, 2002) which I detail in Chapter 5.

Over the five years a core group of 4 women became my partners on the inside: Virginia, Nonkululeko, Philile and Rose. Their involvement in Drama had facilitated a strong bond

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48 This thesis employs the use of apartheid based racial categorisation with an awareness of the problematics of such categorisation with its implied essentialised hierarchies. The thesis is situated within a post-structural amit which contests the validity of racial demarcation, this is explored in Chapter 5. Yet too, racial identity is the reality of how we navigate, experience and identify ourselves in the world. This is even more sharply felt in South Africa which is why racial categorisation is used here. It also offers, as will be shown, the opportunity for politicisation, conscientisation and self-pride.

49 All names of offenders in this thesis are fictitious and have been replaced to protect the offenders’ identities. Offenders identities are protected by law.
between them along with their concern for issues of gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS. With the lack of a designated Correctional Services officer to support cultural activities in the Female Correctional Facility, they became totally indispensible to the smooth running of any project. They would assist me in running sessions; organise offender participants; facilitate offender groups in-between our sessions; help to manage the interventions with the students and with offenders; translate where necessary and generally be my eyes and ears on the ground. This relationship has been invaluable. They have provided much of the insight described in this thesis.

In terms of the PAR model their participation demonstrates a partnership with community members that involves “transformation and emancipation of both participant and researcher” and the repositioning of ‘the subjects’ as teachers (Chilisa & Preece 2005:18). In terms the Ethnographic model the dominant contribution of these four women is an example of Purposive sampling: “This strategy allows the researcher to choose participants who are judged to be knowledgeable on the topic under study” (Chilisa & Preece 2003:30).

I will now introduce these four women: ‘subjects of the study’ who became participants, co-researchers even colleagues and (I hesitate for fear of academic judgement) friends. As this thesis is a humanising project concerned with women’s narrative and its connectedness with ‘real life’, it seems appropriate and necessary to introduce them to any reader. However, this introduction is no simple formality. Their biographies will demonstrate how inextricably the personal and the political are fused informing action with both devastating and liberating consequences, shaping the lives of individuals, communities and societies. Yet, at the same time these introductions will be brief. I have no intention of entertaining any scopophillic desires beyond what is necessary information for the narrative of the thesis.

**Four women: You are more than the sum-total of your worst deed**

During a workshop on running arts based projects in Prisons that I attended with Chris Hurst in Cambridge in 2002, one of the facilitators was conducting a session designed to develop empathy with offenders and the experience of incarceration. The exercise was very effective.

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50 I am not oblivious to the power relations evident in the researcher/researched dynamic and will be unpacking this later in the Chapter.

51 The four day workshop was run by the then Unit of the Arts and Offenders now the Peaker Foundation. It has extensive experience in facilitating and enabling arts based work in prisons.
It involved writing down four loved objects, four loved pass times/activities, four loved people/relationships, four roles that you have – sister, daughter, friend and four hopes for the future. At each stage the facilitator walked around the room to look at what you had written and systematically crossed out what was now no longer feasible since incarceration: going to the movies or walks on the beach were out. She created scenarios around the relationships based on likely possibilities for example: Your mother still comes to visit but your father won’t have anything to do with you and this has put a strain on your parents’ marriage. The experience becomes very real and very personal. I have subsequently run this exercise with students and the effect is always devastating. The point of the workshop is to demonstrate that we are more than the sum total of our worst deed. My introduction of these four women supports this claim.

**Virginia**

Virginia was an educated Zulu woman in her forties. She was an ex-school principle who was the natural leader of the four and of all the women in the drama group and ultimately the Correctional Centre. In stature she was an incredibly powerful woman who stood over 6 feet tall and who commanded absolute authority through her very presence. Yet, there was a warmness to her that was magnetic. She became the mother-figure in the Correctional Centre. She was given privileges and respect by the Correctional Centre authorities for her commitment to many initiatives that Westville Correctional Centre and Correctional Services instigated such as HIV/AIDS committees, Church groups, Anti-Crime campaigns (which involved speaking on the radio and touring schools on the outside) and The School in which she took the principal role. Yet despite the jealous environment no one ever begrudged her. People wanted to be close to her as did I. She was a highly skilled facilitator and had a way of not only holding the attention of a large group of people (sometimes over 100 rowdy offenders) but winning them over completely. She always made a dramatic impression on any students that met her.

**Nonkululeko**

Also a Zulu woman in her 40s she was Virginia’s right hand and closest friend. Also university educated, she partnered with her on all projects. She is an extremely competent and skilled facilitator and since Virginia’s death their mutual responsibilities have fallen on her. Her education and skills are a great asset to the Female Correctional Facility. She
teaches biology and maths in the school and is always called on to assist as an offender representative for events and functions.

Nonkululeko is serving 30 years for murdering her abusive husband. She publically disclosed her story in an issue of the Feminist journal *Agenda* (2005) on Domestic Violence. It is discussed later in the dissertation in Chapter 5.

**Rose**

A Coloured woman in her 30s. Articulate, strong and feminine. She says she is shy but when she speaks people listen. She has an inner strength which radiates. Rose is openly HIV+ and has been surviving with the virus, without medication. She is an amazing example of the relationship between health and mental attitude. She has also openly written about how the drama has facilitated her political ambition to spread information about the virus and aided her own health. This is discussed more fully in Chapter 6.

**Philile**

My enduring image of Philile was when she came forward to speak at the Justice for women campaign in December 2001 (detailed in Chapter 5). The microphone and podium towered above her petite stature yet she had our undivided attention as she told her chilling story. Serving a maximum sentence for murdering her abusive husband, she had participated actively in the Drama interventions and her courage and passion for the plight of abused women is something that informs her politics.

Philile is always the woman who students are most surprised to see behind bars. She is very affectionate and motherly and has an infectious laugh; people simply cannot believe she could ever do anyone any harm. Without wishing to be in any way patronising she is very huggable. She strongly identifies with her role as ‘mother’ and the distance from her children seems to affect her most of all the women.

Philile is also a dedicated teacher in the school. Although less educated than Virginia and Nompumelelo she has been attending courses to further her education.

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52 This purpose of this campaign is detailed in Chapter 5. Briefly The Centre for Violence and Reconciliation spear-headed this initiative to try and lobby for women who were incarcerated for murdering abusive husbands to have their cases reviewed. Most judgments in these cases do not take past abuse into account. It is seen as premeditated murder for material gain.
White woman in the centre? The relationship between the researcher and the researched

It is May 2002. I stand on the peach melamine floor of the dining hall in section C3. The light is coming in through the barred windows and warms the room. The stainless steel tables and benches have been pushed aside to make a space for us to have our Drama session. I am in the middle. Around me are about 15 offenders, today I am the only white woman. This is not unusual. “Okay!” I command “Everybody shake your left wrist!” We begin with relaxation exercises. “Shake it as if you are trying to throw your hand away. Shake it! Shake it! Shake it!” It occurs to me, I am the white woman in the centre.

In her book *Feminist Theory: from margin to centre* bell hooks (1984) argues that white women at the centre still hold the power of naming and claiming. This was not a practice that I wished to endorse; yet in all reasonableness how was I to escape the prison of my body, my voice, my accent, my colour? I am an English white middle-class educated woman conducting research – which is a kind of surveillance (Gray 2003:18) – in a recently post-apartheid Correctional Centre of mostly black Zulu speaking less educated women. How was this inevitable ‘wearing’ of power (a key thematic of this research) to effect my relationships with the community? What kind of knowledge could be generated under such circumstances? Was ‘true’ research even possible? This section will go some way to addressing these questions.

Post-colonial Feminist Theory has provided the central theoretical framework for this research. Its concern, among other things, lies with interrogating and analysing “the relations between Western women, and broadly speaking indigenous women” (Lewis & Mills 2003:8). As a third generation South African I may wish to consider myself indigenous, but it is unlikely, with the divisive history of apartheid as a shared legacy, that the women saw me as one of ‘them’. To be candid, I too was aware of the difference of identification.

In her *Notes towards a politics of location* (1984/2003:32) Adrienne Rich articulates this dilemma of over-determination that speaks directly to the experience of all white female South Africans born before 1994:
This body. White, female; or female white. The first obvious lifelong facts. But I was born in the white section of hospital which separated Black and white women in labor and black and white babies in the nursery, just as is separated Black and white bodies in its morgue. I was defined white before I was defined female.

Thus to ignore difference is to do a disservice – to negate the politics that can allow us to liberate ourselves and others.

One way of conceptualising difference, is to recognise it, not as a justification for ‘othering’ but rather as affirmation of the politics of experience that is essential for the process of liberation: women’s experience being a central tenet of feminism. Mary Maynard (2001:305) argues that by looking at diversity of experience women are able to challenge previous silence around their own condition and in so doing confront so-called experts and dominant males with the limitation of their knowledge and understanding. Further, “focusing on black women’s experience highlights the ways in which ‘race’ plays an important part in social and economic positioning” (Maynard 2001:305).

In the context of this research dynamic ‘difference’ then was not something that I felt negated my role as researcher nor my right to research; however it did absolutely obligate me to an active self-reflexivity as supported within Ethnographic research. As Gray (2003:21) explains Ethnographic practice is reflexive and therefore “emphasises the centrality of the researcher to the research process and invites a far-reaching acknowledgement of that presence.”

The reflexivity also allows a much more fluid and flexible process of research. It acknowledges that “Questions of method…cannot be settled and resolved in the early stages, but will recur throughout the research” (Gray 2003:5). I was therefore able to build much stronger authentic and trusting relationships with the women as I would often spend time with them without any specific agenda other than simply demonstrating my commitment to them. In acknowledging the ‘difference’ between us, and the covert nature of the Correctional Centre environment, this familiarity was crucial for me to be able to ‘read’ the women and the situations in the Correctional Centre accurately.
Further, interrogating myself as ‘white woman at the centre’ (hooks 1984) led me to more interesting analysis vis-à-vis my syncretic use of PPT and Ethnographic methods, in which I include Performance Ethnography, and through a closer analysis of the politics of location (Rich 1984). In looking at relationships of power, at first glance my ‘white/middle-class’ status positioned me as a woman inscribed with power, but how much power did these attributes actually afford me? Certainly some. A minority of women were initially shy and in awe of me, demonstrating overly grateful behaviour indicative of a paternal master/servant relationship. Yet, in many ways I was the one with a disadvantage – which I was able, with the assistance of the PPT methodology, to turn into a distinct advantage for the research. The following were the disadvantages I was able to overcome.

The context: Prison, is a space with its own codes and practices which at first I was entirely ignorant of. This made me vulnerable to manipulation, which did occur on a few occasions. Many offenders are opportunists. Until I came to learn these codes I was the naïve outsider on the back foot reliant on members and offenders that I had chosen to trust to keep me informed. This made me need to form relationships quickly, which I did. I realised remaining separate or isolated was not only bad for the research but potentially dangerous. The strong bond created with certain offenders and members was due to this experience of being ‘an outsider’.

The culture and language of Westville Female, which was predominantly Afrikaans, in 2000 was transitioning towards, with the assistance of the Prison Theatre projects, becoming a ‘Zulu’ cultural space53. In this respect, I again was in the minority. Neither am I Afrikaans nor Zulu. Language presented a potential problem as my Zulu is limited to greetings and short discussions regarding states of mind. Ngiyajabula ukubona! [I am happy to see you!] and the weather. Yet, my lack of proficiency in the language allowed the women far more ownership of the plays and the process and I was happy to take a back-seat. Before a group showed me a play I would ask for a brief synopsis, it then became very easy to ‘read’ the play

53 In the Introduction I cited Davis (in de Waal 2008) with regards to the slow pace of transformation in oppressive institutions. While I acknowledge transformation in Westville Correctional Facility in terms of the practices and policies of the prison there is clearly a carry-over from the previous regime in terms of prison culture. Prison language is almost exclusively in Afrikaans. For example: The gate-keeper (one of the only male members to work in Female Correctional Centre) was always referred to as ‘Boetie’ [brother] and a request for someone to open a gate is ‘Dankie hek!’ [Thank you gate]. Most of the white members are Afrikaans.
through the action as the style is very demonstrative. Need for any clarification was easily solved with me asking for translation.

**My age** when I first started working in the Correctional Centre in 2000 was a youthful 26, this was potentially a barrier to the research process. At least half the women were older than me. Within Zulu culture, age is a significant signifier of respect. Younger Zulu students have commented on how this has been a major factor to negotiate when facilitating in the Correctional Centre (Mhlongo 2002). In this respect *not* being Zulu assisted both myself and the women to work together. We were excused for not abiding by the cultural etiquette, which would have prevented me being respected in a leadership role. I of course also consciously behaved in a manner that upheld the status of the women.

These seeming challenges to the research process then in fact assisted in the relationship between the researcher and the researched which ironically aided the research process. Indian Dramaturge Rustom Bharucha (2003:4) articulates well the benefits of exclusion when working intra-culturally.

Increasingly I have a perverse way of dealing with the seeming vulnerabilities of those privileged groups that attempt to legitimize their absence of interaction with other (generally coloured) minorities. ‘We’re likely to be misunderstood’: ‘It could seem that we’re patronising them… Instead of false reassurance – ‘Don’t worry you’ll be welcomed by them’ – I offer the possible benefits of being excluded…there are some unprecedented insights that can be gained from being silent, decentered, marginalised to the corners of a room, excluded from the intimacy of certain bondings. There are lessons in humility to be learned from being ‘left out’, and perhaps they need to be extended beyond the practice of theatre into the actual vulnerabilities of engaging with the Other not as a tokenistic presence or as a nice foreigner, but as a person with whom one can dialogically redefine the world.

Being a white, English speaking middle-class, younger female working in a predominantly Zulu female space, I have grown very familiar and comfortable with this notion of exclusion. This experience of ‘decentering’, I have found to be valuable and humbling. I also believe it

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54 ‘Intracultural’ (as opposed to intercultural) is Bharucha’s (2003:8) term to describe the cultural dynamics and practices that occur when working/ researching between and across specific communities and regions within the boundaries of the nation-state. The practice of Prison Theatre in Westville Correctional Facilities, which involves the coming together of different cultures within South Africa for the purposes of creating theatre, is an example of intracultural theatre.
has made me a better researcher as I came to feel the significance of those opportunities of ‘inclusion’. Being invited in, established the relationship on the womens’ terms.

Further, PPT as a methodology also shifted the binary of self/other; researcher/researched and observer/observed. In commenting on this relationship the Emancipatory Paradigm seemingly idealistically claims: Within this method “the relationship between the researcher and the researched is not based on a power hierarchy as in the interpretive paradigm, but involves the transformation and emancipation of both participant and researcher” (Chilisa & Preece 2005:34).

I will now discuss how this methodology was able to dismantle the binary. First, Freirean based PPT emphasises different kinds of knowledges as important. Experiential knowledge is emphasised over ‘narrative’ knowledge (Freire 1970:52-67). The women in the Correctional Centre have a great deal of experiential knowledge. The thematics of the interventions (to be discussed below) always centred on themes that they were personally knowledgeable about. I learnt from the offenders as did the students. Students that interacted with the offender participants were always at a distinct disadvantage. This was part of the intention of the projects.

The performance is popular and firmly embedded in Zulu culture and privileged indigenous knowledge. Non-Zulus entering the space must learn to adapt to the form/style and language. On intervention days, offenders who are bilingual are asked to identify themselves so that monolingual students and visitors can have the plays translated. Outsiders must learn to adapt to the context. These decisions in terms of methodology and process were significant in terms of the project as a whole. The affirmation of ‘Zuluness’ as the dominant culture in the Correctional Centre supported and I believe helped perpetuate the transformation in Westville Female in line with an Africanist agenda. Further, it assisted in a personal transformation about perceptions of dominant culture which facilitated cultural pride. This was clearly evident on the intervention days when offenders and other black students united over a shared knowledge and celebration of cultural forms (songs and games). In a reversal of the usual dynamic white students and guests relied on the true generosity of black participants to include them as (temporary) members of their culture. Over the 8 interventions, this display of true generosity which involves the oppressed liberating the
oppressor (Freire 1970), was always consistently demonstrated and never failed to evoke a very moving and spiritual experience.

The experience of involving themselves in the theatre also boosted self-esteem and raised levels of confidence. This was consistently noted as the major impact of the theatre in Westville Female Correctional Centre (focus group interviews 2000, 2001, 2002). This raising of self-esteem as a consequence of the methodology and the bonding process that happens when working on a creative process together helped to facilitate a more equal relationship between myself and the women: researcher/researched. Further, as the method was about generating new knowledge through dialogue, the offender participants themselves became researchers through their own practice.

These elements discussed above could not entirely erase the ‘difference’ between us. This was not the desired outcome. However, through being self-reflexive, seeing the potential for disadvantages to be reconceptualised and through the practice of participatory research an honest dialogue was opened that enabled not only good research practice but something greater. It facilitated the ‘transformation’ and ‘emancipation’ of both myself as researcher and the participants on the inside. Working from the inside/out we were able to open up honest and transparent lines of dialogue that I believe was an extremely healing experience for all concerned. The damage of apartheid was that black and white South Africans were rarely given the opportunities to speak openly and equally with each other, to ask the questions below the surface of speech, to interrogate the stereotypes and generalisations. This is the prison that we all carry with us. To paraphrase bell hooks from her chapter Love as the practice of freedom (1994:244) it is only when we face the internalised racism or self-hatred that we can begin to heal. Acknowledging the truth of our reality both individual and collective is a necessary stage for personal and political growth and in the words of Freire (1970:75) “to speak a true word is to transform the world.”

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55 Each year a handful of white students would resist the invitation to be included as ‘Zulu’. In class feedback they would comment that the plays should have been in English, that they ‘didn’t understand’ and that they felt excluded (post-performance class feedback sessions 2000-2004). One morning of not being the centre was clearly too much. Bharaucha’s (2003:8) argument quoted above provides the perfect rebuttal to this position (of privilege).
Elements of the Research

The Elements of the Research is concerned with explaining what “texts and practices” (Grey 2003:12) I drew on in order to formulate theoretical analysis and conclusions and how the information was gleaned – the data collection procedures.

Integrating the paradigmatic and epistemological orientation/s expanded on above, I essentially undertook a three-fold methodology: Participation/facilitation and observation; recording and analysis.
Texts and Practices

The following section engages the key texts and practices on which the thesis is based.

*Theatre for a Developing Nation* and *Theatre for Debate*

The above two courses provided the majority of research material. Each course is aligned with conceptions around Theatre for Social Change (Boal, 1979; Mda, 1993; Kerr, 1995) and associated philosophical approaches of democratic communication (Freire, 1972; White & Sadanandan Nair, 1999).

The first theatre programme introduced into Westville Correctional Centre involved the introduction of a First Level Applied theatre course entitled *Theatre for a Developing Nation* (TDN), which ran for roughly six weeks in the second semester. The prison/prisoners provided the community component.

While only University students engaged in the theoretical and written components, the practical element of the TDN course aimed to teach applied theatre skills to both students and offenders and to create a platform for dialogue around social issues. But more than that, it provided a powerful opportunity for re-humanisation through open dialogue which enabled the crossing of cultural boundaries and challenging of stereotypes (Hurst, Nkala, Young-Jahangeer 2001; Hurst, Nkala, Young-Jahangeer 2002; Young-Jahangeer 2003).
The TDN course requires short participatory, issue-based plays to be workshopped by students (at the university) and offenders (in the Correctional Centre) on a particular socio-political topic. The plays act as catalysts for discussion/dialogue, therefore facilitation of questions/discussion circles on the issue presented are required to be built into the play.

This process then culminates in a day of ‘play exchange’ where students and offenders perform for and discuss with each other in the Correctional Centre. This involves bussing in up to 150 students and distributing them across the three sites. While the plays do demonstrate a high level of skill, this project is informed by belief that the products are not as important as the exchange itself.

More recently, in 2002, a post-graduate course was initiated entitled *Prison Theatre: Interventions with offenders*, which has since been renamed *Theatre for debate*\(^{56}\). In this course Honours/MA students work intensely with a group of offenders overseen by myself. The practical component happens over a 2 week period, where student facilitators have daily 2-3 hour sessions with their group to devise an intervention which theatrically poses a problem (Freire, 1972) decided by the offender participants. The intervention is then performed with/to an audience of offenders by offenders about matters that directly concern them.

The projects are such that although the students facilitate (typically in pairs) the process in essence, in reality the offenders had far more experience and familiarity with the form and the issues at hand\(^{57}\). I would also emphasise the offenders’ role as ‘teachers’ of the students, as per the Freirean Emancipatory Paradigm (Chilisa & Preece 2005; Freire 1970) described above. Offender participants often emphasised this point in post-performance focus groups. “*The students are also learning from us!*” one participant stated emphatically after the 2001 intervention.

Where the TDN course built skill and familiarised offenders with the language of Applied Theatre, the emphasis in this course – for both the students and the offenders is on

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\(^{56}\) The name was changed to accommodate for the possibility that we may not always be able to run the course in the Correctional Centre. Correctional Centres are notoriously unpredictable spaces.

\(^{57}\) As will be elucidated in Chapter 5, these skills have also been appropriated and used independently by offenders with a political agenda.
facilitation. The form requires all audience participants to become spect-actors (Boal 1979) and to come up with possible solutions. They are able to communicate these as image theatre58 (Boal 1979) / ‘photographs’ or short plays/ skits. An offender then facilitates a discussion around these possible solutions (university staff/ students simply form part of the audience on event days). In Female Correctional Centre the audiences have ranged from approximately 50 – 200 people.

**Thematic investigation: Selection of social topics**

Below is a list of the topics engaged in the various PPT interventions. These topics have helped to thematically navigate this research providing rich insight into the experiences of the women (who draw on their on lives when making theatre) exposing relationships of power. Due to the nature of the two projects, some topics were given or negotiated with key role players in the group as with TDN and others came exclusively from the offenders themselves as with *Theatre for Debate*. This has meant that my research has been in part researcher directed and in part directed by the ‘researched’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Topic/s</th>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>TDN</td>
<td>HIV</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Addiction</td>
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<td>Spousal abuse</td>
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<td>2001</td>
<td>TDN</td>
<td>Racism</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>TDN</td>
<td>Why do women undermine other women?</td>
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<td>2002</td>
<td>Theatre for Debate</td>
<td>Illness (HIV/AIDS) in prison</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Motherhood in prison</td>
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<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>TDN</td>
<td>Class conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Theatre for Debate</td>
<td>Getting out or what to do on release Substance abuse</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>TDN</td>
<td>HIV/AIDS</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Theatre for Debate</td>
<td>Lesbianism</td>
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<td>Crime</td>
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58 Image theatre – which the offenders have renamed ‘photograph’ has become a very useful research tool for learning about offenders’ views and experiences of the world in a way that is generalised and low focus (Baim, Brookes & Mountford, 2002). Offenders too have found image theatre useful in communicating grievances to other offenders and members and for demonstrating solutions to problems posed. This form has been widely and successfully adopted across all three Correctional Centres.
Weekly sessions

In addition to these PPT interventions, in 2002 weekly drama sessions were run with offenders. They typically involved theatre games (Boal, 1992; Miles-Brown, 1986; Spolin, 1985) including image theatre (Boal 1979). Information revealed in these sessions have been useful for the purposes of this research; however in keeping within the objectives of participatory methodology (Merriam & Simpson 1995) the aim of these classes was not simply to elicit information from the researched. Benefits to the community were threefold, first to provide a space to explore creativity thereby relieving the stress that is associated with prison living and secondly, to increase the level of practical skill. Offenders often articulate the desire to learn useful skills; the sessions were essentially initiated because they wanted to “learn drama” (discussions with participants 2001). Finally the sessions aimed to instil a higher level of critical awareness through the use of discussion circles, in order that participants become “critically vigilant of their own ideological proclivities” (Mda 1993:20). This is necessary for the offenders’ effective facilitation of PPT. I have also used information gained from such discussions and theatrical explorations of identity and power in my analysis.

In 2003 these sessions had to be suspended due to the introduction of the school. Weekly session clashed directly with school hours and three of my primary members/ assistants were to become teachers and the vast majority of my other participants were to become students. The overwhelming contribution of the Drama participants to the school should be noted.

Conversations

The purpose for entering the Correctional Centre was always, at least in the beginning, the execution of an intervention; however as explained this research is not based exclusively on the plays but the ‘performances’ that extended beyond the confines of theatrical practice. As the relationships with the women developed, I became privy to open and honest conversations which helped inform much of my analysis. These conversations were informal and organic.

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59 During the period of this research all activities in the Correctional Centre had to take place before 2pm, when the offenders are locked up but preferably before 12pm when they eat lunch.
Other Material

For the purposes of this research I have also drawn on other texts which I encountered whilst in the Correctional Centre:

Event Days: 9 August is Women’s Day. This is annually celebrated in Female Correctional Centre with a Cultural Event in which both offenders and Correctional Centre Staff (the overwhelming percentage of which is female at this centre). This ‘practice’, can be considered a ‘text’ in itself; yet is composed of many texts. Most strikingly are the exhibition of billboards written by the offenders around issues of women in prison such as sexuality, gender-roles and gender-based violence. These are fastened to the bars which enclose the three story high central core in which the ‘Event’ occurs. These Event-days also include Ingoma [Zulu dance], Gospel singing and popular theatrical performance. These Womene Day events were centred on the celebration of Zulu Culture. The events used Culture and Gender to cut across divisions of offender and member. Fashion shows were also events that took place in Female Correctional Centre.

Play scenarios: On 2 occasions women had written out of their own volition possible play scenarios for potential performance. These provided insight into their reading of the world and have been drawn on.

Data Collection Procedures

The methodology employed in the collection of data was essentially three fold: participation/facilitation/observation, which falls under PAR data collection; recording, which predominantly involved ethnographic methods of note-taking and analysis. This will be discussed in more detail below. However, prior to the execution of any intended research methodology, access must first be granted.

Access

The central prerequisite for the practicalities for conducting of research and gathering information is the issue of access. Within a prison context, this is something that has to be carefully negotiated and renegotiated both at an official (legal) level and at an unofficial personal one.
Access to the Correctional Centres (Female and Medium B) in order to conduct research was approved by Pretoria in 2001. Without approval from The Department of Correctional Services Head Office no access and no research is permitted. The project did run unofficially for one year. All research articles and dissertations and theses must be submitted to Head Office prior to publication, this is a condition of the research.

Once this official approval has been granted however, there is no guarantee of access. As a researcher you are entirely at the mercy of the real gate-keepers: guards and other Correctional Services staff. In this regard the building of relationships becomes fundamental to the success of the research project. I therefore consistently made the effort to support the authority of the guard and to get to know each DCS staff member on my route personally. Many hours were spent over a cup of tea discussing families and hopes for the future.

My continued presence also assisted greatly with my ability to access the Correctional Facility and the offenders. I fairly quickly became a familiar and trusted presence and in a sense an honorary ‘member’. Over time, I could arrive at the main gate unannounced (typically this must be pre-arranged with a DCS staff member who gives your name to the guards at the main gate) and gain access as the guards knew me. Again, I would always make a point of being polite and friendly. Correctional staff within Female Correctional Centre too felt comfortable, once I had earned their trust, to allow me to walk through the Correctional Centre often unaccompanied to meet with women in the sections if there were no staff available to escort me.

Occasionally however guards would be resistant to assisting me, even if the project had been negotiated and pre-arranged. This has been for a variety of logistical (insufficient staff) and occasionally personal reasons such as ‘feeling tired’ to escort the offenders from the workshop (which lies some 500m beyond Female Correctional Centre). This has cost the offenders and myself countless hours of contact time. Correctional Centres are often very frustrating institutions to work in. The power dynamics also do not allow for you to make demands or ‘lose your cool’. You must accept any situation that is presented to you.
In one example, a previously negotiated intervention, which involved a structured scheduled University course with registered students, was postponed at the 11th hour because an outside agency was coming to do flower arranging and some of the offenders wanted to do both.

**Research Process: Participation Facilitation Observation**

The first stage in the methodology was participation: participation as (active) facilitator and as (passive) observer. The philosophical and political reasons / merits for this as part of the participatory research design have already been discussed. However my role as researcher went beyond the participation as facilitator of the PPT projects. I was also an observer that was attempting to stand apart and reflect on interactions either with me or in my presence.

The ethics of the research process is of obvious concern to academic institutions who require extensive documentation to prove the ethics of any research project; however the nature of a researcher who interacts with a community (real people with whom relationships are formed) is always to play two roles simultaneously. As a participant-observer the quality of the information is often dependent – or at least it could be interpreted as such – on how well the researcher is able to ‘perform’ affability in order to gain the trust of the researched community. The longer one works with a particular group of people the stronger the relationship becomes, the more complex the information shared and the more potentially ethically problematic doing research becomes.

In May 2002 an offender, Pretty, who had been in a leadership position at that stage, confronted me with the ethics of research and the associated issue of exchange. She spread a rumour that I was video-taping their plays and selling them overseas for financial and professional gain. I had recently returned from a research trip to the United Kingdom concerning Prison Theatre. A meeting was called. The offenders were angry. They are highly sensitive to the issue of being ‘used’ and they threatened to boycott the interventions. As the meeting unfolded, it became apparent that the women, who knew I was benefiting from the project, wanted something more in exchange. They knew the students were performing in the Correctional Centre as part of their University degree: they were tired of certificates they wanted a degree too. Many of the women had not even completed school let alone University entrance requirements or the money to register. They had not understood. This was my false assumption. As I explained the room became more and more still. I
feared the worst; yet the projects did not fail. In fact this incident opened up space for renegotiation of the terms and for the dynamics of the group to shift. Pretty had been quite a divisive force from the outset, this incident caused her to lose interest in the projects and allow the four women who remain my invaluable partners on the inside to step forward. The renegotiated terms of exchange involved the provision of fast-food – (KFC) and Coke, on completion of the project in addition to certificates: Easily done.

I am grateful for some important lessons learnt through this incident: First, never assume knowledge and never assume ignorance. It is essential to be up-front, open and clear in all your interactions – and never make promises you can’t keep. Second, exchange is essential and must constantly be renegotiated; third, it is not your role to control the environment. Some conflict is inevitable as ‘you’ the researcher enter into a context of finely balanced power which must now find a new equilibrium: it is impossible not to make an impact – even a fly on the wall is a meal for someone. To be a researcher in Cultural Studies is to play two roles simultaneously but this need not be ‘dishonest’ or conflictual if we are aware of and constantly interrogate those roles. It requires that we learn to discern between what is private, what is public and always to ask permission.

I will now explain the practicalities of participation/ facilitation and participation-observation within the context of the projects – in other words the research process.

**Participation Facilitation**

Participation occurred principally within the context of the popular participatory theatre projects and weekly sessions described above. As the facilitator of these interventions I was uniquely positioned to conduct research based on the information gained from the process. This involved:

**Preliminary dialogues.** Prior to the plays being workshopped I would facilitate a discussion of the relevant social issue/ theme to be engaged with in the play. This served to gain a sense of the knowledge and understanding of the issue at hand, but also to offer challenges where necessary in line with Freirean conscientising objectives.

**Workshop techniques** such as image theatre (Boal 1979) often involved in devising the plays provided useful information with regards to the women’s reading of the world and of their
imagined ideal (image theatre to be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3). Games used in the weekly sessions such as image theatre (Boal 1979), other Boalian Games (Boal 1992) and the performance of short skits improvised around objects or words also became a source from which to draw research material.

The plays themselves, which dealt with socio-political concerns, communicated valuable research information. Over the duration of the research (2000-2004) which involved 8 interventions, 22 offender-participant plays were performed. This is quite a significant number. This thesis does not involve extensive content analysis. As such the plays in and of themselves are not the object of research. Rather through a process of selection, elements of the plays which speak to the research area and which communicate the women’s views on power and identity will be drawn on to support the findings.

Virginia facilitating a post performance discussion 2003

Post-performance discussions around the issue are built into the form. Through involving myself in these discussions I was able to gain further insight into the perceptions and experiences of the offender-participants in terms of their world views and how these experiences have shaped their understanding of the power dynamics in social relations. Discussions would also help to reveal and emphasise certain aspects I had perhaps not thought of, redirecting and focusing research.
Each TDN intervention would involve me working with the women for approximately 10, 2 hour sessions over the 6 weeks prior to the intervention with the students; and 1 to 2 post-performance sessions where I would usually conduct follow-up discussions or focus-group interviews. The approximation is based on the unpredictability of the environment (including the offenders), which greatly affected planned contact time.

Research in connection with the post-graduate course happened while it was running: daily over a 2-week period for a duration of up to 3 hours. I would always go in prior to the commencement of the course to organise and brief the offenders.

Weekly sessions, as mentioned occurred for a period of 1 year and lasted approximately an hour from the arrival of the participants. That might involve me being present for 3 hours in the Correctional Centre waiting for staff to organise a space, inform the offenders and for offenders to arrive.

**Participation observation**

This study extends its analysis of Prison Theatre to Prison as Theatre. This is detailed in Chapter 4. Research in support of the broader study was gained through participant-observation since it is concerned with “the ways in which people interact and relate to one another within given sites or spaces” (Gray 2003: 82). As the key methodology within ethnographic research it draws not simply on information gleaned through formal interviews, or play texts for example but all those aspects such as appearance, demeanour, clothing, behaviour, attitudes and manner which provide a “‘descriptive context’ in setting the scene of the action” (Gray 2003: 82).

This research was conducted through simply being there, typically with no particular agenda other than to visit the women. I rarely went in with note-pad and pen or tape-recorder. Apart from the challenges in getting permission it would compromise the relationships.

**Recording participation**

During my facilitation of the respective interventions, and during my numerous informal visits with offenders **extensive notes** were taken (usually subsequent to any visit/interaction) which outlined my general experiences in the Correctional Centre, my discussions with offender-participants with regards to the relevant social-issue, the plays, the process and a
broad range of other issues. I also noted any significant occurrences that I observed between offenders or between members and offenders as well as behaviours and appearance. This note-taking was often quite narrative and organic.

**Still photographs** were taken of the performances on the performance days when possible. Permission must be granted by the Correctional Centre and offenders must sign an indemnity for any pictorial capturing, which they did for all the photographs in this thesis. I am aware of the apparent contradiction between protecting the anonymity of the offender by altering names yet publishing photographs that displays faces. These photographs however are not available for reproduction other than for the purposes of research. Photographs are a contentious issue for offenders for an entirely different reason however. Offenders would ask me if they could pose for portraits and then want copies of the photographs which they are not allowed as per Correctional Centre regulations. I have countless portraits of offenders which I am not allowed to distribute to them.

On four occasions I was able to **videotape** the TDN intervention day (2000, 2001, 2002, 2004)\(^{60}\); however on later inspection of the 2001 tape the tape had been damaged and the information lost. An undamaged copy was given to the Correctional Centre which I have not been able to locate. The larger interventions, which took place in the outside courtyard, as part of the post-graduate course were not recorded. That number of offenders being potentially captured on film presented an administrative nightmare and almost definite refusal of such a request. Further, video cameras are invasive and mediate the experience between ‘you’ and ‘them’. As a participant I chose not to distance myself in this way.

The videotapes were **transcribed** and **translated** into English for greater academic accessibility. Where the plays have not been transcribed word for word, extensive notes exist on the plays outlining plot, character and other observations.

After the interventions, **structured focus group interviews** were conducted on 4 occasions with offender-participants. On three of these occasions the interviews were recorded and transcribed. In the 4\(^{th}\) instance notes were taken. The Correctional Centre must also give

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\(^{60}\) On 3 of the 4 occasions I was able to get someone else to do the videoing which in the context of the TDN interventions simply requires a camera to be set up fixed frame on a tripod. The TDN interventions have occurred in the Church Hall. This enabled me to fulfill my function as facilitator and participant researcher.
permission for a tape-recorder to be brought into the Correctional Centre. Research is therefore dependent on the current administrations position on the matter of security and the willingness to assist. A tape-recorder also presented a barrier to discussion. The women consistently mistrusted the tape-recorder imagining that it would be used to implicate them in some way. This had to be carefully managed. For this reason I found it necessary to conduct far more informal discussions with offenders which I would then write up.

Where focus group interviews were not conducted unfocused interviews were conducted and notes were taken.

**Analysis**

The information gathered was analysed in a threefold methodological purpose:

To assess the **social impact** of the plays (process and product) on personal and communal levels. Research gathered to this end was gained primarily through: Note-taking and structured focus group interviews. These interviews were then coded broadly using arts evaluation guidelines (Woolf 1999). Most of the information fell within the following markers: conscientisation, raising of self – esteem, agency/ risk taking behaviours, problem solving and coping mechanisms in the management of emotional states which all contributed to the building of social cohesion. This is significant for the appropriation of the theatre by the women in terms of the articulation of grievances (resistance) and in identity (re)formation (evasion).

The second and primary purpose of the research was to attempt to examine the role and position of women in a gender/race/class structured society dominated by a patriarchal domestic and political/civil system. This essentially involves answering the following questions:

*What do the plays say about how this group of predominantly Zulu incarcerated women identify themselves post 1994? And how have they reconstructed their identity through prison theatre and prison as theatre and why?*

An investigation of the above question reveals what kind of women have power, what kind of women are desirable/ acceptable, and to what extent are we able to reconstitute/ reclaim and
transform the ‘undesirable’. This has significance for offenders’ ability to reclaim and re-imagine themselves outside of and beyond their label as ‘criminal’ and or ‘ill’.

Essentially this thesis documents a battle for the new (negotiated) image of the liberated (yet incarcerated) Zulu woman.

The process involved first eliciting information from popular performance – particularly in relation to the way in which power relations are expressed therein. And second through participant-observation of texts and practices outside of the magic (theatre) space.

The thematics of the programmes (discussed above), both given and decided by participants to a large extent dictated the direction of the research and the information gained; however certain themes became dominant. The research was also a response to the existing politics of the women – particularly the four key protagonists, which pre-existed this research project. I have analysed the material in terms of the overarching thematic of Gender Role Play under which the following presented themselves: Motherhood, Sexuality, Sisterhood and Health.

**Fearful institutions brave individuals: Challenges to the research process**

The process of introducing theatre – theatre for conscientisation – into a post-apartheid Correctional Centre environment requires a leap of faith that is nothing if not brave. A contemporary Correctional Centre, whether punitive or rehabilitative (or both) cannot accommodate such cultural practice within their objectives. It is by design a fearful institution. Individuals within it however may be bold enough to introduce or experiment with potentially risky projects (that they may not even fully understand) within an ethos of transformation. It is to these people that the projects owe their life. The support of these individuals notwithstanding, conducting research inside a Correctional Centre is fraught with many challenges. These are the key challenges that I encountered.

**Correctional Centre protocol**

Any Correctional Facilities primary objective is security. Any outsider coming into that space poses a potential breach of that security which could have serious consequences, both to security of staff and other offenders and to the integrity of the institution. The bringing in of media such as video-cameras and tape-recorders for example (often necessary for research)
is seen as highly risky by the institution. The incidents that initiated the Jali Commission are case in point.

Offenders, as confined human beings, are often manipulative. Correctional Services Officers are wary of an outsiders’ ability to identify and ward off this manipulation. Indeed, I have been caught out once or twice. These risks make Correctional Centres fearful institutions, which is always challenging to the research process since the typical response to fear is control. This manifest is primarily two ways: limits to space and limits to time.

**Limits of space and time**

Often after the projects had been approved at the highest level, we would battle to find a place to work. This is also because participants would invariably be from different sections in the Correctional Centre (C1, C2 or C3) and working together required offenders to move across sections, which is not allowed. Security is maintained through isolation and containment. Practically there is also limited space in the Correctional Centre. It would often take a significant amount of time to resolve the space issue on my arrival. This would limit the time for working.

Offenders are highly regulated beings. During the period of this research cells were locked at 2pm until the next day and offenders must eat lunch prior to that at 12pm. In the mornings, cells must be cleaned and breakfast eaten. This leaves a relatively short window of working time, when we factor in the length of time it takes for offenders to arrive to the session – either due to their own delays (waiting for the shower or for a phone call) or the unavailability of a member to walk them across a section.

**Understaffing**

This brings up a further challenge. The under-staffing problem. On many occasions there were just insufficient staff to facilitate the smooth running of the project. If offenders from the factory/workshop are included, a member must fetch them and walk them back (often in the heat) to the Correctional Facility. Many are reluctant to do this. Later projects exclusively involved maximum sentences offenders, who are not allowed to work, since the logistics of organising with the workshop was too difficult. The workshop is also a business with quotas to fulfil – the offenders are labour.
The lack of staff, who are also not given any incentive to assist (it is often perceived as more work for no benefit), means that successful research is all about building relationships. The guard will provide greater assistance, often, if they know you and like you. In Female, there was no delegated Member in charge of ‘recreations’ or ‘entertainment’ as in Medium B. Individual members were often assigned but would then move on or up. The DCS has a very high staff turn-over. This makes the building of relationships with key members in Westville Female quite difficult. There are a handful of staff however who did often assist me and I am grateful to them.

**Personal problems and participation**

As will be discussed in later chapters, research has shown that Female offenders often exhibit unpredictable behaviour (Hughes 1998:49; Young-Jahangeer 2003:102). This is in part due to the fact that the prison experience has enormous psychological impacts in terms of curtailing your aspirations, roles and relationships, activities and material possessions.\(^{61}\)

The affects of one or more of these issues (but primarily the separation from children) would often affect the smooth-running of the projects in terms of attendance and level of participation. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, the women were often ‘inactive’ as both a response to and resistance to incarceration.

The emotional states of the women therefore contributed to the differing levels of participation of the women.\(^{62}\) This can be perceived as potentially problematic since research methodologies should encourage equal participation. Other factors that influenced participation (ie who spoke more and who spoke less) were cultural issues of age as well as class issues often related to education and rural/urban dynamics. Nevertheless, other less confident women were able to be heard through simple gestures of consent (nodding in agreement) or disagreement (disgruntled behaviour). I would also often meet with these women individually and informally to test out any decisions made by myself with majority group consensus.

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\(^{61}\) This experience was highlighted in the game outlined previously in the chapter.

\(^{62}\) An important finding in this research is that in Westville Female Correctional Centre, the PPT interventions were appropriated by the women most significantly for the management of emotional states. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5 and 6.
Self-censorship

Researching and working in a Correctional Centre is at the discretion of the DCS, which is self-protecting. When doing research and writing it up, I became inevitably aware of what would be acceptable or unacceptable to the DCS since it could result – at the very least – in a termination of the projects. Qualitative Research by its nature is speculative. This makes coming to conclusions, with their inevitable bias, very difficult since the consequences are potentially damaging to the DCS to the offenders, to me and to the research. I have therefore had to consider with more than a degree of caution any conclusions. Whether this amounts to self (or external) censorship I am not certain; nevertheless it unequivocally demands a greater interrogation of the material presented and the consequences of utterance.
"Theatre... is one area... in which man has attempted to come to terms with the spatial phenomenon of his being" (Soyinka in Kamlongera 1988: 23).

“When I do drama, I think sometimes I am free” (offender Westville Female 18 September 2002)

Forty first year students are asked to form a line outside the entrance to Westville Female Correctional Centre. The anticipation is palpable. The busses heave diesel as they pull off to deposit the other hundred students between Medium B and Youth Centre. It is 16 September 2000 and it is the first intervention of its kind and scale in a Female Correctional Centre in South Africa, and as far as my research has shown: the world. The students have their popular participatory plays rehearsed and we are discussing a variety of themes: HIV, addiction and spousal abuse. I have been working with the women for the past 6 weeks making plays on the same themes. As we enter, the warder gives identity cards to the girls only; it takes me about a second to work out why: in an all female Correctional Centre, it can be safely assumed that young men are not offenders. She is Afrikaans and authoritarian. She plays her part brilliantly and becomes in the minds of the English speaking students the archetypical Afrikaans teacher, not to be messed with! To the Zulu speaking students, I imagine she is a ‘boer’ – equally not to be messed with.

In the years to come I get to know Mevrou Strydom better, she is not her first impression. Her most endearing quality, to me, is her love of cats. She feeds the strays that live in the Correctional Centre and fights for their continued survival.

The students have been repeatedly briefed about their conduct in a Correctional Centre and before we enter the Correctional Centre proper, Mevrou Strydom confirms: No cell phones or weapons, no giving out phone numbers, no taking notes, no giving of gifts including money. Above us the correctional services insignia is hand-painted on the wall – no doubt by an
artistically inclined offender, as is the AIDS ribbon. The juxtaposition is striking. Not only symbolically confirming the silenced issue of HIV prevalence in South African Correctional Centres (Gear et al 2002) but inadvertently likening the disease to a corporal prison of sorts.

The great pink Iron Gate is unlocked and we walk through confronted by the labyrinth of corridors heading into the bowels of the prison. The students are almost overwhelmed into silence. We are lead into the church hall. The ‘smartest’ venue in the Correctional Centre – it has carpet-tile and wooden benches. Blue is the colour for Female Correctional Centre. Offenders must wear blue uniforms, dresses or track suits, décor is blue.

I run to the sections to alert the women that we have arrived. They of course know this already through the internal grapevine, but in true prison fashion they stretch the time, to make it last, to build suspense, because they can. We are waiting for them!

Slowly they begin to arrive. I have never seen them looking like this, showered, make-up, hair done – some are in high-heel shoes. They were transformed. The students sat stiffly on the benches, wide-eyed and out of any comfort zone. When we were all assembled, I opened the day and handed it over to the women. Instantaneously a powerful female voice singing:

_Insontoma, heya heya heya!_

The rhythm is a regular 4/4, it is rhythm for coming together slowly, a rhythm that gives you time to accommodate the transition. The women clap on the down beat and shuffle in time towards the centre, the students are beckoned to join in. They rise from their seats, some singing, some trying to sing, all clapping. Once assembled Zinhle breaks through and ups the pace, a new song. A circle is formed, our hands are stinging already from the fast pace of the clap and the intense energy – she throws herself into her _ingoma_ dance, her legs slice the air. The students are entranced. She brings a student into the circle to dance. It is a dynamism (Boal 1979) – she represents all students in this moment and you can feel it and see it in their eyes, there is a sense of what can only be described as a kind of ‘healing’ through encounter. Similarly the offenders find this exchange extremely important – the simple act of asking someone to dance is a brave undertaking. It is an invitation which revels willingness on your part but one that can be shunned. Historical and educational hierarchies as well as class and
language dynamics placed the offenders at a social disadvantage; yet the space (prison) and the form (*ingoma* dance) inverts the roles. The women are able to practice feeling powerful and generous.

Students and offenders take turns to dance in the centre. Pulses are racing. We are dancing together, we are clapping together, we are building consensus, connecting, committing, creating commonality. We are ready to begin.

*Kaluma! Kaluma! Kaluma! [talk!]*

The following chapter is primarily concerned with defining Prison Theatre in Westville Female Correctional Centre. It will therefore focus on form; although form begets intention – the politics of form – inseparable from the form itself. The form too (PPT/ dialogical cultural action) has been the methodology discussed in Chapter 2. As such form, intention, theory, methodology all becomes inextricably intertwined. At the centre of this tapestry is Paulo Freire. Although Rosa María Torres (1998) is careful to point out on Freire’s behalf that he is part of a trajectory (educative, philosophical and political), the constraints of a dissertation demand a beginning. This beginning lies with him.

Freire’s (1974/2005; 1996) dialogic – yet directive (McLaren 2000; Torres 1998) – problem-posing education (1996), and to a lesser extent Augusto Boal’s (2000) Theatre of the oppressed (TO), has informed the basis for the cultural action (form and intention) conducted in the Correctional Centre. However the idea was not to impose an existing form, but in the spirit of the collective, rather to negotiate a new form by embracing the influences of African popular culture such as ‘traditional song’ and dance and radio drama (Barber, 1997; Gunner 1994; Horn 1986) which informed the experiences of the offenders, with other more openly educative forms of Theatre for Development (Kamlongera 1988; Kerr 1995; Mda, 1994) in an eclectic mix.

Fundamentally what this implies is an attempt to define Popular Participatory Theatre, which circularly has its roots in Freirean methodology. Significantly, African dramaturges such as Ross Kidd (1982) Christopher Kamlongera (1988), Zakes Mda (1993) and David Kerr (1995) locate the incorporation of Freirean praxis into forms of Theatre for Development as
indicative of the emergence of a “true African theatre” (Kamlongera 1988:83). This concept of syncretism – the inside assimilating/appropriating the outside – to make something ‘true’ of the inside, is an intriguing concept and one that this intervention and research embraces. Essentially it is engaging notions of the popular (Barber 1997; Fiske 1989).

Investigation into why Freire’s inclusion was so applauded demands a brief historical exploration into African theatre at the point of the arrival of the colonials in Africa. This marks a point of contact/ (inter) cultural clash and therefore crossover, another conceptual thread that is embedded in this intervention and research.

The interlinking aspects of clash, crossover, assimilation and appropriation are essentially describing notions of ‘the popular’ and by extension ‘popular culture’. The thesis engages ‘the popular’ in some detail and is one of the key theoretical underpinnings of the project. In this chapter however I will not engage it theoretically in great detail, but practically.

Theatre and Social Change

Theatre for Development also known more contemporarily as Theatre for social change due to contestations around notions of ‘development’ is now a well researched field that sits within the wider ambit of applied theatre (Solomon 2001; Prentki & Epskamp 2006). It can itself be considered the umbrella under which a number of other performance forms sit for the broader purpose of ‘development’. As David Kerr (1995: 149) notes in his chapter on the area “there have been two major sources of Theatre for Development: the colonial tradition of theatre as propaganda, and another more radical tradition of community theatre”. Both traditions have influenced the theatre work in Westville Correctional Centre, as the rest of this section will attempt to expound.

Theatre Ritual Real Life

In the preface to The history of theatre in Africa (2004) Martin Banham attempts to unpack the problematics of trying to define the parts as well as the whole. ‘Africa’, despite its

63 ‘Development’ within a western capitalist frame is seen as ‘wanting to be like the west’ (Mda 1983; Hedebro 1982). As such it is equated with technological and infrastructural advancement. Zakes Mda’s (1993: 40) proposition is that “Africa should learn to view development as a process of liberation…the emphasis should be on … self-reliance; participation; equity in distribution”.

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tendency to be essentialised (as argued above), is hardly homogenous. North Africa has more in common with the Middle-East than Central or Southern Africa and is practically part of the Arab world. Historically it has records dating back 5000 years (Banham 2004: xiv). This compared with most other parts of Africa in which an Oral tradition has pervaded. The influence of the respective colonials: Arabs, French, English, German, Portuguese and Dutch have also been profound in shaping African cultures. In addition, with its tribal legacy, even relatively localised areas can be home to numerous distinctive clans with their own culture, custom and often language or dialect. South Africa’s 11 official languages seem considerable until we consider that in Nigeria around 500 languages are spoken.

To localise the point, in a recent move 11 men in KwaZulu-Natal applied to be given the status of ‘King’ equivalent to that of King of the Zulu’s Goodwill Zwelethini on the grounds that they felt they were heads of clans – they were all Zulu (Mercury 6 July 2007). Nevertheless, despite this ‘multi-nationalism’ which typifies African political and cultural life, in addition to the enforced ‘separate development’ of apartheid in South Africa, there has been cultural cross-over and interchange; although often outside of the mainstream ‘gaze’. This becomes relevant for later discussion on theatre in South Africa generally and theatre in Westville Correctional Centre specifically.

‘Theatre’, in this context, although loosely identifiable as ‘African’, is equally problematic. Writing on theatre in Africa, Zakes Mda, is always clear to make the distinction (1993; 1994) between ‘Drama’ which points to the literary text and ‘Theatre’. He defines the later as the “production and communication of meaning in the performance itself...a transaction or negotiation of meaning on performer-spectator situation” (1993: 203). Although far more useful than ‘drama’ when engaging the cultural products of (mostly) oral traditions, ‘theatre’ as Hutchinson (2004) points out “is a European term with a specific meaning” (2004:312) and I would argue specific expectations by those coming out of a western tradition/education. Particularly with regard to content, purpose, actor/audience relationship and

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64 South Africa’s official languages are: Afrikaans (13.3%); English (8.2%); isiNdebele (1.6%); isiXhosa (17.6%); isiZulu (23.8); Sepedi (9.4%); Sesotho (7.9%); Setswana (8.2%); siSwati (2.7%); Tshivenda (2.3%); Xitsonga (4.4%) (http://www.southafrica.info).
65 David Kerr’s (1995: 1) definition of ‘drama’ is slightly different, for him it refers to “displays of actions to an audience, in which there is an imitation of events in the real or supernatural world and there is an element of story or suspense”. In any event he also finds it inadequate and defers to a broader understanding of the word ‘theatre’ to describe African performance, pre and post-colonial.
spatial organisation. Thus before we can engage with the specifics of African theatre, we must first allow for a more inclusive redefinition that goes beyond the Euro-centric bias.

An examination of the specifics of African Theatre historically, reveals a far more syncretic approach, embracing a multiplicity of styles which can include mimetic masks, chant, song and dance, mime, acrobatics and dramatised narratives (Banham 2004; Hutchinson 2004). How these elements come together and what form each element takes, is as varied as the peoples that perform them; however it is the element of ritual indicative of theatrical purpose and participation, which Banham argues should be considered a unifying element in the multifarious field of African Theatre. He states: “The apparent difficulty of finding a coherent pattern of history of African performance is also an opportunity to assert its defining and unifying quality – a sense of function” (Banham 2004: xiv).

This functional aspect within African theatre, and the subsequent association of African theatre with ‘ritual’ was seen, within a Darwinian oeuvre, by colonizers and missionaries as evidence of lack of evolution and so fuelled – at least initially – a ‘moral’ justification for their colonial/evangelical imperatives. Malawian Theatre practitioner and academic Christopher Kamlongera (1988), writes in his seminal study on Theatre for Development, on this very issue. His research into colonial literature revealed the perception that Africans, pre-‘the civilizing influence of the West’, “were still to evolve to the Dionysian stage” (Kamlongera 1988:3) and by 1930 Ghana, he notes with irony, was considered to have reached “the pre-Elizabethan stage morality-play phase…A remarkable achievement on the African part” (Stevens 1930 in Kamlongera 1988:6)!

Early colonial observers of African art or ‘craft’ – as they would no doubt prefer, perceived of it as a proverbial ‘body in the bog’. Writes one critic: “African art is very definitely young in all its manifestations; here there are no memories of older civilisations, but the simplest of forms, and childlike expression: We may look to the African to show us, as a thing still alive, the origin of all our own art” (in Kamlongera 1988:4).

Interestingly, it is this same aspect of ‘function’ that has marginalised Theatre for Development (TFD) and practitioners of TFD globally, within the broader discipline of ‘the Theatre’.

66 Interestingly, it is this same aspect of ‘function’ that has marginalised Theatre for Development (TFD) and practitioners of TFD globally, within the broader discipline of ‘the Theatre’.
Yet, for all the anthropological (archaeological?) fascination, there was a cunning realisation regarding the utilisation of ‘theatre’ – particularly on the part of the missionaries – to achieving their own ends (Kamlongera 1988; Orkin 1991; Hutchinson 2004). Namely for the promotion of a ‘civilising’ ideological imperative: in a word – propaganda. As such “the relationship between missionaries and Africans should therefore be understood as one of suppression” (Kamlongera 1988: 6), beginning a rather complex relationship between (South) African culture and Christianity which I will engage later (Kerr 1995; Orkin 1996).

It was never the intention of the colonials to understand or respect African theatre. Instead it was reduced to a collection of identifying elements: dance, drumming, music, story-telling, simplistic form (Kamlongera 1988), which were inserted arbitrarily into European style plays which overtly communicated colonial intention. Thus missionary efforts to “create drama amongst Africans” (Kamlongera 1988: 8) were solely and deliberately founded in a hegemonic agenda of cultural imperialism. It is this usage of theatre as propaganda that forms the more insidious branch of Theatre for development history that Kerr (1995) alludes to in the quotation above. This debate is picked up later.

The connectivity between African Theatre and ritual “[that] which is undertaken to give homage to, obtain assistance from, or in some way intercede with supernatural forces” (Kerr 1995: 1) is well established and documented (Kamlongera 1988; Mda 1993; Kerr 1995; Banham 2004). However it is the relationship and conceiving of the two terms which has been extensively debated. David Kerr, in his (1995) definition of ‘Theatre’ attempts to resolve the dilemma by including ‘ritual’ as one of its many guises. In this way he locates ritual as a dramatic form. As evidenced above, typically, this has not been often the case.

The difficulty has arisen with the colonial/ western conception and consequent separation of ‘theatre’ (civilised articulation) from ‘ritual’ (primitive form). Kamlongera argues convincingly against this proposition, and subsequent denigration of African Theatre.

The contention here is that art and ritual do co-exist. In this, entertainment which is normally associated with art appreciation and enjoyment are not necessarily conceptualised as irreligious and as impossible in ‘serious behaviour’. The understanding of ritual in the west does not seem to take this into account. When applied to the African experience it therefore becomes doubtful and inadequate as a basis for study of such experience. (1988:18)
It is Kamlongera’s (1988: 20-21) proposal that there are clear elements of ritualistic ceremonies that are deliberately performance which shifts the event – even momentarily – from ‘dramatic experience’ to ‘theatre’. This shift involves how the ‘performer’ perceives him/herself in relation to the action and in relation to the spectators, who in turn respond and interpret differently.

This integrated approach of theatre and ritual, points to a larger integrated understanding between the relationship between Art and Life; Theatre and ‘the real world’. Robert McLaren (2000) uses the analogy of ‘broken mirrors’ to describe this phenomenon. “In Africa art and actuality constantly overlay and part. Where modern drama is known and performed, art articulates itself as something distinct from actuality but only temporarily and with fragility. The performance and spectator / participant norms of many modern African plays take this for granted” (McLaren 2000: 6).

Thus, to develop Kamlongera’s argument, in a western understanding of this relationship he argues “theatre feeds on the ‘real world’ without necessarily giving back anything in return” (1988: 23). In an African frame “there is an area of co-existence in which the functional nature of theatre takes root” (1988: 23).

This view was clearly represented within the theatre at Westville Female Correctional Centre. It was a way of seeing the world that the offenders understood and engaged in. What was being portrayed was theatre, but in many instances they were literally playing themselves, often not even changing their names. Yet, it was not psychodrama. The ‘characters’ and ‘spectators’ were distanced enough from the performance to understand it as such, often laughing hysterically at apparent ‘serious’ and often harrowing ‘real life’ representations. This can only be seen as acceptable if we appreciate that what is presented is understood as theatre – not real life; but that real life is part of theatre, just as theatre is part of real life. It is this intersection that as Kamlongera explains, introduces the element of function since the theatre is able to, in the case of Theatre at Westville Correctional Centre, literally talk back to life.

An example that comes to mind was the realistic depiction of a rape by a woman who had been raped and to a room of women many of whom had been raped. The laughter was also simultaneously mocking of the man and distancing from the reality of the event.
It is for this reason that Paulo Freire’s influence into Theatre (for development) in Africa is seen as facilitating a “true African theatre”\(^68\) (Kamlongera 1988: 83): The dialogic political imperative integrating with African popular form to create popular participatory theatre as part of Theatre for Development. Interestingly this African understanding of ‘life’, ‘art’ and ‘ritual’ also introduces two further aspects relevant to this research. First, it is able to accommodate ‘healing’ (of self and society) as part of these processes. The Western distinction therefore between theatre and therapy ceases to have meaning. Psychologists have often verbally expressed apprehension over the ethical implications of the work Chris and I have been doing with the offenders. It also explains the categorical Western distinction, expanded on in the example of Prison Theatre in the United Kingdom, between drama, psychodrama and the term socio-drama, used often to explain the kind of work that is under discussion here.

Second is the element of magic, which I also conceptually introduced in my discussion on the Prison Theatre of Brazil. The nature of theatre is to play with notions of illusion and reality. The actor invokes (like a \textit{sangoma} or \textit{cantadora}) the character and in so doing collapses the differentiation, which she then embodies. One can see the fascination on people’s faces when an actor transgresses the boundary of the fourth wall and performs in ‘reality’. The more ‘real’ the space the more noticeable and intriguing it becomes. Francis Harding observes:

> The evanescent cusp between the imaginary and the real is inherent in performing. In Africa and throughout the world, performing makes visible the unseen and makes the present that which is in the past or in the future, manipulating space and time and challenging social and natural order. (2002:2)

It was Jerzy Grotowski (1968/1994:15-25) who in exploring the relationship between elevated spiritual state and performance, observed that what makes theatre unique from other art forms are two interrelated concepts that are activated by the actor-spectator relationship: First that “performance is an act of transgression” (1994:19) (a nice analogy when pondering theatre in prison) and second his ‘poor theatre’. His concept of ‘poor theatre’ proposed a stripping down of theatre to its bare – and sacred – essentials: actor, spectator and space.

\(^{68}\) His full acknowledgement is to the ideas and experiences of “Freire, Boal, Kidd and Etherton” (1988: 83) however the three former theorists all take Freire as their methodological and political point of departure.
In contemplating the (magical) power of performance space Ngugi wa Thiongo (1997:12) extends this argument. Where Grotowski privileges the actor-spectator relationship in the invocation of a spiritual state, Ngugi emphasises the influence of the ‘audience’ in the magical activation of the performance space. It is only in relationship to the audience/spectators/spect-actors that the space acquires its real power. At this point:

The entire space becomes a magnetic field of tensions and conflicts. It is eventually transformed into a sphere of power revolving around its own axis like a planet in outer space. This is the real magic and power of performance. It incorporates the architectural space of material and immaterial walls into itself and becomes a magic sphere made still by its own motion – but it is potentially explosive, or rather it is poised to explode. (Ngugi wa Thiongo 1997:12/13).

The concepts introduced by Ngugi wa Thiongo in particular allude to the key arguments to be unpacked in this thesis: The power of theatre to expose tensions and conflicts; the transformative potential of theatre and performance – transformation of all key elements as identified by Grotowski (1969): actor, spectator, space. The ability of performance to dissolve context, which I discuss as ‘the inbetween’ (see Chapter 4).

These aspects, however magical, make performance (and all its elements) political. It explains why theatre (and the arts generally) has always struggled with the organs of power. It explains, as I will discuss below, why the powers that be have always tried to co-opt and control it and why and how it has been such a powerful tool to bring about change. It exists in this tension.

Ultimately, Ngugi wa Thiongo (1997:12) writes:

The war between art and the state is really a struggle between the power of performance in the arts and the performance of power by the state – in short, enactments of power. The conflict in the enactments of power is sharper where the state is externally imposed, in a situation where there is a conqueror and the conquered for instance [as in a post-colonial prison].

This last point forms the pivotal concept for the last section of this thesis.

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69 I use this term loosely since as will be discussed below, Prison Theatre and PPT as a form tries to move beyond the audience/ actor binary.
Colonial contamination?

As has been discussed above, African theatre history since colonisation cannot be separated from propaganda and cultural imperialism. Further, the success of such initiatives can be seen in consequent internalisation of the colonial mindset by the colonised (Fanon 1965/1990). Frantz Fanon describes this as ‘the dualism of the oppressed’ such that “the settler’s world is a hostile world that spurns the native [sic] but at the same time is a world of which he is envious” (1990: 41). This schizophrenia is founded in a self-loathing that Fanon argues can only lead to violence.

Theatrically, this ‘enculturation’ is exemplified by the early work of missionary educated playwrights such as H E Dhlomo, who wrote his controversial The girl who killed to save: Nongqause the liberator in 1936 – the first English play by a black South African. Ian Steadman (1994) writes extensively on the consciousness reflected in the play, which demonstrates “its author’s assimilation into middle-class European cultural norms” (1994: 15).

However in his chapter on the reaction of indigenous African theatre to colonialism, David Kerr (1995) warns of the widely accepted model of cultural imperialism in Africa which suggests that colonialism had a total deracinating effect on indigenous culture (1995: 41). This opinion he posits, points to an essentialising and mythologizing of culture – specifically black African culture – which feeds into the debate around popular culture to be argued in Chapter 4.

In terms of African theatre specifically, Kerr’s (1995) proposal is that this proposition situates African theatre as part of a pre- and post- linear trajectory that represents “a kind of aesthetic version of modernisation theory…which links African development to Westernisation” (1995: 41). Ironically this suited simultaneously the ‘colonials’, the ‘African traditionalists’ and the African intellectuals (Fanon 1990) although they interpreted it from different perspectives.

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70 Steadman uses as his theoretical base for this analysis Raymond Williams’ ‘Structure of feeling’ (1976) which will be expanded on in Chapter 5.
Those who buy in to Western Liberal humanist hegemony, discussed in detail in Chapter 2, tend to perceive this linearity as necessarily evolutionary since it sees “pre-colonial and syncretic forms of theatre logically progressing into the more ‘developed’ forms of literary drama” (Kerr 1995: 41). His contention, which is the position of this dissertation, is that this is of course false.

The alternative, within this essentialising frame is to see colonialism as a contaminant; however Kerr argues that the danger here is that in “emphasizing the achievements of pre-colonial theatre it is easy to underestimate the achievements of indigenous African theatre after ‘contamination’ by colonialism” (1995: 44).

As I have argued above, popular culture appropriates and transforms the outside making, as I stated in the introduction it true of the inside. Thus it is the position of this thesis that it is the point of cultural contact that enables a crossover that enriches and strengthens culture. In biology this is known as hybrid vigour. Why should it not translate culturally? The wider arena of South African theatre for liberation/Suppression (Orkin 1991) becomes an interesting and relevant – albeit brief case-study for the testing of this thesis.

**Theatre and change in South Africa**

History as they say is the story of the victors. When looking at a continent ravaged by colonialism ‘history’ becomes a loaded term and begs the question ‘whose history?’ In narrowing the focus to theatre history in South Africa this becomes particularly apparent. As Banham writes “[In South Africa]…there are legitimate separate performance histories of both indigenous and settler cultures” (2004: xiv). Yet as Yvette Hutchinson posits in a later chapter on theatre history in South Africa (2004: 312-379), these trajectories have not run simply parallel. In keeping with my metaphor of ‘crossover’, “theatre in South Africa is not essentially European or African; rather it takes place between and within practices, forms and institutions” (Kruger in Hutchison 2004: 312- 313). It is the position here that it is precisely this ‘contamination’ that elevated theatre in South Africa to becoming such a strong force for the precipitation of change. The same argument applies to this South African case-study.

‘Colonial’ or ‘settler’ theatre in South Africa, both English and Afrikaans medium has a rich and well documented ‘evolution’, which at times functioned to deliberately reinforce the
South African state (Orkin 1991; Kerr 1995) and at other times chose to completely ignore it. I am not sure which is worse. Post 1994, it continues its trajectory rehashing colonial imports for the entertainment of the ever diminishing white population. Original South African theatre that engages the current context is to be found at the Grahamstown Festival\textsuperscript{71}; however a look at what is currently showing on Durban’s stages (December 2007) reveals a more telling picture: \textit{Guys and Dolls, Master Class} and \textit{Robin Hood} the adult ‘panto’ for the festive season amongst others.

The theatre speaks to the cultural legacy of much of white population and therefore fulfils a specific social function. However as Augusto Boal argues, all theatre communicates political value: entertainment is not ‘mere entertainment’. It hegemonically reinforces the value through \textit{catharsis} which Boal (1979 25 – 39) argues is a substitution for action and thereby reinforcement of the status quo. This also points to the ‘civilising’ imperative of theatre, outlined in Chapter 1 and above.

However hegemony is a ‘moving equilibrium’ (Gramsci 1971) and as such must be constantly renegotiated. Recent studies show that white South African’s have held on to much of the wealth of the country post-apartheid (van der Westhuizen 2007); however culturally there has been a shift – or has there? Although outside the scope of this research, an interesting question to investigate might be in the battle of western versus African hegemony, how and if the state of white South African mainstream theatre, reflects any renegotiation of the status quo?

Nevertheless, as Keyan Tomaselli records speaking on cinema in Africa, cultural products have “always acted as a powerful weapon deployed by the colonial nations to maintain their respective spheres of political and economic influence” (Tomaselli 1989:53). Culture and

\textsuperscript{71} The Grahamstown Festival is the second largest theatre festival, after Edinburgh, in the world. It began in 1974 by the 1820 Settler’s Foundation (http://www.interactnow.co.za). They are still the primary organizers. Although historically an English speaking festival over the years it has evolved to include more African language productions. It remains an important event for the survival of performance is South Africa; however the English hegemony is still evident and critiqued by those with a critical eye. Most festival goes are still white and middle-class. The audiences are still predominantly racially divided.
cultural representation in any manifestation is understood as the ideological weapon in the battle for hegemony. Until 1994, this was the ‘the weapon of the struggle’\textsuperscript{72}.

South African popular theatre it could therefore be assumed offered the counter-hegemonic position. However, as Kerr observes, it was only after the black consciousness movement of the 1970s started to build, that popular critique began finding a voice through both ‘white’ and ‘black’ theatre in South Africa. Black South African popular theatre was typified by the grand travelling musicals\textsuperscript{73} of Gibson Kente and others which were not overtly political. The might of the apartheid machinery which operated through institutionalised divide and rule principles: laws, censorship, control by subsidy, migrant labour and other mechanisms (see Tomaselli 1989) ensured that the people were not unified (Kerr 1995: 209 – 240). Any moments of resistance were unable to rouse the rabble.

Yet, after the 70s dissident voices started shouting out from the township stages\textsuperscript{74} (Steadman 1994; Kerr 1995; McLaren 1996). The consciousness of resistance grew culminating in the Soweto uprisings of 1976. Black consciousness theatre grew as a form often forcing white actors out of racially integrated theatre groups (McLaren 1996). This was an important political moment of essentialised identification; however while the actors on the stage were black, the theatre form was Creole, in its popular celebration of appropriation and transformation. Nevertheless the leaders of the liberation movement became distinctly aware of the importance of culture in building the solidarity and confidence of black South Africans as such “black theatre became a consciously articulated cultural counterpart of the movement towards political liberation” (Steadman 1994: 24).

This conscientisation also initiated the rise of the ‘protest’ play that falls within the ambit of Alternative theatre (Solberg 1999; Mda 1996). Most notable in this category of playwrights is Athol Fugard, whose \textit{Statements} plays (1974) workshoped with John Kani and Winston

\textsuperscript{72} Drawing on Albie Sachs (1990) controversial statement that “the ANC members should be banned for five years for saying that culture is a weapon of the struggle” (Mda 1996: 193), Zakes Mda (1996) warns against the potential for the work of the artist to deteriorate “to the levels of sloganeering, masquerading as art” (1996: 193).

\textsuperscript{73} As Geoffrey Davis and Anne Fuchs note (1996), township theatre was a hybrid style embracing the aesthetic of black American performance. Drawing on David Copeland they argue that this was not indicative of ‘slavish imitation’ but rather “the result of creative syncretism in which innovative performers combine materials from cultures in contact into qualitively new forms” (1985: 236).

\textsuperscript{74} See Bhekizizwe Peterson (1994) for a fuller description of black South African theatre.
Ntshona are a fine example of the ‘crossover’ alluded to above (Kruger in Hutchinson 2004). This collaborative process challenged, at the height of apartheid, its ‘separate development’ which denied “the common humanity which must be the basis of the open-ended potential for mutual expressiveness” (Crow 1996:14).

As is evident in the above quotation, its political position however was liberal – not radical. The plays were in English consequently, although the theatre itself was racially integrated, with the exception of Workers Theatre (Von Kotze 1987), most Alternative Theatre (prior to 1976) played to (mostly) white middle-class audiences (Solberg 1999: 20 - 22). Many of the more successful shows toured overseas and became more instrumental in rallying the global anti-apartheid movement (in which I include white liberal South Africans) than mobilizing a popular base.

However, it was not only ‘white’ liberation theatre that found a space on the stages of the West. Jerry Mofokeng (1996: 85 - 88) writes critically of the commercialization of ‘the struggle’ through the huge successes of popular musicals such as Ngema’s *Sarafina* and theatrical adaptations such as Welcome Nsomi’s *Umabatha*. Martin Orkin (1991; 1996) notably warns against the over simplification of ‘popular’ struggle.

Nevertheless, there can be no doubt of the profound role that popular theatre – in its most encompassing definition – had within the Liberation movement of the country. Theatre flourished – in dance halls and playhouses, shebeens and side-walks – dodging the censorship police it survived and thrived. It had – and still has – a lot of work to do – as Kerr writes “in perhaps no other African country has there been such rapid transformation of society for theatre to mediate” (1995: 237).

**Informing form**

It is the element of ‘function’ that, as has been argued above, classifies African theatre and theatre at Westville Correctional Centre is no different. It is also this element of functionality (intended function and appropriated function) that will be discussed in greater detail later on; however, as Kamlongera (1988) observes, it is important not to focus exclusively on the functional aspects when engaging African Theatre, which simply reinforces this western
compartmentalisation. ‘Form’ which describes performance, is integral. This recognition draws attention to the aesthetics of the theatre – often ignored – and acknowledges performance as “the organising principle” (1988: 24) in the facilitation of function. How this is applied in the case of Westville Female Correctional Centre is of great relevance here; however it necessitates a cursory overview of the field in which it is situated.

**Outside/in**

Theatre for Development has its origins in the University travelling theatre of the 1960s and early 70s and it was practiced quite widely across sub-Saharan Africa: Uganda, Kenya, Zambia, Malawi and later Lesotho, Botswana and South Africa (Kerr 1995). It involved well intentioned academics and their students venturing off into ‘the bundu’ with ready devised plays on issues aimed to ‘help’ underprivileged communities through theatre. In this respect it represented an outside/in approach and extended the missionary imperative mentioned above.

This form of Theatre for Development is called Agitprop (agitation propaganda), a term which had its origins in the Soviet Union in the 1920s (Mda 1993: 49). Within TFD it describes “all plays used as development communication, that are message-orientated and exhortatory, rather than focusing on a process of community analysis and community decision making” (Mda 1993: 50). Kerr’s primary concern with the travelling theatre movement was precisely around what ‘message’ was being communicated. As he points out many of the students had dubious class positions – working-class roots with bourgeois aspirations. “This class limbo often makes the students somewhat marginal to their society and capable of wild vacillations of ideology …[producing] theatrical policies which waver between unacknowledged elitism and romantically immature ultra-leftism” (1995: 148).

The theatre was not popular and it was transient. These have since been identified as two of the essential elements by development practitioners for a sound methodology: a popular base and commitment to the community over a significant length of time (Kidd and Bryam 1982; White and Nair 1999). The inclusion of these two aspects would certainly have limited the ideological control of the students in this instance enabling the participants to challenge their class confusion. These are two elements present in the Westville Prison theatre and this was
precisely the experience of the student facilitators in the Westville Correctional Centre project. They too were students with working-class roots and middle-class aspirations but the interventions became a means through which to reconnect with those roots in a way that was empowering and affirming. In the evaluation of the Postgraduate course Interventions with offenders, one of the students who worked in Westville Female Correctional Centre in 2002 commented:

When we get here [university] we are told please pack it [Zulu culture] in a nice box and forget it outside. Now we are here to learn something else. That is something that I became very conscious of during the project – knowing that for once it is so okay to have all these cultural resources … one of the benefits of this course is that it completely unwraps everything – constantly! I thought where the hell have I been! (Welile Thembe 18 August 2002).

As a form, agitprop has no – or limited participation – as such it exploits the potential for theatre to be used as propaganda since there is no space to challenge what is being presented. Propaganda as a term is often vilified, so to in this paper, since it removes agency and thus any potential for empowerment; however if I was to suggest that it is propaganda to promote condom usage, or to break the power of the prison gangs, it introduces a more complex element that often misleads practitioners into thinking they are doing ‘good’ work. In addition, limited participation can also be implicit in the building of a non-negotiated consensus thereby functioning as a mechanism of social control: “Everybody! Repeat after me!” However I am pre-empting the debate for the next section. The field of TFD is still dominated by academics, partly because it can be used as an excellent methodology for research, partly because there isn’t much money in it, if you want to do it without donor agendas and academic institutions have typically been a good place for more socially committed individuals to hide. However, the realisation by more enlightened academic practitioners as to the problematics of TFD prompted further questioning around the enigmatic but inescapable relationship between form and function leading to the inevitable question: If my intention is to facilitate real and lasting positive change in an individual and a community, what should the theatre look like? The answer was forthcoming.

75 Agitprop with limited, structured participation by an audience is termed Participatory Agitprop (Mda 1993: 49-51).
Inside/out: The Freire factor

By the mid 1970s, with the publication of *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (1970) and *Education for critical consciousness* (1974), news of this more radical approach to the education/development of the individual in post-colonial societies began to reach Africa. His fervent concern with a “democratization of culture, within the context of fundamental democratization” (Freire 2005: 37) essentially describes his commitment to invert the top-down, unidirectional flow of communication and power, where the oppressed are grateful beneficiaries, towards a model that is popular and dialogic. The dialogic model he proposed being instrumental in “surmounting the antagonistic contradictions of the social structure, thereby achieving the liberation of human beings” (Freire 2000:160). This hit a chord, with theatre/cultural activists/academics, radical educationalists and many others that is still echoing around the world today.

Although Freire’s focus was not theatre, his pedagogy had profound influence on Theatre for development in broadening debates about “how to achieve a genuinely participatory popular theatre” (Kerr 1995: 149). Theoretical discussion around popular culture (Barber 1997; Fiske 1989), broadly defined as “the large class of new unofficial art forms which are syncretic, concerned with social change, and associated with the masses” (Barber 1987: 23) will be extensively dealt with in the following chapter.

Ross Kidd and Martin Byram’s *Laedza Batanani* non-formal education campaign, initiated in Botswana in 1974, was one of the first projects to integrate Freirean methodology with theatre. The synthesis was a notable instance of an inside/out approach to development now known as popular participatory theatre.

*Laedza Batanani*, which means ‘the sun is ready up! Let’s work together’, encapsulated the emphasis of the project; its aim being to “find a way of motivating people to participate in development, of mobilising the community around local issues” (Kidd & Bryam 1982: 2). The general apathy they felt was holding the people and the region back. Participatory drama was therefore seen as the appropriate tool for their goals since it

stimulates not only the analytical, but also an emotional response. It is a much more organic and integrated medium – the issues become alive because the participants are no longer talking academically
They are in that situation and responding in an imaginative and creative way to its pressures and problems. (Kidd & Byram 1982: 2)

It is important to briefly note here that the resulting form predates Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed (1979) which was only published in English five years later. Although Augusto Boal’s theatrical adaptations of Freire’s pedagogy have subsequently been integrated into Theatre for Development as theatre for conscientisation (Mda 1993), the fusion of Freire’s pedagogy with African (popular) theatre has been thought far more appropriate and useful. Further, Boal’s focus is to act rather than talk (1979), which deemphasises the dialogic element somewhat. To my knowledge Boal’s forum theatre is rarely used in its original form in Theatre for Development work in South Africa, although some of Boal’s principles around Theatre of the Oppressed have been applied and adapted in the Theatre at Westville Female. This will be elaborated on later in the chapter.

A discussion of Kidd and Byram’s project is important here since not only is it a seminal example in the field of TFD, but many of the concerns they raise in regards to their own and others’ subsequent work in the area remain the current debates in the field (Drag 1993; Kerr 1995; Mda 1993; Prentki & Selman 2000; Prentki & Epskamp 2006) in particular the Freirean principles of participation, conscientisation and action. These describe the normative (arguably utopian) goals of PPT and will provide the navigational thread around which my discussion on PPT will hinge.

**Participation**

Their paper on *Laedza Batanani*, written – by their own confession – with the benefit of hindsight in 1982, documents the introduction of Freirean pedagogy as the much needed element of community participation in the process of empowerment. Due to the interweaving of art and life, African theatre as has been discussed, involves an actor/audience relationship quite unlike the European concept. Participation is part of the form. A call demands a response. As an example of how intrinsic this is, in one of the prison plays a courtroom drama was depicted. As the judge entered the stage, the whole audience spontaneously rose.

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76 DramAidE did conduct a Forum at the Technikon Natal (now Durban University of Technology) that I was present at, to create awareness around HIV/AIDS. It was sponsored by Johns Hopkins University. Veronica Baxter of UKZN, Drama and Performance Department (Pietermaritzburg), who has attended workshops by Augusto Boal, played the Joker. At the level of audience participation and engagement, facilitation and spectator role play, it was a highly successful event.
However this level of participation has far more to do with building consensus, which can be at odds with conscientisation. Consequently, Kidd and Byram replaced simply clapping along and singing a song (often imposed by TFD practitioners), with community consultation and involvement in process and product. Yet, as Kidd and Byram assert “highly participatory, engaging, entertaining, locally understandable forms of communication can be used not only to liberate but also to domesticate” (1982: 2). This is due to the tendency, they argue to distort or compromise on Freire’s principles which could, rather dramatically “intensify the oppression of powerless groups in the Third World” (1982: 33).

I am critical of their somewhat paternal use of the word ‘powerless’ here choosing to recognise a more post-structural conception of power (Foucault 1977; 1984). Nevertheless, in reviewing their project they arrive at three key elements which could have potentially reinvigorated the intervention towards a liberatory agenda: First, ‘authentic participation’ not ‘pseudo-participation’. This would involve a more strategic approach allowing more community (popular) control over the process and direction of change (1982: 1). In addition they felt it should be directed specifically towards the most oppressed sectors of the community (eg women) (1982: 32).

To address the second point first. My research suggests that fact that no matter how differentiated the group (women in prison for example), hierarchies of power will exist among them that will impact equitable participation. This is not always a problem if there are enough strong voices. In this instance the more submissive women will speak/participate through agreement or disagreement (verbal or non-verbal) with those who are more confident. Where the problem comes in is when one individual is dramatically more dominant than all the rest, or a group of women that have an agenda speak with one voice. The Prison Theatre as it evolved at Westville Female Correctional Centre experienced both examples.

The potential ‘anomaly of participation’ (Kidd and Byram 1982; Mda 1993) in TFD projects, where participation becomes “mere cliché lacking in substance” (Melkote 1991: 245 in Drag 1993: 152), is an ongoing concern for practitioners. To quote Kidd and Byram “participation as mere performance is no real guarantee of progressive change; unless [the community] control the popular theatre process they may be used as mere mouthpieces of ideas produced
by others.” (1982: 12) However, one might respond that even participation in both process and performance is “no real guarantee of positive change”: HIV infection rates continue to rise in South Africa despite the best efforts of able PPT practitioners.

It is my contention that this is partly due to the fact that many TFD plays that purport to be participatory and dialogic are in fact inadvertently supporting and often actively promoting a particular view, opinion or behaviour modification. In my view, the reasons for this are manifold, and often operate simultaneously, which makes solving it even more problematic. The most overt reason would be donor agenda, however many projects are not donor driven and many that are claim not to influence the direction of the project. The other obvious reason could be the outside facilitator/ cultural worker whose worldviews could be very different from the participants. There is a seeming tension between Freire’s ‘directive’ focus and his notion of ‘exchange’. How is one to get the balance right? How do we negotiate political intention with cultural relativism? The third reason points to the ‘people’/ participants themselves. Kidd and Byram (1982) speak of the need for popular control; however, while this is an integral element for the ‘ownership’ and therefore successes of any project, it is also a potential wild card for the sabotaging of the ‘liberatory’ agenda of the project. Strong prison personalities have been the life and death of this theatre as ‘intervention’. In a Correctional Centre, this is not a solvable dilemma. The participants are inexorably playing by different sets of rules – cultural / institutional – that a PPT intervention would battle to shift. There are leaders that must be honoured.

Further, the work needs to be inclusive. In the TDN intervention in 2002 an offender deliberately decided not to pitch up to the practice, no one would take her role – it was hers. We were stumped. We couldn’t move forward. We had to rework the whole play, which effectively wrote her out. She refused to come back and made life hard for the other offenders. She joined later interventions but was eventually transferred to a maximum-security facility.

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77 I also observed this in some the Prison plays at Westville Correctional Centre particularly the interventions around HIV/AIDS and Addiction.
The second area that they felt Freirean intentions were compromised was around the area of “critical consciousness”. For Freire (1996, 2005) *conscientização / conscientisation* involves an awareness of the historical and political nature of oppression and an emergence from false (oppressor) consciousness. Their reflection on this aspect revealed a far more immediate and practical reading: “In *Laedza Batanani* critical consciousness has been interpreted as an everyday sense of ‘being aware of local problems and information needed to solve the problems’” (1982: 27).

In Westville Correctional Centre, as has been stated, the intention was to be true to the liberatory – and thus conscientising – pedagogy of Paulo Freire. Whenever we met, we would gather in a discussion circle to speak about either specific issues related to an upcoming intervention or any issue that they would wish to speak of. I also spent many hours of one on one time with the women talking in corridors or eating halls or school yards discussing issues personal and political. Over the years we challenged each other and together we became more conscious of ourselves *in* the world and *with* the world\(^78\) (Freire 1970); however, during the interventions conscientisation was often deliberately capped by a number of the older offenders. This was the point at which my intention, supported by the form, went counter to the offender’s desired use/ appropriation, which was more concerned with how the theatre made them *feel*. This will be discussed more fully in Chapter 6.

This element of conscientisation also raises further issues within the field of Theatre for development. Many TFD projects do not have this as their desired intention. Many of these projects function as a means to theatrically present information, which may developmentally assist a community: how to dig a pit latrine for example. This kind of Theatre for Development is often sponsored by companies, NGOs or governmental departments. For example the petroleum company Shell have also recently used participatory TFD to communicate safety issues around their products to rural and peri-urban communities who still use paraffin for cooking (personal conversation Bheki Kabela\(^79\) 2006). I also recently played joker for a forum sponsored by the electricity giant Escom to try and role play

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\(^78\) Examples of this raised awareness will follow in Chapter 5

\(^79\) Bheki Kabela is an actor who works professionally in the area of Applied Theatre in Durban, South Africa. He is part of the Problem Solving Theatre Project (PST) initiated by Emma Durden. It is based in Durban.
solutions for supervisors in managing a work force with high instances of TB and HIV/AIDS. The forms are by no means sacred.

Kidd and Byram seem to feel that deemphasising the popular-theatre component coupled with “a critical assessment of the social and political context and a more strategic sense of the possibilities and constraints for change” (1982: 32) would bring about greater possibilities for conscientisation. I would agree that projects that become dominated by ‘putting on the play’, can cause the goal of ‘conscientisation’ to become compromised. However, if the intervention is truly popular, should it not respond to the needs of the people? If the community is finding its use in, to paraphrase Kidd and Byram (1982: 27), creating awareness of local problems and gaining the information needed to solve the problems, surely there is merit in that?

In a recent intervention (2007) run by an American based group REFLECT in Lesotho, local and foreign academic facilitators used popular participatory theatre to conscientise deep rural communities around issues of HIV and cultural silence (Malibo 2008). One of the key problems was that rural villagers, who face many challenges with little support, kept sabotaging the discussion at hand in order to raise the issue of stock theft! (Malibo 2008: 80). They were using the forum to discuss issues that were more immediate to them: Potential contraction of a virus which I may die from in five or ten years time, or my cows!

In this case-study, while the Theatre for a Developing Nation topics were consulted but essentially given, in the Post-graduate course it was left entirely up to the offenders to decide. While they did engage with enthusiasm the more political and politicising elements of race, class, gender abuse, sisterhood that were imposed; the themes that they chose included themes that were more practical: For example what to do after prison and illness in prison80. Other topics such as motherhood, crime and lesbianism were more identity driven. This also had to do with the intended ‘audience’. The TDN course offered a rare opportunity to engage across class, race and gender lines, while the post-graduate interventions were specifically for offenders to dialogue with other offenders.

80 This appropriation of theatre for social change for ‘practical’ purposes by the participants was also a finding and area of discussion in the chapter on Brazil and the PPP project Staging Human Rights.
Zakes Mda (1993) problematises this finely balanced relationship between participation and conscientisation within popular participatory theatre. If we agree that the goal is conscientisation, then participation must be present. However, as Mda observes too much participation will also prevent critical consciousness from arising. For Mda, the solution lies in the concept of ‘intervention’ which essentially describes Freire’s component of ‘directive’ instruction by the educator (1996; 2005; McLaren 2000; Torres 1998) within the ambit of theatre: Intervention he states “serves a directorial function” (1993: 168). Nevertheless, like participation, if it is too dominating it will also prevent conscientisation. The formula therefore is simple: if the goal is conscientisation then participation and intervention must be present; however if the form contains too much of either ingredients the desired result (raised awareness) will not be achieved.

However to extend the argument posed above vis-à-vis inequitable participation. How does one balance a popularly driven project with intervention by a sympathetic outsider? Such interventions are designed to have personal benefits, with regards to ‘conscientisation’ – and confidence – that over the course of time become consolidated within the community. Over the five years that the drama ran, although there was a noticeable change in all the women, a handful of women identified themselves as leaders who held sway with the women in the drama group – and the Correctional Centre at large. They became invaluable to me and gradually took more and more control over the projects. They proved the projects’ sustainability. However, while we had – and still have – a mutual respect and admiration, with a relationship based on exchange, on the whole we did not share worldviews. Challenging their perceptions in many instances was fruitless as they became more overtly fundamental in matters of culture and religion. I was not the only ‘intervener’ in their lives, as Freire admits, “to be human is to engage in relationships [my italics] with others and with the world” (2005: 3).

Thus, to clarify the point, a sustained popular participatory project – which if effective promotes the empowerment of participants can over time potentially undermine the ‘directive’ nature of intervention, which is essential for conscientisation. Therefore the dual aspects of popular power and ‘other’ outside influence, combined with the constraints of life circumstance (for example being in prison – which points to context) can lead Freire to
backfire. The clarity of Freire’s ideals and vision, while poetic, often do not account for the messiness of life, the need for strategies of survival that often seem at odds with the idea of freedom.

**Action!**

Of the three aspects outlined above ‘action’ remains the most polemical – and certainly this aspect has further implications in a Correctional Centre. Within Freirean praxis, the model which we embraced, the culmination of participation and conscientisation is nothing if not followed by action! Further within Freire’s Marxist Christian rhetoric, ‘action’ is essentially a call for a “revolutionary effort to transform the structures [of oppression]” (Freire 1996: 107). He is demanding social change. Augusto Boal picks up on this in his *Theatre of the oppressed* (1979) describing his theatrical forms as “rehearsal for revolution” (1979: xx). Although the “theatre is action” (1979: xx) it is also the expectation that one is able to translate that action through to the reality of one’s life.

In following the Freirean model Kidd and Byram (1982: 29) state candidly “In *Laedza Batanani* and the other popular theatre programmes the performances and discussion have lead to very little action”. They admit to having had a naïve expectation that interest in a drama event somehow sparks community action (1982: 30). In some respect this reveals a flaw in Freirean praxis. Currently, for example, innovative PPT organisations such as DramAidE, still grapple with how to translate increased knowledge and understanding about HIV/AIDS into behaviour change (Dalrymple 2006) which would result social change (an HIV free generation). Such challenges lead sceptics to doubt the effectiveness or even the worth of PPT and certainly it has caused contemporary practitioners to re-evaluate what PPT – as a form of radical theatre – is able to do. In a critique of the perhaps idealism of Freire (1970) and Boal (1979), radical practitioner and theorist John McGrath for example, unequivocally argues:

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81 In 2001, I literally experienced this first hand when as part of our intervention on ‘racism’ we were sent to an upstairs corridor to rehearse. As we workshopped the play, which was describing a history of racist oppression, a scene of a toyi toyi was needed. As part of the rehearsal, offenders in the play began to toyi toyi, but the mood of resistance soon overwhelmed them and offenders from other plays joined them and they sang and marched – they were almost at the at the end of the corridor, with their powerful voices echoing through the better part of the prison, when the member quickly reappeared and put a stop to it. They were contained.
The theatre can never cause a social change. It can articulate pressure towards one, help people celebrate their strengths and maybe build self-confidence… Above all, it can be the way people can find their voice, their solidarity and their collective determination. (McGrath 1981: xxvii in Kershaw 1992: 165)

Yet, these more modest goal posts are for him by no means indicative of the failure of radical theatre. In following on from the above quotation he writes: “If we achieved any one of these, it was enough” (McGrath 1981: xxvii in Kershaw 1992: 165). In light of the outcomes of the interventions at Westville Female Correctional Centre this statement enables me to say that they were more than enough, since in the example to be discussed below theatre was used as a dangerous – yet effective means of bringing about a specific transformation at Westville Female.

The idea of changing the structures of oppression (Freire 1996: 107) which in a prison can be tantamount to inciting rebellion, is a deeply contentious one; with serious consequences. In the first postgraduate theatrical intervention in 2002 on the topic Illness in Prison (2002), offenders used PPT to articulate a complaint that they had about a specific occurrence within the Correctional Centre to both offenders and Correctional Centre staff. The criticism concerned the delayed removal of deceased offenders from the hospital. Offenders who had passed away were often not removed and left, often overnight, in the hospital bed while terminally ill patients looked on – at their fate. While a response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, offenders were more concerned that the deceased and living be treated with more dignity and respect.

The play, unbeknownst to the facilitator depicted a recognisable ‘member’ (a nurse), who had a particularly bad reputation amongst offenders. When the actress ‘played her part’ the audience started to erupt as the recognition set in. Unsentenced offenders, who were not invited to the event, had been brought in. Unsentenced offenders are notoriously unpredictable as their lives are uncertain (conversations with social worker Lou Dlamini 2001/2002). They caused the biggest commotion and at one point came dangerously close to getting out of control. The nurse ran, covering her face, across the quadrant while 200

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82 Ruth Escobar’s Prison Theatre work in Brazil in 1979 resulted in a prison riot that outlawed theatre in prison for over a decade (Heritage 1998a).

83 This is relevant as in Chapter 5 I deal with an example of offenders articulating a grievance that occurred prior to incarceration (outside) to relevant members of the public (outsiders), while this example deals with concerns of ‘inside’ to ‘insiders’. Both involve the appropriation of PPT for the initiation of structural transformation.
offenders screamed. Fortunately actors from the Youth Centre were there as guests and started to diffuse the situation with some comic distraction (they mimed a woman having a baby) and everything calmed down and carried on. While there were no serious repercussions to the offenders involved, I was asked by the Deputy Head of the Correctional Centre: ‘What exactly are you trying to do?’ It was a good question and one I was not sure exactly how to answer.

Academic Prison Theatre practitioner James Thompson (1998:17) articulates this dilemma well. He writes:

‘What should we be doing? Are we playing the disciplinary role of the prison or are we inciting rebellion? Can we comfortably define and find a blurred edge between the two? Are we content to liberate a person’s imagination because we cannot liberate their body?’

This incident certainly made it abundantly clear that popular theatre that accurately gauges the consciousness of a population can create insurgence. However, to what extent is it appropriate in a prison context since not only is the Correctional Centre unlikely to allow theatre which promotes revolution, but what do the offenders do with this raised awareness, this sense of self and this tool? How do offenders, whose agency is limited ‘act’? – In the sense that their acting leads to action? In this instance, these women were demanding action on the part of others with far more institutional power than they, this piece constituted their action. How feasible is this? Well in this regard, and I believe that it is probably not repeatable, there did appear to be action. Shortly after the intervention, it was declared by the Area Manager in writing and posted on the communal notice board that no deceased offenders were to remain in the infirmary over night.

In another bizarre twist years later, ‘the nurse’, finding herself incarcerated at Westville Correctional Centre for involvement in a corruption scam, joined the drama group. In 2009 she and other offenders devised a project in which they objected to the manner in which members were treating them by representing them on stage! She was a welcome, eager and constructive participant.

84 Establishing this kind of information as ‘fact’ or no, would involve perceived highly inappropriate questioning of officials in high authority. As the questioning would be embarrassing and potentially incriminatory it is unlikely that you would receive a full honest answer. I am not a journalist. My concern was the project and the women. Pursuing this link could place both in jeopardy.
In doing theatre work in prisons, the questions raised above are ever present in the mind of the practitioner, and there are no easy answers; however Karlene Faith (2000) suggests that what the practitioner must ultimately ask herself is “Who benefits?” Motivating for permission to work in the prison system requires that there are benefits to the Correctional Centre; however these benefits are (I believe) not at the cost of offender benefits – they are not mutually exclusive.

Undeniably, part of this initiative was to dialogically\(^85\) raise awareness around how power (often in the guise of essentialised ‘culture’) operates to oppress women and limit women’s decision making. However, while our intention was political in the sense that it was intentionally consciousness-raising (liberatory education) we were not trying to turn the offenders into revolutionaries. In engaging ‘who benefits?’ in this instance, I do not feel that this would have ultimately benefited them. Perhaps I am imposing my trepidation, but judging from how close the project came from being closed, I do not think that this level of prisoner activism was sustainable.

Within this frame, what becomes more ‘doable’ and I feel equally revolutionary at a personal and political level, is the imaginative exploration of different ways of being – of alternatives. ‘An alternative’ as it is appropriated here, could be as concrete as investigating alternative behaviours – such as to refuse sex without a condom; or as ephemeral as a feeling such as exploring the possibility of feeling good about oneself (as a woman).

To extend this point, Adams and Goldbard explain the root idea behind community cultural development\(^86\), of which theatre for social change forms part:

> community cultural development is the imperative to fully inhabit our human lives, bringing to consciousness the values and choices [my italics] that animate our communities and thus equipping ourselves to act – to paraphrase Paulo Freire – as subjects of history, rather than merely objects” (Adams & Goldbard 2002: 17).

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\(^{85}\) Although not described here, all plays at Westville Female have involved post-performance dialogue around the issues engaged in the plays. These typically take the form of discussion circles. In this instance the facilitator engaged the audience directly at various points in the play.

\(^{86}\) Community cultural development embraces the use of a diverse range of creative/ expressive forms through which to achieve its ambitions. They would include theatre, art, dance, music, video, poetry amongst others.
However by equating change with choice are we not subverting Freire’s revolutionary ideals? Is this a radical theatre? bell hooks offers some useful insight in this regard she writes: “our living depends on our ability to conceptualise alternatives, … theorising about this experience aesthetically, critically is an agenda for radical cultural practice” (1991: 149). To extend hooks’ argument, investigating the conceptualisation of alternatives ideally should not remain at the level of the individual. Radical cultural practice, to my understanding necessarily implies cognisance and commitment to the social, the political. The result: plays, which mostly in both form and content sought to challenge mainstream cultural practices that exist to reinforce the status quo.

Another key theoretical and methodological approach that has ‘informed the form’ of the theatre at Westville Female Correctional Centre has been Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the oppressed (1979).

**Theatre of the oppressed**

Paulo Freire’s transformative and liberatory politics, and his dynamic, participative and creative approach to education inspired, together with German theatre practitioner Bertolt Brecht, fellow Brazilian Augusto Boal to develop his ‘Theatre of the oppressed’ (1979/2000). He saw the potential of theatre to not only conscientise the mind but to invigorate and free the marginalised body. By actively and performatively rehearsing revolution (Boal 1979), Boal believes we not only open ourselves to the possibility of change but we transform in the process. He contends, “to transform is to be transformed. The action of transforming is, in itself, transforming” (2000: xx).

Thus, in order to achieve his liberatory aim of transforming oppression he developed various techniques and games (Boal 1992) for transforming the spectator into an actor. In short it is a

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87 How this theatre has been appropriated by the female offenders – particularly in the later years – has in not all instances been used to challenge oppressive hegemonies. This will be discussed in Chapter 6.
88 Sadly Augusto Boal passed away in 2009.
89 It is significant to note the Theatre of the oppressed was first published in 1979 – nine years after Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed. My edition is 2000. I have referenced both dates here however henceforth the 2000 date shall be cited to insure accurate referencing.
90 Testimony to this is the annual Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed (PTO) conference in which Friere’s ideas share a platform with Boal’s theatrical approach. The first conference was in 1995 at the University of Nebraska, Omaha. In 1996, at the second CTO conference, and a year before Freire’s death, both men shared a platform for the first time to discuss issues of liberatory methodology. Over 800 people attended.
four stage process (1979/2000: 126-155). Stage one and two are concerned with the body: ‘knowing the body’ and ‘making the body expressive’ (2000: 126). Both stages involve games and exercises which encourage the participant to become aware of how their body moves through space and how to understand and control it. Boal extends the plethora of such exercises in his later book ‘Games for Actors and Non-Actors’ (1992). The body ‘speaks’ the oppression that we consciously or unconsciously hold within us. Once we have become aware of the habitual and oppressive patterns of the body we can then begin to practice “theatre as a language that is living and present [his italics]” (1996: 126).

Games form a serious part of the process of theatre work at Westville Female. Popular Zulu children’s games and Boalian games have been utilised. Boalian games were particularly useful in my sessions with offenders for the reasons he describes, but also for the simple fact that they are a lot of fun.

‘Theatre as language’ – stage three of the process – is manifest in Boal’s three most significant theatrical forms (along with invisible theatre which is in stage four). These three forms reflect degrees of involvement of the audience member and effectively map the transformation from spectator to spect-actor (a central concept be discussed below). The three theatrical techniques are simultaneous dramaturgy, image theatre, and forum theatre (1979; 1992) in that order. These three forms are the three forms that have been used by offenders in plays at Westville Female. I shall describe shortly the three theatrical forms of theatre of the oppressed that work together in the process of liberation; however this must be proceeded by a discussion on the concept of spect-actor.

The fourth and final stage is entitled ‘theatre as discourse’ (2000: 126). The forms of theatre that fall under this umbrella such as invisible theatre and newspaper theatre are far simpler.

91 There is a great deal of inconsistency with the capitalization – or not – of Boal’s theatrical terminologies in Theatre of the Oppressed (1979/2000). In accordance with Adrian Jackson, translator of Games for Actors and Non-Actors (1992), I have chosen to capitalize the forms of theatre: image theatre, forum theatre etc but not to capitalize ‘spect-actor’. When I have quoted directly from the text, I have kept to the original.

92 Invisible theatre is defined as “public theatre, which involves the public as participants in the action without their knowing it” (Boal, 1992:xx). It takes place outside of a theatrical context and is used to stimulate debate and discussion thus getting people to question their beliefs in a public environment. The skit must be well prepared (Boal 1979/1996: 144) by the actors for, the ‘performance’ must inevitably involve improvisation as the public unwittingly joins in. The topic under discussion, although a seemingly real-life scenario, must be political in the sense that is can be generalised and involves the play of power. Some examples which Boal cites (1979; 1992) involve gender issues, sexual norms and class issues.
yet they complete the transformation. “The spectator is freed from his chains, finally acts, and becomes the protagonist” (2000: 142). Essentially, they function according the need of the spectator-actor to “discuss certain themes or rehearse certain actions” (2000: 126). This four stage process incites the taking back of power and agency. By rehearsing in performance a new image of the world and of the self the spect-actor believes transformation is possible and is ready to live it. As Boal famously claims “maybe the theatre in itself is not revolutionary, but these theatrical forms are without a doubt a rehearsal of revolution [his italics]” (Boal 2000: 141).

Spect-actor

The Boal system works specifically at identifying oppressions and leading the participant to propose creative solutions for solving them. The central aspect of this process is the involvement and active participation of the oppressed person who is also the spectator. Thus Boal creates the space within his theatre for spectators to transform into “spect-actors” (Boal, 2000: xxi). Simply put, therefore a spect-actor is Boal’s term to describe “a member of the audience who takes part in the action in any way” (Jackson in Boal 1979/2000: xxiv). The audience are empowered to alter the course of action on stage, to change a certain image of the world and to do the action they think necessary to liberate themselves. He asserts

By taking possession of the stage, the Spect-Actor is consciously performing a responsible act. The stage is a representation of the reality, a fiction. But the Spect-Actor is not fictional. He exists in the scene and outside of it, in a dual reality. By taking possession of the stage in the fiction of the theatre he acts: not just in the fiction, but also in his social reality. By transforming fiction he is transformed into himself. (Boal 2000: xxi)

All Boalian theatre forms work hand in hand with this concept since all aim “to change people – ’spectators’, passive beings in the theatrical phenomenon – into subjects into actors, transformers of the dramatic action” (Boal, 2000:122).

Boal’s poetics is ostensibly a reaction to Aristotelian poetics (Boal 2000: 1 – 50) which he calls “Aristotle’s coercive system of tragedy” (Boal 2000: 36) this will be outlined in greater

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93 Theatre of the oppressed (1979) and subsequent translations (2000) have remained androcentric in their use of the masculine to imply the universal. Adrian Jackson, in his translation of Games for Actors and Non-Actors (1992) has been more sensitive to gender, rejecting the ‘s/he’ option he has elected to use “he and she in… roughly equal quantities” (Jackson in Boal 1992: xxiv). Due to the consistent use of ‘he’ in Theatre of the oppressed (1979/2000), there is still an overwhelming use of the masculine gender.
detail later since it informs the theoretical base for his work. Simply put, Boal’s system deliberately tries to avoid *catharsis*, being the ultimate aim of tragedy in its purifying of the audience (Boal 2000: 26 & 38). For Boal this is a danger as it encourages passivity and works against his revolutionary ambitions. The spect-actor concept helps to circumvent the inevitable compliance. Boal argues:

> When an actor carries out an act of liberation, he or she does it in place of the spectator, and thus for the latter a catharsis. But when a spect-actor carries out the same act on stage, he or she does it in the name of all other spectators and thus for them it is not a catharsis but a dynamism. (Boal 1992:35)

In his work with popular audiences, Boal acknowledges their desire to participate, interject and become involved in the action. “They abhor the ‘closed’ spectacles” (Boal 2000: 142), he writes, constantly trying to “enter the dialogue and interrupt the action” (Boal 2000: 142). This has certainly been my experience at Westville Correctional Centre. The spect-actor concept recognises the need for popular and oppressed audiences, who have few channels through which to express and discuss grievances, to speak out and creatively and dynamically work on transforming the status quo.

**Theatre as Language**

**Simultaneous Dramaturgy**

Simultaneous dramaturgy is the first degree of the progression towards transforming the spectator into spect-actor. Here the spectator is invited to intervene “without necessitating his physical presence on the ‘stage’” (Boal 2000: 132). In this form, a scene is staged by actors on a specific theme or topic that is provided by a member of the community who are the target audience. The scene, which has been loosely scripted and improvised, is halted by the joker (discussed below) at the point that the situation reaches a crisis. The joker then asks the audience to offer solutions. The actors must then enact the solutions suggested by the spectators who simultaneously write the script and direct the action from their seats. The actors are “obligated to comply strictly with these instructions fro the audience” (Boal 2000: 132). Zakes Mda, who has worked extensively with this method feels “The ‘best’ solution is arrived at by trial, error, discussion, then audience consensus” (Mda 1993: 66). In ‘When people play people’, Mda (1993) classes simultaneous dramaturgy and forum theatre (below) as theatre for conscientisation since “of all the [theatre for development]
methodologies...simultaneous dramaturgy and forum theatre are the most effective in conscientisation” (Mda 1993: 184).

Simultaneous dramaturgy was a form that offenders felt more at ease with than forum theatre which was usually not attempted. The Boaliam form that offenders used most frequently however and which I felt most useful for the purposes of research and in the aim of conscientisation was image theatre.

**Image Theatre**

Image theatre is defined as “a series of exercises and games designed to uncover essential truths about societies and cultures without resorting to spoken language” (Jackson in Boal, 1992: xix). For this reason it is a very effective tool when working across language and cultural barriers (Jackson in Boal 1992: xx). This is relevant particularly in relation to the Westville Correctional Centre work where it was used extensively.

The form involves the participants making images – symbolic representations – of their lives, feelings and oppressions, which are then grouped in terms of themes. Although Boal conceived of the images being still⁹⁴, the images are not static but are rather the starting point for further action. Once the image has been created the participants must then ask “what do we want to change?” The image, which is representative of the oppression, is then physically transformed. And so, the ‘actual image’ becomes the ‘ideal image’ (Boal 2000: 135). The final stage requires the spectator-sculptor to look at “how it would be possible to pass from one reality to the other” (Boal 2000: 135). This becomes the ‘transitional image’. Working on the image, Boal feels reveals the possibilities for change in all situations, this is the process and effect of ‘dynamisation’ or activation of – in this case – the image.

Within image theatre there are different methods of dynamisation (see Boal 1992: 164 – 191) all are concerned with “the bringing to life of the images and the discovery of whatever direction of intention is innate in them” (Jackson in Boal 1992: xix).

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⁹⁴ I emphasise this point here as I have found that in working with image theatre with offenders at Westville Female Correctional Centre, the concept of creating a still image was at first very difficult to grasp. A woman at a stove for instance would continue stirring the pot, a ball would keep bouncing. Eventually we had to change the word to ‘iphotograph’ in order to communicate the idea of an image frozen in time and space.
**Forum Theatre**

Forum theatre marks the graduation of the spectator to a fully fledged spect-actor. In this form the spectator is empowered to take possession of the stage … to trespass, since: “To free ourselves is to trespass and to transform” (Boal 2000: xxi). In applied theatre it is regarded as the form, which most enables the conscientisation of participants since it engenders optimal intervention and optimal participation (Mda 1993:170 – 172).

Definitively, it is a theatrical game or fight (Boal 1992: 19) in which a short narrative depicting a social or political problem that has a difficult solution is performed. The skit, which has been rehearsed, presents the problem and ‘solution’ intended for debate (Boal 2000: 138). The spectator-actors are then asked if they agree with the proposed solution, which encompasses the attitudes and actions of the protagonists. As the solution is oppressive, they will inevitably object.

The play is then repeated from the point that the conflict begins. The ‘spect-actors’ are encouraged to alter the course of the action by physically replacing one of the characters at a key point showing that alternative solutions are possible. “[The] spect-actor intervenes and changes the vision of the world as it is, into a world that it could be” (Boal, 1992: 20).

To alter the course of the action all the audience members have to do is approach the playing area and shout “Stop!” Once the character has been replaced by the spect-actor, the other actors must transform themselves (if they are not already) into “agents of oppression…to show the spect-actor how difficult it is to change reality” (Boal 1992: 20). In addition, there can be no magical solutions. The poor man, whose situation is transformed because he wins the lottery, is unfortunately not realistic. Adrian Jackson (in Boal 1992: xxii) is clear to point out however that Boal’s concern with the depiction of reality as truth is no indication of his favouring of the Realist style of theatre. In fact “he sees truth as being utterly distinct from realism”. Consequently the genre of forum theatre is not fixed and depends on the participants.

Forum was devised theatrically to create a space for dialogue and it is this element that Heritage picks up on in his definition. For him, “the essence of Forum lies in the dialogic relationship between stage and audience constructed through the use of the space, the
performance style, and the conduct of the actors and the joker. The theatrical goal is to achieve a common purpose with the audience, as solutions are sought and rehearsed in a shared safe space” (Heritage 1994: 30). This incorporation of the spatial and dialogic will become important for later discussions of theatre for conscientisation at Westville Female Correctional Centre.

As an example of a successful forum, Boal (1992) cites the famous “Feminism in Gondrano’ experience (1992: 30), in which patriarchy was challenged in a small Sicilian town. He states: “It was a wonderful experiment for a number of reasons. Apart from anything else, this was the first time in my experience that Forum Theatre was being done with an audience composed of oppressed and oppressors at one time” (Boal 1992: 33).

Boal likens the form to a fight because it has rules; however the analogy of a fight can easily be extended to the purpose of the forum. It is a fight against oppression; it is a fight for transformation representing inevitably a clash of world views. Thus, ideally by acting out their ideas participants are able to train for real-life action, learning the possible consequences of their actions and that transformation is possible. According to Adrian Jackson, Theatre of the oppressed, in all its manifestations, “is about acting rather than talking, questioning rather than giving answers, analysing rather than accepting” (in Boal, 1992: xxiv). However, are these liberatory goals translatable in practice? This debate is picked up below.

**The Joker System**

Boal’s joker system, which involves both dramaturgy and staging, is integral to Theatre of the oppressed. In fact in mapping its genesis, Boal describes it as “the most important leap forward in the development of our theatre [Theatre of the oppressed]” (2000: 172). But, as with all theatre it did not appear from thin air, but evolved in response to the needs of the audience, he states:

>The ‘Joker’ system was not a capricious creation; it was determined by the present-day characteristics of our society and, more specifically, of our Brazilian public. Its objectives are of an esthetic and economic nature. (2000: 174)

So, what were the characteristics of the society from which the ‘joker’ system arose? What needs was it responding to? The colonial legacy marked by an increasing number of poor
and illiterate (Freire 1970) and a growing oppressive military force that would eventually force Boal out of Brazil to Argentina in 1971 and then on to Europe (where he developed methodologies articulated in his *Rainbow of Desire* (1995)). The people needed a voice, the society desperately needed transformation. Thus a theatre was needed that “attempt[ed] to influence reality and not merely reflect it, even if correctly” (Boal 1992: 168) in other words, an activist theatre.

In advocating a transitional view of the world, Boal aimed to disturb the unity and ‘loyalty’ of theatrical styles, acknowledging that “a healthy bit of chaos” (2000: 170) is often just what is required to stimulate the audience. Four techniques were introduced to further this aim: First an actor-character separation. He acknowledges that this separation is as old as theatre (2000: 168); nevertheless for his purpose it was central. The character, often represented by a mask, can be played by many actors demonstrating that ‘societal masks’ are worn, transition is possible. Secondly, the theatre is ‘collective’. Collectively made, collectively interpreted. A sense of the ‘we’ over the ‘I’ is therefore emphasised. Thirdly, the chaos is extended through “stylistic eclecticism” (2000: 170). In the joker system, under which all his theatrical forms fall, there is no adherence to one style. Lastly, in acknowledging that “in theatre any break stimulates”, (2000: 170) Boal suggests the introduction of music. Music has the power to move the imagination in a way that the spoken word cannot. Together, these techniques jar the audience and open them to the power of possibility.

**The Joker**

In order to facilitate the realisation of the techniques and the activist objective of the theatre, the joker ‘character’, who in a sense embodies the system, was created. Taken from the joker in a card game, for its polyvalent ability, the joker’s role is integral to the success of any T.O performance. Boal describes the multiple roles of the joker:

> He is magical, omniscient, polymorphous and ubiquitous. On stage he functions as a master of ceremonies, raisonneur, kurogo etc. He makes all the explanations, verified in the structure of the performance and when necessary he can be assisted by the coryphaeus or the choral orchestra. (2000: 182)

Boal is clear however to place the joker at the opposite end of the spectrum, in terms of function, to the protagonist. This polarisation, of the protagonist embedded in a specific
reality and the joker, “a universalising abstraction of the other” (Boal 2000: 177),
embraces the possibility for the inclusion and expression of the stylistic eclecticism
central to the system. And so, anything is possible if the joker deems it so.

Beyond the element of style, the joker is the bridge between the actors and the spectators
enabling and actively promoting the transition to spect-actor. Thus as Barbara Santos, one of
Theatre of the oppressed’s (T.O) most experienced jokers describes: “The Joker is an artist
with pedagogic and political functions who helps people to understand themselves better,
express their ideas and emotions, analyze their problems and seek their own alternatives to
change or solve them” (Santos 2002: 227).

In its magical playfulness, it is an extremely responsible role that requires many kinds of
knowledges: cultural, theatrical, pedagogic and psychological; but above all it requires a
sensitivity and humanity.

**Boal in practice**

Boalian rhetoric is inspirational – even magical. However, what does it look like in reality;
and to what extent is Boal’s forum able to do in practice what it claims in theory? From
seeing it first hand as Boal intended I was struck by a number of seeming contradictions
(compromise?). This example is not the primary focus of the research as such the discussion
will be brief; nevertheless I will cite my observations here. It is also picked up in my
discussion on ‘form’ below.

First, the issue of space: The vast majority of the plays were performed in a theatre. Other
venues became theatres. There was seating and in a few instances a grand auditorium with a
galley between the stage and the seats/actors and audience. This spatial division is … a
division. It is also hierarchical mirroring the classroom designed for Banking Education that
Freire (1970, 1974) opposes. This makes participation far more difficult. Spect-actors must
cross the great divide to intervene. They must shout Stop! really loudly – and have the
confidence to do so. This is in part addressed through the warm-ups which “prepare the

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95 When at the PPP offices in February 2004, I watched extensive video footage of sessions and Forum events
well as edited versions of Mudança de Cena (2003 – 2005) and Direito’s Humanos em Cena [Staging Human
Rights] (2001 – 2002). The unedited content was explained to me by Alexandra Britto.
spect-actors for action” (Boal 1992: 236); however in all the forums I witnessed, the audience did not have to move from their seats. Boal does speak of the games moving into image theatre (1992:236); however this is an evolution that I have witnessed in the Workshopping process with actor/participants not ‘spect-actors’. As will become evident when discussing the Prison Theatre at Westville, great effort was taken to counter the divisive spatial elements to encourage participation.

Second, observations of staging: Most noticeable was the reliance on technology such as lighting and sound. Obviously, this is dependent on the constraints of the venue. Staging Human rights, performed in the City Hall of Rio de Janeiro, did not have such effects; nevertheless the vast majority of performances with the youth did: A definite nod towards ‘high production values’. This is in line with Boal’s conviction that “the more care that is taken over the aesthetics of the show, the more it will stimulate, and the more the audience will take part” (1992: 235). My argument is not that communities who participate in these projects don’t deserve ‘the best’, it simply raises for me questions around values, aesthetics and intention – whose? Particularly In light of Boal’s vociferous objection to pacifying colonial theatre. For me, this not only points to content, but presentation/form – a darkened theatre with lighting effects seems at odds with confronting the audience with ‘real life’.

In terms of style, the plays themselves were often quite sophisticated. Using symbolism and theatrical devices that I doubt came from the children themselves: A character playing an abusive husband is dressed as a king because he ‘feels’ like a king. Again, this is completely in line with Boal’s staging philosophy – costumes should be completely developed because “very often oppression is reflected in clothes” (1992: 235). In another example a young pregnant girl is along on stage – she is back lit against a white screen, she spreads her arms and her shadow becomes an angel. Children of the favela dress in white – a group of up to 20 occupy the stage simultaneously; they are the casualties of the violence of the favela. One after the other they tell the audience how they died. It is very moving. Enough to do something about it? Perhaps.

However, the extent of the conceptual skill evident in the plays, to me suggests an overwhelming emphasis on production and consequently strong influence of the facilitator. I am left asking, how much time was spent thinking and discussing the issues that affect the
lives of the kids and how much was on conceptualising and implementing the play itself? What was the primary intention – to teach them about the theatre – or to enable participants to have a more complex understanding of the world that helps them to make better choices? Perhaps the two are not wholly mutually exclusive. Involvement in creative activity is always an enriching process, but from my understanding, this is not the primary intention of TO.

Further, in watching the unedited version of Changing the Scene (2003), I was struck by the seeming overriding intention of the project. Rather than promoting ‘questioning’ and ‘analysing’, which the form purports to do, it seemed far more focused on building consensus around a particular mainstream vision of the world – albeit a more healthy one. This is also my experience when using Forum with offenders and in my teaching. As it was dealing with youngsters in the favelas, the Forums were primarily about the danger of the gangs: the message being if you join a gang you will end up dead or in prison. They did not explore why a gang might be the preferable option for a child with no education whose parents are abusive addicts. By avoiding this aspect you fail to address the core reasoning behind gang membership that remains a reality after the show is over. You fail to fully address context. I can understand why perhaps these young people don’t always want to.

Global trends

Almost 40 years later, Freire’s influence has not waned and has in many respects become invigorated by cultural activists with the global trend towards neo-liberal consumer capitalism (Adams & Goldbard 2002; Prentki & Selman 2000) resulting in globalisation and the illusion of choice\textsuperscript{96}. In warning against the undemocratic, non-participative and homogenising tendencies of globalisation, Prentki and Selman equate it with colonialism: “Far from enjoying a post-colonial period of world development, the present time is witnessing the most extreme, far-reaching manifestation of colonialism yet devised” (2000: 200). Most notably are the massive disparities in power and privilege and vastly inequitable global power relations – cultural, economic, coercive, and political.

\textsuperscript{96} Consumer capitalism floods the market with fifty different kind of shampoo to choose from for instance but, anti-globalization activists argue (Klein 2000), that this merely is a distraction – an illusion of choice. In reality most people feel alienated and therefore powerless to effect change against the massive centralized power of contemporary governance, epitomized by the United States.
Yet ironically, as globalisation has facilitated the rapid and massive movement of capital, goods, institutions, and images across the globe (Ybarra-Frausto 2002: 5), it has also been responsible for the movement of people (culture) and ideas. This has enabled rare instances where knowledge has flowed against the grain of cultural power and imperialism, Theatre for development with its roots in Africa and South America is such an example.

In engaging the diaspora as a consequence of globalization, Ulf Hannerz (1987: 12 - 18) observes London, Paris and New York are some are the largest third world cities in the world. While this has facilitated a cultural cross-over (creolization) that I believe is enriching and necessary in the deconstruction of modernist and colonialist power binaries, it has also resulted in incumbent social ills based in those binaries. Immigrant communities typically experience social exclusion evidenced in ghettoisation, unemployment and racism/xenophobia. Seen visibly on the skyline on the outskirts of European cities these high-rise ghettos, known in France as de cité, become ‘no-go zones’ for the European ‘locals’, known for – predictably – high instances or violence and crime and a hostile/suspicious attitude to outsiders97 (Mackenzie 2007).

In addition the mass urbanisation that typifies both the first and third world situation has meant further human casualties: homelessness, delinquency, and addiction to name a few. These are the issues that PPT practitioners are engaging. These are global issues. Consequently, Tim Prentki argues passionately that “The issues that popular theatre addresses are no longer marginal” (2000: 199) therefore his proposal is that “popular theatre [for development] should migrate out of the ghettos of ‘fringe’, ‘alternative’ and ‘small-scale’ and announce itself as the new mainstream” (2000: 199). Although I agree that the issues that PPT engage is seminal and that the participatory and democratic nature of it is fundamental in the celebration of grassroots knowledges, I am less convinced that positioning it as ‘the new mainstream’ is a solution. As I will argue in Chapter 4 it is popular theatre’s position as ‘in between’, out of the mainstream gaze, that in many respects allows the spirit of resistance, of alternatives to flourish.

97 Johnny Steinberg in The Number (2004) speaks of how the modernist spatial vision behind the Cape Flats, lead directly to the formation of the notorious gangs that the region are famous for. Isolated and inward looking architecture easily became ‘territories’ where understandably angry young men became terrorizers of communities.
I will now attempt to apply much of the theory that has been discussed to the case-study at hand in an attempt to answer the question: What does the theatre at Westville Female Correctional Centre look like?

Performance as organising principle/ what does the theatre look like?

The discussion on PPT has gone some way to clarify the key elements of popular culture and participation. I have outlined in some detail the theoretical and methodological informants of PPT at Westville Female, primarily Friere (1972) and Boal (1979) However, it is the aspect of performance as an organising principle (Kamlongera 1988: 24) mentioned in the introduction to this section ‘Informing form’ that I would like to pick up on here.

In the Prison Theatre at Westville Female Correctional Centre, performance (form) essentially functioned to facilitate the intention through the initiation of relationships: First, between the actor and the ‘audience’98/ the participants; and secondly between the participants and the space. As such it can be said to ‘organise’ ‘the audience’ and ‘the space’ in the ‘imaginative exploration of alternatives’. Without repeating too much of what was explained in the methodology, I will now take you through the process of a typical intervention, elaborating on how performance functioned as an organising principle.

Essentially the interventions all conformed to a similar structure. First, as described in the opening to the chapter there was popular song, dance and games. This performance form had

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98 I deliberately avoid Boal’s term spect-actor here. In Forum theatre, the spectator becomes a spect-actor once he/she has entered the performance area. This is not the nature of the Prison Theatre as will be elaborated.
a number of functions. The audience’s inclusion into the song, dance and isiZulu games that preceded the plays, as one offender noted “introduced friendship” (Margaret 18 September 2002) thereby breaking the ice between outsiders and insiders. Further, all participants became effectively initiated as performers. An important aspect of the Prison Theatre was that *all* people present were performers. This challenges Boal’s notion of the ‘spect-actor’ which as I have explained only describes audience members who participate in the Forum.

Popular performance here also functions to activate the audience. As one offender observed “…when we open [the play/intervention] with the songs it gives us energy and power – you can be down and out, but you keep moving and you say “I’m on top of the world” (female offender 18 September 2002). Many of the games played are Zulu childhood games such as *ayabamba amakewnya ihotel* and *tomati so’n’so* that the women have not played since they were children. The games are always very successful. Playing these games transports them through time and space. It activates memories that allow for a more encompassing sense of self/ identity. A female Correctional Centre, is typically a passive environment. Women are not used to moving, to feel their hearts beating – to feel alive.

An important aspect alluded to above, pertains to the performance recreating the relationship between the participants and the space. At the commencement of the intervention, the students have always typically waited for the offenders to arrive. They always gravitate to the church pews (the similarity between church and theatre architecture is notable in its reaffirmation of hierarchy and division), where they 'plonk' themselves down waiting to be entertained and to entertain. By introducing the active element of songs and games, the spatial division between stage and seating is dissolved. This is important for the post-performance discussion. In the post-graduate interventions, we usually performed in the courtyard. The Correctional Centre on more than one occasion set up a table and chairs – ‘a mock stage and adjudication table’ as part of honouring the formality of the event. They were confused when I insisted that all chairs should be removed to counter passivity and the audience/actor binary. Some of the older Zulu women were not happy and snuck off to get some benches. Predictably they did not involve themselves in the intervention at all.

The plays themselves would then commence with minimal props or costumes that became more minimal with each passing year as they understood the form and intention. The plays
theatrically posed/presented a problem pertaining to a specific theme either given (as with Theatre for a developing nation) or chosen (as with Interventions with offenders). Each play had to engage the audience dialogically either through asking direct questions, creating discussion circles, creating circles for communication through image theatre, and in a few instances asking audience members to instruct the actors (simultaneous dramaturgy). The most typical device however was the discussion circles, facilitated by an ‘actor’ (the actors would all become facilitators of groups), where participants would all discuss issues posed by the actors that the play presented. A spokesperson from each discussion circle (not an actor/facilitator) would then be asked to summarise the discussion.

This is where the plays depart somewhat from other PPT models. Typically this form uses theatre as a mode of ‘once off’ active explanation to initiate dialogue between two groups typically external to the actors (Kerr 1995). In our brand of Prison Theatre the plays are questions in an ongoing dialogue where everyone gets to ask and answer. In this way the form is arguably more effective in creating the space for women offenders to speak and be heard, and for issues to be more fully interrogated. Thus, although it is in some ways similar to forum theatre, where they depart from forum is through a reformulation of the ‘spect-actor’ – as mentioned above – with the reconceptualising of ‘performance space’. An enduring feature of the Westville Correctional Centre Plays is the fluidity of the performance space (scenes and dialogue/discussion with ‘audience’ can occur anywhere in the room). Thus, the ‘spect-actor’, need not approach the playing area and shout “Stop!” in order to “intervene and change the vision of the world” (Boal, 1993: 335) since all the space is performance space.

In the dialogue phase of the intervention performance structures the transition between ‘reality’ and ‘theatre’, communicates expectations to the audience through the establishment of conventions. The ability of performance to do this is understood and often happens spontaneously. As an example, during the ‘post-performance’ dialogue process of the intervention in 2002, after a woman had spoken on the issue at hand, another woman, Patricia, clapped 3 times, twice, and on the forth time pointed to the next participant who had indicated she wanted to speak. She did it twice and on the second time everybody joined in. This became an established performative convention, over many years, to simultaneously
affirm the previous speaker and indicate the next speaker while still framing the event within the mode of ‘theatre’.

Another convention that had the same usage but was devised prior to the event was an interesting allusion to Geese Theatre Company’s concept of ‘lift the mask!’ I had discussed with the offenders the idea that we conceal our true thoughts and emotions behind masks. It was an idea that immediately resonated. Offenders then devised a slogan ‘khuluma iqiniso!’ ['tell the truth!'] when they wanted either the character to reveal inner thoughts or the audience to speak. The convention worked better in engaging the audience to speak about what they had witnessed.

Within the plays at Westville Female, performance operated as a structure to organise for the intention of liberation\(^99\) within a structure (prison) that has the intention of incarceration. The tensions are apparent. In trying to analyse how this was able to happen one needs to look at the nature of performance – African performance – with its integrated and overlapping approach to life and art in a way that is magical and transgressive. It allowed for the safe exploration of alternatives through the transformation of space. Further, it is my conviction, that if it is your intention to open up possibilities of different choices/modes of being for people inside a prison; the form must be theatre. The prison space/ culture is defined by is submission to authority – by its oppression. For liberation to occur – even if for a fleeting moment\(^100\) – the space must be re-imagined and African popular theatre is the ideal medium. In the words of Khubisile “When I do drama, I think sometimes I am free” (18 September 2002).

This chapter has investigated how a form of cultural action (PPT) can precipitate the exploration of alternatives. It has examined the historical, philosophical and political elements that birthed the form and problematised some of the challenges. The following section will explore what kinds of alternatives were perceived by the offenders. What gates were unlocked for them, what gates they were able to unlock, and what gates were slammed in their faces. What choices they made.

\(^{99}\) Liberation is understood within a Freirean (1972) sense to be freedom from being submerged in the reality of the oppressors. Freedom, which is not a ‘gift’ but a ‘conquest’, must be fought for since it is necessary for human completion. Through the process of the theatre ‘freedom’ in its literal sense is also felt physically through the imaginative exercise.

\(^{100}\) The significance of this, is discussed later in the thesis.
Prison Theatre play 2003
SECTION 2

PRISON THEATRE, PRISON AS THEATRE: POPULAR APPROPRIATIONS AND NEGOTIATIONS OF POWER AND PATRIARCHY IN WESTVILLE FEMALE CORRECTIONAL CENTRE

The previous section expanded on the conceptual framework for the thesis (inside/out). It provided specifically the methodological approach and a theoretical and historical positioning for the theatre at Westville Female Correctional Centre. It detailed the theatre form and engaged questions around the ‘use’ and ‘appropriation’ of the theatre itself. This section was initially intended to extend and focus this argument into a discussion through an analysis of the plays.

However over the five years that I was actively involved in the cultural life of Westville Female Correctional Centre, I was compelled to re-look at the original thesis, which as noted was ostensibly a project about the power of women of the third world representing themselves through Popular Participatory Theatre. I became acutely aware through my participant observation over time that, to provide a more accurate picture of how power operated culturally and was appropriated by women under these circumstances, I would have to widen the lens of scope and complexity.

This realisation is supported theoretically by a number of factors: First is the notion of the performative quality of power (Foucault 1977; Kershaw 1999) and by extension ‘the self’ (Goffman 1959) and society (Williams 1983). Second are integrated notions of popular culture (Fiske 1989; Barber 1997) which describe the “meaningful expressions” (Mbembe 2001: 6) of the women. And finally, integrating elements of both in engaging the politics of space-time/place (Massey 1992, 1993, 1994) in the zone between (Barber 1997).

The first chapter of this final section will therefore set up the theoretical frame by engaging these concepts in some detail. While the discussion on ‘performativity’ is new, it may seem analogous on the one hand and quite ‘inside out’ on the other, to be engaging ‘the popular’ after detailing the practicalities of Popular Participatory Theatre in the Chapter 3. However not only did I feel it was conceptually sound, but since the primary analysis is not of the
‘form’ but of the political and pleasurable appropriation of it, it made logical sense to detail
the theory here.

In the second chapter of this final section, I will engage in the uses and appropriations of
radical Prison Theatre specifically concerning the gendered politics of incarcerated third
world women. In so doing it will assess both the idealistic and more realistic possibilities of
cultural action (in a women’s prison). As discussed in the previous chapter, Prison Theatre as
it has evolved in Westville Female Correctional Centre has been a convergence of
performative traditions with an ironic political ambition: the liberation of incarcerated women
in the pursuit of self-realisation and self-actualisation. In extending a Freirean belief system,
liberation is not simply concerned with physical bondage, rather, it involves an escape from
the mental incarceration of interconnected oppressive ideologies such as colonialism (race),
capitalism (class) (Freire 1996; Wa Thiongo 1986) and patriarchy (gender), in this way taking
Freire, beyond the binary.

In acknowledging the politics of space and subjectivity, this chapter is theoretically informed
by the larger postcolonial feminist debate (Mohanty 1991; Spivak 1990) around third world
women and the need to invoke popular memory/history amongst women through the telling
of their own stories. As it places great emphasis on women’s narratives, the chapter takes the
form of a (woman’s) narrative, tracing a hegemonic dance of resistance, cooption and
resistance through theatre and real life. It is argued that women’s popular participatory
theatre can function as an excellent oral / performative medium through which to respond to
this need. However it questions ultimately the sustainability of this form of resistance, where
there is little chance of grand transformation.

It is therefore the ‘erosive’ agency – the Fiskean within and below – at the level of the
individual that started to play itself out in the theatre of the prison. Primarily through the
active construction of identity in the prison place. As Doreen Massey (1992: 3 - 15) writes
places should be considered spaces of interaction in which local identities are constructed out
of material and symbolic resources that may not be local but should be considered authentic.

101 It must be mentioned that not all the Prison Theatre performed by the women at Westville Correctional
Centre was ‘radical’. The process and form I contend was radical. As was the idea of encouraging uncensored
dialogue in a Correctional Centre; however on one occasion in particular the theatre was used by more dominant
women as a containing devise. This is discussed in the final chapter.
In the final chapter I will analyse through the depictions of themselves in the plays and in their performance of the self in everyday life how they use identity to (re)appropriate and (re)negotiate a sense of self which speaks to their politics and to what they perceive as powerful.
CHAPTER 4

Meaningful Expressions: A Theoretical Orientation of the Popular Performance of the Self in Westville Female Correctional Centre

Between the practised smile and the panoptic eye. Between the politician and the policeman, between human rights and legalised oppression, in any system designed by some to control others, there will almost always be a space for resistance, a fissure in which to forge at least a little freedom. (Kershaw 2004:35)

Performing the self

In engaging the performative quality of power, Baz Kershaw observes that more than ever before, performed power is shaping the global future (1999:5). We watch nightly newscasts of politicians whose spin is spun as they look meaningfully into the camera at certain key points ‘performing sincerity and authority’. We see celebrities being benevolent ‘because they can’ (and it’s good for PR), with grateful (usually African) recipients overjoyed or supplicating themselves. We see the Twin Towers fall and we think: Is this real? Didn’t I just see this on a movie? Then there was the movie starring Nicholas Cage as the heroic fireman. Are the terrorists learning from Hollywood or is Hollywood learning from the terrorists? Either way, both acknowledge the inextricable link between power and performance and thus an inevitable blurring between reality and illusion that we must negotiate as part of a post-modern consciousness.

The concept of power as performed, which introduces Kershaw’s (1999) book on the conundrum of radical theatre in a time of cultural relativism, is the same concept that introduces Foucault’s seminal text Discipline and punish (1977). The account of the public torture and execution of Damiens in March 1757 is nothing short of “spectacle” (Foucault 1977:10) – “a festival of punishment” (1977:8), in which all parties, (lord high) executioner
spectators, and ‘condemned man’ all play their parts. Foucault notes in the account of an eyewitness:

Monsieur Le Breton, the clerk of the court, went up to the patient\textsuperscript{103} [Damiens] several times and asked him if he had anything to say. He said that he had not; at each torment he cried out, as the damned in hell are supposed to cry out ‘Pardon my God! Pardon Lord.’ Despite all this pain, he raised his head from time to time and looked at himself boldly… Monsieur Le Breton went up to him again and asked him if he had anything to say; he said no. Several confessors went up to him and spoke to him at length; he willingly kissed the crucifix that was held out to him; he opened his lips and repeated: ‘Pardon Lord’ (Foucault 1977:4).

From this early account a relationship can be clearly established between power (most literally demonstrated through punishment) \textit{and} performance; and power \textit{as} performance. However; Foucault historically traces punishment (and by extension power) out of the performative, into something that by the beginning of the nineteenth century happens “under the seal of secrecy [since] it is ugly to be punishable, but there is no glory in punishing” (1977: 10). I am reminded of the countless instances of torture and murder – most famously that of Steven Bantu Biko – that were carried out behind closed doors during apartheid and disowned in cowardice by secret police henchmen as ‘slipped on a piece of soap while washing’ (van Wyk 1979\textsuperscript{104} in Chapman 1991:363). Of course this covert torture still happens today – and the secrecy of the prison system globally is testimony to that. And yet, twenty-five years on, Kershaw’s observation is that “as the world wakes up to the twenty-first century … the processes of \textit{performance} have become ever more crucial in the great cultural, social and political changes of our times” (1999:5). Power is performed. This we understand.

Further, Foucault’s project was to trace punishment from the “theatrical representation of pain” (1977:14) though to “an economy of suspended rights” (1977:11) as part of a larger project where punishment is regarded as “a complex social function” and “political tactic” indicative of broader social and political processes. The implications of this in light of this

\textsuperscript{102} The reference to Gilbert and Sullivan here may be obscure, but points to the performability of punishment.

\textsuperscript{103} Interesting use of ‘patient’ to describe the prisoner and this prior to the pathologising of criminality which Foucault documents (1977).

\textsuperscript{104} Christopher van Wyk’s poem In Detention (1979) sardonically explores the reasons for unnatural deaths of detainees given by the South African secret police subsequent to the Terrorism Act of 1967 which legalized indefinite detention without trial.
contemporary integrated trend towards power/punishment/performance which implies in a sense a theatrical representation of “an economy suspended rights” (1977:11), is significant. This is literally demonstrated in the fascination with ‘the prison drama’ genre on television (Wright 2000) or in fact any dramatisation of cops and robbers though television, radio, film which inevitably ends with justice being served, morality enforced.

Clearly this performative trend is concomitant with technology and the mediatisation of society and yet birthed far earlier as evidenced in the account of Damien’s execution (Foucault 1977). In his chapter ‘Drama in a Dramatised society’ in ‘Writing in Society’ (1983) Raymond Williams observes this phenomenon. Writing from the perspective of 1980s Britain he notes “we have never as a society acted so much or watched so many others acting” (1983:11).

This insight is easily applicable to twenty-first century South Africa. Although the ratio of radios and televisions is significantly lower than in the United Kingdom: 335 radios and 134 televisions per 1000 people in South Africa compared with 1443 radios and 521 televisions per 1000 people in Britain (US Census Bureau 2000 in Croteau and Hoynes 2003:370), South Africans are still avid consumers of media. We also consume media differently. Where the west/ western culture is famous for private media consumption (the TV in the bedroom), Africans (and this is typical of third world scenarios) consume media communally (Croteau and Hoynes 2003). The SAARF AMPS for 2007 shows the average weekly consumption of media in South Africa to be 81.4% television and 93.3% radio (www.bizcommunity.com).

As has been shown in the chapter on Prison Theatre at Westville Female, popular performance – particularly song and dance – is something that is part of daily life in Southern African culture. Work, celebration, struggle or sadness all is accompanied by song and often dance. It is for this reason that it is so easy to activate a group of ‘amateur’ performers. The women at Westville were instantly able to break into a song with a four part harmony and a synchronised movement/ action to depict whatever situation the play was engaging.

My point is to position South Africa as a “dramatised society” (Williams 1983). A society whose African majority “has regular and constant access to drama … [that has been] … built into the rhythms of everyday life” (1983:12). This, Williams argues effects the consciousness
of society, which itself becomes dramatised such that whether prisoner or politician, we cannot break free of ourselves as perpetual spectators.

Baz Keshaw takes this further and argues that the insertion of performance into everyday life (the dramatisation of society) disperses the theatrical: “Every time we tune into the media we are confronted by the representational styles of a performative world – and in the process the ideological impact of performance becomes ever more diverse” (1999: 6). This has two implications for this research. First, for the position of radical theatre, which the Prison Theatre project proposed – this is dealt with in the first chapter of this section. Secondly it also implies a contemporary consciousness around performativity, that has been nurtured through mediatisation (Williams 1983). It is my argument that South African women in prison do not operate outside of this reality. Further, I have argued that over the five years of theatrical intervention, PPT (as a ‘medium’) has contributed to the dramatisation of prison society, which in turn has brought an awareness around performing the self to the Westville women.

However, in this dramatised society of ours, we are not simply spectators – but performers: we are the stars in our own soap operas or radio dramas. Erving Goffman was engaging in this conception in the 1960s when he first published Presentation of the self in everyday life (1959/1990). Goffman openly utilises the word ‘performance’ to refer “to all kinds of activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers” (1990: 32). This has resonances with the Foucauldian (1977) notion of surveillance and performance alluded to earlier.

Further, this usage is underpinned by the conviction that human beings are constantly playing roles in order to control the impression that others have of them for various reasons or motives depending on the situation. Masked, we present ourselves. However, although Goffman’s analysis borders on the cynical in his detailed deconstruction of human social behaviour, the suggestion is not that we are all deliberate deceivers. Rather, there is an understanding that in life we play many parts and that “it is in these roles that we know each other; it is through these roles that we know ourselves” (Park 1950: 249 in Goffman 1990: 30).
Relating to this case study, prison must be one of the most acute environments to observe the playing of roles because the stakes are so high. For the offenders, behaviour – how convincingly you play your role of ‘reformed woman’ – determines privileges and ultimately freedom. For the members, authority and control determines safety. In this context, the performativity consumes all aspects – in playing their parts both for example wear ‘costumes’, but they also wear their identities. Goffman terms this “personal front” (1990: 34) that refers to

other items of expressive equipment, the items that we most intimately identify with the performer [herself] and that we naturally expect will follow the performer around wherever [she] goes…[including] insignia of office or rank; clothing; sex; age and racial characteristics; size and looks; posture; speech patterns; facial expressions; bodily gestures and the like. (1990: 34).

Much of my research is based on observation of these ‘personal fronts’ and analysis as to why. For example members of Correctional Centre staff have a particular deadpan expression. Although often friendly and expressive in conversation they can shut down instantaneously. Offenders manipulate guards; I have been witness to it on many occasions. They need to learn how to detach. Similarly, offenders play their roles, which are the focus of the coming chapters.

Thus within this oeuvre, the concept of ‘performing oneself’ needs to be broadened, beyond ‘Prison Theatre’ towards an acknowledgement of ‘the prison as theatre’. In the appropriation of power, the theatre provided merely one avenue through which it could be exercised\textsuperscript{105}. It was also I believe the catalyst for understandings – as alluded to above – around ‘performance as power’ and ‘power as performance’ to be developed. And yet an important point of clarification is that ‘performance’ here is in no way separated from the material reality, but has been from the start integral to it. To draw again briefly on the argument in Chapter 3 in African theatre/performance, art and life are intertwined (Kamlongera 1989), thus performance of self on stage and in everyday life cannot be separated from reality.

\textsuperscript{105} As will be discussed in the prison theatre the women do literally perform themselves. Art and life overlaps (Kamlongera 1989) and character and individual are synthesized.
This brings me to the second theoretical factor for broadening the scope of performing the self. In writing on the post-colony, and sub-Saharan Africa in particular, Achille Mbembe (2001), is wary of theory (including feminist) inspired by Foucauldian neo-Gramscian paradigms which position identity as ‘invented’, ‘hybrid’, ‘fluid’ and ‘negotiated’. He feels that “on the pretext of avoiding single factor explanations of domination, these disciplines have reduced complex phenomena of the state and power to ‘discourses’ and ‘representations’ forgetting that ‘discourses’ and ‘representations’ have materiality” (2001: 5). This has implications for the both chapters in this section which is why I respond to it here.

I am not in agreement with Mbembe regarding his argument that anti-essentialist notions of identity present some kind of ‘smoke screen’ to mask ‘real’ operations of power. In fact I openly employ such conceptions in both chapters. Postcolonial feminists (hooks 1989; Mohanty et al 1991) in particular demand this conception of identity in order to articulate the interconnected nature of power which acknowledges gender as a dynamic. This is discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

Nevertheless I do concede that academic discussions on power can abstract the political, forgetting its material and inevitably violent reality. The fact that – in this case – third world women can demonstrate inventiveness and agency around self representation and have mobilised in moments of resistance using theatre as a tool should not be regarded as proof of ‘the’ postcolonial African reality as articulated by the dominated. Mbembe writes:

This is not to say that such assertions [around the complex consciousness of ‘the oppressed’ and their ability to contest their oppression] are necessarily false but to suggest that a project to build a cumulative body of knowledge about African cannot rest on such thin hypotheses without dangerously impoverishing reality. Reducing everything to ‘resistance’ or to quantifiable calculations is to ignore the qualitative variety of the ends of human action in Africa. (Mbembe 2001: 20).

The nature and contextualisation of the project – situated in a Correctional Centre – ensures that representation through performance – in its broadest sense – cannot be extricated from the materiality of power as emphasised by Foucault (1977). My analysis, particularly in the coming section, pays constant attention to institutional operations of power and how this
affects the practicalities of people’s lives: how they are perceived and treated by others, what choices people have available to them and how they feel about themselves – which in turn affects their perception of choice.

In trying to explain ‘the African subject’ outside of political reductionism, Mbembe states:

The African subject is like any other human being: he or she engages in meaningful acts. (It is self evident that these meaningful human expressions do not necessarily make sense for everyone in the same way). The second observation is that the African subject does not exist apart from the acts that produce social reality, or apart from the process by which those practices are, so to speak, imbued with meaning” (2001: 6).

To integrate the point at which I shifted from ‘performativity’ to ‘postcolony’ to the present line of thought, this final section is concerned with the ‘meaningful acts’ that the women from the Westville Female Correctional Centre drama group enacted. Further it is absolutely understood that these acts are imbedded in the reality that they both respond to and produce. As implied above by Foucault (1977), Kershaw (1999), Williams (1983) and Goffman (1959/1990), these are ‘acts’; however, my interest is not to analyse the art of manipulation or persuasion – that we are all guilty of to a lesser or greater degree – but rather the meaningful acts which are politically motivated (with an acknowledgement of course that the personal is political).

**Power to the people!? Popular culture and the zone between**

In engaging the ‘meaningful expressions’ of the women at Westville Female Correctional Centre, one is essentially engaging ‘the popular’. The plays themselves, as has already been outlined in Chapter 3 and which will be expanded on in the following chapters constitute popular expression in their formal manifestation as ‘popular’ participatory performance. It may have seemed logical therefore to delve into a discussion on the popular and by extension popular culture in detail when describing the form of the plays. However, investigating the theatrical and cultural in the negotiation of power at Westville Female Correctional Centre, demanded, as has been argued, a look beyond Prison Theatre to prison as theatre.

Theoretically this is based in an analysis of the popular, popular culture, popular expression as an extension of the idea of performing the self discussed in the previous section. My
theoretical argument therefore is that in performing the self, which is part of a growing consciousness around performance as power/power as performance, the women in Westville Correctional Centre are essentially engaging in practices of popular culture.

Further, popular culture within an African context, necessarily implies a framing within the theory of African popular culture (Barber 1997, Drag 1993; Kerr 1995; Mbembe 2001); however, although this is entirely applicable for an analysis of the plays, within the broader focus I found interesting similarity with the way popular culture manifests in consumer capitalist societies (‘the west’) as described by John Fiske (1989). What this says about the equation between western ‘so-called’ democracies (where democracy has been so conflated with capitalism) and the authoritarianism of a prison that would produce such cultural similarities I can only speculate. Nevertheless, in my observations of the operations of power through popular culture in Westville Female Correctional Centre my research will show that these points of crossover are notably recurrent.

This section will then first engage the concept of ‘the popular’ and its antithesis the ‘power-bloc’ before looking at ‘popular culture’ as described by Fiske (1989) and subsequently by Barber (1997). It will then discuss these points of crossover and points of departure within and between these two approaches. Popular culture has also been described by Karin Barber as “the zone between” (1997: 1) as this introduces the spatial element so key to this thesis. I shall elaborate on this here in an attempt to connect space to power and therefore to popular culture. Although this section is largely theoretical I will nevertheless furnish some theory with brief examples that fall beyond the scope of detailed analysis in the thesis; but which should enrich the argument.

The popular and the power-bloc

Much has been written on ‘the popular’ both within a Western framework of consumer culture (Fiske 1989; Hall 1982) and within an (post-colonial) African context (Barber

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106 This western framework of understanding ‘the popular’ and ‘popular- culture’ originated in the Birmingham school from the 1960s onwards promoted by such notable academics as Stuart Hall. Essentially their stance was born in reaction to the Structuralist approach (from the 1930s) as articulated by the Frankfurt School and the work of Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer. The Structuralists viewed the rise of technologies (such as television) as ideological machinery that would direct the thoughts of the masses to a passive acceptance of the status quo (Strinati, D 1995:5-81). The Culturalists’ put much more faith in ‘the people’ to negotiate dominant
The word ‘popular’ originates from the Latin *popularis* meaning people. ‘The popular’ would therefore translate as ‘the people’; but who are the people? Theorists on popular culture (Barber 1997; Fanon 1965/ 1990; Fiske 1989; Hall 1982; Mbembe 1992, 2001) are not in total agreement. Nevertheless the term has not been abandoned entirely albeit a little ‘distanced’. One point of agreement is that ‘the people’ is not ‘all the people’ – at least not at the same time.

Nevertheless, one may argue that while ‘the people’ may not be a definitive category, and I will discuss this in more detail below, when evoking this term – particularly in an African context one has a sense of ‘the people’ as ‘the majority’ who do not consistently benefit. The majority, are excluded mostly from the privilege of wealth, education and the power of the public sphere. If they eat at the head table, they are there by invitation only. At the risk of generalising, in South Africa, they are the people who walk. They are the people who wait in line: in taxi queues, hospital queues, bank queues, pension payout queues. They are the people who go to prison. They are the people who wait for houses, for compensation, for documentation, for work to come their way, for a better life… for the promise.

Within a European Cultural studies perspective, ‘the people’ have been perceived as “a diverse and dispersed set of social allegiances constantly formed and reformed among the formations of the subordinate” (Fiske 1989: 8). They are seen as those excluded from the ‘power-bloc’, which Fiske (1989) and Hall (1982) describe as “a relatively unified, relatively stable alliance of social forces – economic, legal, moral and aesthetic” (1989: 8). In this way the antithetical binary of ‘the people’/‘power-bloc’ is established and recognised in broadly class terms. The lower-classes (the people) are then judged (judgement being the prerogative of the ‘morally superior’), as inferior and along with any cultural product or artefact they may

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107 For an extensive bibliography on ‘the popular’ see Barber (1997: 9 – 12).
108 Durban businessman Schabir Shaik sentenced for 15 years for corruption spent the first three months of his prison sentence (from November 2006 – March 2007) at St. Augustine’s, a private hospital. The bill amounted to hundreds of thousands of rands. He was being treated for high blood pressure and depression: A hardly surprising consequence of imprisonment. Debate raged in the press; particularly after the release of ex-ANC Chief whip Tony Yengeni, around the issue of people with power avoiding prison (*Sunday Tribune* 11 February 2007). Shaik has since been released on medical parole.
happen to produce: popular culture. “The people’s culture in Europe, then is low or common culture as opposed to the high culture of the ruling class” (Barber 1997: 3).

The categorisation of ‘the people’ as a discrete (class) entity has, as Barber (1997) notes, not escaped Africa and is used widely by press and politicians alike (www.info.gov.za/speeches) to their own ends. Thus while on the one hand ‘the people’ are associated with lack of sophistication, education – and dare I say it ‘morality’, on the other hand ‘the people’ are essentialised (or branded/ commodified\(^{109}\)) (Klein 2000), as the ‘real’ African and the upholder of tradition. However as Barber (1997:3) observes, within an African context “The ‘people’ are neither the rural, idyllically remembered ‘folk’ nor the urban industrial proletariat”, rather, they are better characterised as “emergent, fluctuating and fissiparous constellations [that] are both divided by and cohere around notions of ethnicity, religion, gender and common historical experience. They are mobile in aspiration and often in fact so that borders between categories… become blurred” (1997: 4).

Within a Western context, I would suggest that shifting the gears towards an even more aggressive capitalism in the United Kingdom and Europe (‘New’ Labour) in the last decade has too resulted in a greater ‘blurring’ the ‘people’/‘power-bloc’ binary in that context. Much like nineteenth century Britain, the wealth of emerging middle-classes is finding easier access to the elite. Conversely, although Britain remains indelibly class-conscious, ‘the elite’ are finding that courting ‘the popular’ is necessary for its’ own survival; hence the branding of Britain as ‘Cool Britannia’ (Van Ham 2001) and the Queen’s imminent knighting of King of ‘Chav’\(^{110}\) David Beckham with his Queen Victoria (II) basking in the royal glory at Beckingham Palace. This expresses an interesting somewhat symbiotic relationship that is developing between these two entities.

The relationship of the ‘power-bloc’ to ‘the people’ within postcolonial Sub-Saharan Africa has Mbembe (2001) argues, is far more brutal and demonstrated than its contemporary Western counterparts. This is almost certainly due to the legacy of colonisation and the nature of the colonial relationship which is then integrated into the current commandement

\(^{109}\) The commodification of ‘Africa’ is picked up in the following section on popular culture.

\(^{110}\) CHAV is British slang for the nouveaux riche. It is rumored to stand for Council House And Violence. Although integrated into daily usage by the press its roots are essentially classist and thereby demonstrate resistance to the class mobility that new found wealth now offers.

But what of the nature of this relationship – this “colonial rationality” (Mbembe 2001: 25) that has been so readily adopted by the postcolonial commandement? I have extracted some notable characteristics relevant to this study – that being its concern with penal power within a Sub-Saharan post-colonial context. Primarily, it is a power relationship that it is maintained through violence – and yet the violence is of a very specific sort: “its distinctive feature was to act as both authority and morality...anything that did not recognize this violence as authority, that contested its protocols, was savage and outlaw” (2001: 26). Mbembe isolates four main properties: First, colonial (and thus post-colonial) commandement was based on “a regime that departed from the common law” (2001: 29), in other words of unequal privileges. Second, it is a regime based in those privileges and immunities (2001: 30). Third, is the “lack of distinction between ruling and civilizing” (2001: 31) and lastly is its “circularity” (2001: 32). “The institutions with which it equipped itself, the procedures that it invented, the techniques that it employed, and the knowledge on which it rested were not deployed to attain any particular public good. Their primary purpose was absolute submission” (2001: 32).

It is not hard to see the parallels between the postcolony (holding its cracked mirror up to colonialism) and the prison system in terms of how power operates and how it rationalises itself. In this way the Correctional Centre too holds its own cracked mirror up to post-colonialism. As Mbembe eloquently notes: “The post-colony is a particularly revealing, and rather dramatic, stage on which are played out the wider problems of subjection and its corollary, discipline” (2001: 103).

In demonstration of their disciplinary power, prisons have understandably very strict hierarchical and bureaucratising protocol around access and privilege111. But how do ‘the people’ (the offenders) operate within this status quo? How do they articulate with ‘the power-bloc’ or commandement? This is stuff of popular culture and primary concern of this

111 For an offender this might include crossing a section, going to the shop, being relieved from ‘workshop’ (work), being released to go to school, or drama practice, access to the clinic or library, being allowed to attend a choir competition or other inter-prison competitive event.
thesis. As a way in however, my experience has been that while the nature of power in the post-colony and by extension the prison is rooted in a violence that mimics the colonial\textsuperscript{112}, daily survival in the Correctional Centre demands constant negotiation with people in positions of power. This applies to all ‘non-commandement’ who engage in the space: offenders, members and outside agents (like me) alike. Unofficially therefore fluid operations exist through the building of relationships which are within and below (Fiske 1989).

These survival networks are however not unique to Fiske’s context. Achille Mbembe (1992) postulates that detailed societal systems connect people in Africa across lines of class and privilege such that ‘the people’ often feel [my italics] that they are potentially – or momentarily – part of the elite (in Barber 1997: 5). This is what Jean Francois Bayart (1993) describes as the rhizome state, which typifies operations of power in sub-Saharan Africa. He writes “It has been argued that no one in sub-Saharan Africa is absolutely cut off from the centre: instead, in the ‘rhizome state’, ‘small men’ are linked through a multiplicity of capillaries of patronage and influence to some ‘big man’ through whom they can get a share of the good things in life” (Bayart 1993: 218 in Barber 1997: 4). Where the prison is different is that while some societal associations may be set-up, offenders must for the most part create their own networks. Thus it is Fiske’s insistence on the activity of ‘the people’ in the accessing of power, not simply through ‘connections’ but through calculated guerrilla tactics employed in the pursuit of their objectives – which are necessarily subversive as they are affirming, that resonates with my experience of the women at Westville Correctional Centre.

**Popular culture**

Following on from the debates around the delineation of ‘the people’ of at worst impracticable at best tenuous, it is hardly surprising that engaging with ‘popular culture’ is equally problematic. When ‘reading the popular’ there is a notable separation in the literature between popular culture as it manifests in the First world and popular culture as it manifests in the Third. As such ‘popular culture’ can be regarded as a “site of contested evaluations”

\textsuperscript{112} It is not the intention of this thesis to ignore the efforts both within the country and within Correctional Services to embrace democratic principles (Mbembe’s acknowledgement of the pluralism of the post-colony (2001: 102) supports this); nevertheless it cannot be denied that South Africa is a violent nation.
(Barber 1997:3). In my discussion, I shall first précis popular culture as it is theoretically interpreted by John Fiske (1989). My discussion of African popular culture (Barber 1997; Drag 1993), which will follow, will take the Fiskean analysis as a point of departure indicating where it diverges from popular culture in (western) consumer capitalist societies (Barber 1997).

My employment of both lines of thought, rather than simply African popular culture has been considered. First, theories of culture from a cultural studies perspective provide much of the theoretical foundation for this thesis. Fiskean analysis fits into that trajectory and offers up opportunity for engagement with key theoretical concepts that are both relevant to my study and easily applicable. Secondly, and perhaps more conceptually pertinent is that South Africa is a place of crossover between First and Third\(^{113}\). In one’s daily journey to work or home one must ‘crossover’ numerous times encountering the values, codes and practices of different worlds.

Karin Barber herself in “Views of the Field” (1997: 3) distinguished South Africa from the rest of Africa in terms of its people’s relative urbanisation. Ten years on, this situation has become even more pronounced. According to a 2007 study by the University of Cape Town’s Unilever Institute of Strategic Marketing and TNS Research Surveys (www.researchsurveys.co.za) the black middle-class (which they have termed the ‘black diamonds’) now amount to a population just short of three million with a spending power of around R180 billion\(^{114}\). Although this group maintains connections with ‘the townships’ (which are themselves urban), 47% now live in the previously white suburbs (www.researchsurveys.co.za).

Post ’94, South Africa has willingly embraced consumer capitalism and although there has been a slight slowdown due to the rising petrol price, according to the National Association of Automobile Manufacturers of SA (Naamsa) record levels of car sales have consistently been reported in the last 10 years with 714 340 vehicles sold in 2007 (Mokopanele 2007). This is not all good news however, people are prepared to live on credit and get into heavy

\(^{113}\) This issue of ‘crossover’ has already been thematically engaged with in Chapter 3 and is continued here.

\(^{114}\) Comparatively middle-class white South Africans still have a spending power of 235 billion (www.researchsurveys.co.za).
debt just to have to commodities that give status (www.markette.co.za)\textsuperscript{115}. While working in Youth centre on a Prison Theatre project (TDN 2003), young men openly discussed how their crime had been due to the pressure of being poor in a world where you are what you own (Youth Centre plays 2003).

Further, contemporary South Africa has taken on board the ethos and technologies of the global in their attempt to forge a local ‘South African’ National identity. Public Service broadcasters have typically had this as their mandate (see footnote 26); however consumer culture’s preoccupation with ‘branding’ and commodification (Klein 2000; van Ham 2001) has been readily adopted in South Africa\textsuperscript{116}. The brand ‘Proudly South African’ developed to encourage loyalty to South African brands of consumables and so grow the economy, culminates in an advert currently airing on television, which brands the country. The brand ‘South Africa’ being endorsed by none other than Nelson Mandela, Bishop Tutu, Jonny Clegg, Abdullah Ibrahim and President Mbeki himself among other extraordinary South Africans\textsuperscript{117}.

In this respect Fiske’s study of Popular Culture becomes useful to engage, prior to a fuller discussion of African popular culture, when analysing the broader arena of popular culture/theatre within an urban women’s Correctional Centre in 21\textsuperscript{st} century South Africa.

\textbf{Reading the popular: John Fiske}

A good starting point for an investigation into popular culture is the relationship, between culture and the social system or, in Marxian terms economic base and cultural superstructure. Simply put Marx saw this relationship as unidirectional, with the base determining superstructure. He wrote “The mode of production of material life determines the general character

\textsuperscript{115} A research company reveals that 15\% of South Africa’s black middle-class have experienced significant financial problems with 11\% becoming heavily in debt and being plagued by debt collectors (www.markette.co.za).

\textsuperscript{116} As Peter van Ham, Senior Research Fellow at the Netherlands Institute of International Relations writes “Image and reputation have become essential parts of a state's strategic capital. Like branded products, branded states depend on trust and customer satisfaction. And they are the harbingers of a postmodern politics based on style as much as substance” (www-stage.foreignaffairs.org).

\textsuperscript{117} What is significant in terms of the politics of this research is the lack of representation of women of substance. Miriam Makeba (‘Mama Africa) and a relatively unknown para-Olympic athlete must stand for all women.
of the social, political and spiritual processes of life” (Marx 1964: 51)\(^\text{118}\) as such there is a tendency to “reduce cultural to economic practice” (Cashmore 1999: 346)\(^\text{119}\). Constructivists Stuart Hall and John Fiske, extending the arguments proposed by Antonio Gramsci (written in the 30s but only translated into English in 1971) and later Louis Althusser (1971) saw this relationship as dynamic (Bennet 1982). It is in this dynamic relationship between culture and social system that Gramsci’s definition of hegemony holds sway. In fact, as John Storey (1999: 149) points out, it was “the introduction of Antonio Gramsci’s concepts of hegemony into British cultural studies in the early 1970s that brought about a rethinking of popular culture”.

Without becoming too bogged down in the definitive, hegemony essentially describes the situation of control of the dominant (class/race/gender) over the subordinate. Not through coercion, but through the consent of the masses – as such, they are complicit in their subjugation since they are consenting to unequal (class) relations (O’Sullivan et al 1994:133). The power of the dominant classes – along with their ideology – in this process seems “legitimate and natural” (Hebdige 1979/1993:366). No great injustice appears to have been committed, no bloody battles fought; yet there is a victor. However, it is not simply a case, as the Structuralists would propose, of passive acceptance.

Gramsci called hegemony a ‘moving equilibrium’. Within the battleground of the cultural arena, power and control of the elite must be “won, reproduced and sustained” (Hebdige 1993: 366). In the process, Fiske argues that there are progressive political gains, which enlarge a space of action [my italics] for the subordinate (Fiske 1989:11). Culture is therefore a space of contestation, negotiation and its relation to the social system, to what Fiske calls “structures of dominance” (1989:2), means that it is always political (Fiske 1989). Since “popular culture is the culture of the subordinate who resent their subordination” (1989:7), it is proof of this ongoing struggle. It is proof that the battle is not lost.

\(^\text{118}\) For a more detailed debate on structure and superstructure see Raymond Williams (1958/ 1971) Culture and society Chapter 5.

\(^\text{119}\) Many of the theorists appropriated in this thesis have their roots in Marxist thought since Marx’s intention was to expose and destabilise the ‘structures of dominance’ (Fiske 1989) promoted through capitalism, which perpetuate unequal class relations and ultimately an unfair society.
Fiske’s analysis here is clearly applicable in terms of how Prison Theatre and broader identity (re)negotiation amongst participants in Westville Female Correctional Centre functioned within the hegemony of the Prison. The plays literally, through the form (discussed in Chapter 3) ‘enlarged a space of action’ where ‘structures of dominance’ – both within the Correctional Centre and broader society – could be ‘contested’. Discussion in the coming chapters will elucidate with examples.

Popular culture according to Fiske is made from within and below (1989). It is not imposed. In other words it must come from ‘the people’ themselves. In its undermining of authority, it subverts and inverts, and is often “tasteless and vulgar” (Fiske 1989:6). For, Fiske argues “taste is social control and class interest masquerading as a naturally finer sensibility” (1989: 6).

Popular culture is crafted “out of the resources both discursive and material that are provided by the social system that disempowers them; it is therefore contradictory and conflictual to its core” (1989: 2). In Fiskean terms this refers primarily to the popular (re)articulation of the global and can be seen in Westville Female Correctional Centre through the embroidering or “subversive stitching” (Parker 1984) of brand logos (in white) – such as the Nike swish – onto their blue prison dresses. The women see this adornment as a kind of ‘in-joke’ and they are amused and empowered by it through their subversive creativity (conversations with Philile and other offenders 2000 – 2004); yet it also speaks aspirationally demonstrating the simultaneously dissident yet conforming nature of popular culture informed by consumer capitalism.

However as will be later argued in Chapter 6, the women’s engagement with popular culture as described by Fiske (1989) came most notably through the construction/ performance of identity/self; although there is definite overlap with some areas that Barber (1997) outlines which essentially describe operation of the plays. For example as Fiske describes, although mostly under the watchful eye of ‘big brother’ or the ‘panopticon’, “there is always an element of popular culture that lies outside social control that escapes or opposes the

120 Karin Barber writes that “though much has been written about ‘globalization’, more attention could be paid to the specific ways it works through local African scenes of cultural production and consumption, and to the question of what African audiences actually do with, or make of, imported cultural products” (Barber 1997: 7). Although not the specific focus of this thesis, the above example I feel does contribute to this enquiry.
hegemonic forces” (1989:2). This point is key to the operations of theatre in Westville Female Correctional Centre. As such, popular culture’s oppositional relationship to hegemony and the structures of dominance in a sense defines its (hegemony’s) existence. In a sense this is accommodating of the slightly contaminated nature of popular culture/theatre as outlined by Kerr (1995) in the previous chapter; yet identifying the more important counter-hegemonic element within it.

But what principally defines popular culture? Aside from the points above a key aspect is that of ‘relevance’ (Fiske 1989). In and of themselves popular texts are not popular until they are popular. In other words, “they are only completed when taken up by the people and inserted into everyday culture” (1989: 6) as such popular texts “are never self-sufficient structures of meanings [my italics]” (1989:6). A text is only ‘taken up’ if it ‘speaks’ to or it relevant to ‘the people’. As such it “minimizes the difference between text and life” (1989: 6) 121. Although, in the case of the plays at Westville Female, the plays are never ‘text’ in the conventional sense since they are never written down, the boundary between ‘text’ and life is so blurred they become indistinguishable from each other: The plays are their lives – personal yet collective. Yet, as is argued in Chapter 1 psycho-drama has no real relevance in this context and therefore the plays should not be considered as such. Not concerned with the individual, they are a conglomeration of shared experience for the purposes of articulating a communal, social concern. In remaining oral, these plays also escape commodification and are therefore owned by everyone and no one. For Fiske, popular culture as ‘relevant’ culture exists “at the intersection between the textual and the social... and is therefore a site of struggle” (1989:6).

This concept of ‘relevance’, for me, is analogous to Raymond Williams (1968) ‘Structures of Feeling’. Ian Steadman, writing on popular theatre in South Africa, observes that many theorists on popular culture gravitate towards similar ideas in their attempt to explain how popular artists “‘touch a chord’ or articulate ‘something’ which is related to the ‘needs’ ‘aspirations’ or ‘feelings’ of their audiences” (1994: 13). Williams clarifies: “all that is lived and made, by a given community in a given period is ... essentially related” (Williams 121 Christopher Kamlongera’s (1988) elucidation of the African integrated conception of art and life, expanded on in Chapter 3, clearly resonates within – and yet through contextualising takes further – this Fiskean concept of the minimisation between ‘text’ and ‘life’ due to relevance (1989).
‘Structure of feeling’ therefore is articulated by and through ‘the artists’ “way of responding to a particular world” which is not felt consciously but rather embodied. In the same way it is accessible to others “not by formal argument or by professional skills, on their own, but by direct experience – a form and a meaning, a feeling and a rhythm – in the work of art, the play as a whole” (1968: 10). In its commitment to ‘the here and now’ it embraces the notion of space-time (Massey 1993) engaged with in the introduction and to be expanded on later in the chapter. This briefly explains ‘Structure of Feeling’ in terms of its formal (as in form) recognition which he recognises as the starting point (1976:9); the political aspect of relating “this general form to a period” (Williams 1969:9) is too embraced in the consistent contextualising of this work. The plays themselves, to be discussed in the following final chapters also provide unique insight into ‘the period’ in which we live.

Popular culture then, according to Fiske, is situated between ‘the power-bloc’ and ‘the people’ which acts as an agent to destabilise or redistribute social power more equitably. As such it is structured in between122 “forces of closure (or domination) [my italics] and openness (or popularity)” (1989: 5). But what is the relationship of ‘the people’ to these structures of dominance? Particularly when ‘the people’ are incarcerated women, in ‘enforced closure’ and the project is about ‘openness’/popularity. And further, how is this ‘destabilisation’ or ‘redistribution’ achieved? Fiske (1989) outlines two ways: resistance and evasion. These concepts become very useful in my later analysis of popular performance at Westville Female Correctional Centre. Fiske explains the relationship between evasion and resistance:

Evasion and resistance are interrelated, and neither is possible without the other: both involve the interplay of pleasure and meaning, but evasion is more pleasurable than meaningful, whereas resistance produces meanings before pleasures. (1989:2)

In addition, Fiske situates evasion as the foundation of resistance since it is about avoiding capture – physically or ideologically. It embraces guerrilla tactics (1989: 9). Again, these are quite intriguing concepts to engage when dealing with popular culture in a prison. How does

122 This concept of the ‘in-between’ which engages a spatial philosophy expanded on by philosophers/ psycho-geographers (de Certeau 1984), cultural geographers (Keith and Pile 1993) and site specific performance artists such as Francis Alÿs (Medina et al 2007). The commonality and interest in ‘in-between’ spaces lies primarily in the exploration of space and power and that “everyday life has a special value when it takes place in the gaps of larger power structures” (During 1993). In between spaces are invisible to the panoptic gaze.
one avoid capture if one is already captured, so to speak? This question has been in part answered in Chapter 3 but is taken further later in the chapter as well as in Chapters 5 and 6.

This resistance, when engaging popular culture in within consumer capitalist societies, is semiotic. It is at the level of meaning – not to be found in the text itself but only in “social relations and in intertextual relations” (Fiske 1989:3). Essentially it is about controlling the meanings of one’s life. Fiske argues that this control of meaning is necessary for a sense of self (empowerment) which in turn is vital for social action “even at the micro-level” (Fiske 1989: 10). Discussion in the final chapters will prove that in many respects this is so – particularly at the level of identity construction engaged in Chapter 6, however as the plays themselves are African popular culture, there are instances where the resistance is embodied in the text, the primary example of this (The Justice for Women Campaign 2001) is discussed in Chapter 5.

Fiske’s proposition is that rather than radical or revolutionary change, popular culture, from his perspective is about “making do within and against the system, rather than opposing it directly; [the tactics of the subordinate] are concerned with improving the lot of the subordinate rather than changing the system that dominates them” (Fiske 1989: 11). It is Fiske’s contention that within Western patriarchal capitalism the “interior resistance” (1989:12) of popular culture, which erodes the system and promotes action at the micro-political level, meets the needs of the people more effectively than radical action. While it is not the position of this thesis to disregard radical action, findings to be discussed in the following chapters do reveal the validity of this statement in terms of the appropriation of performance in Westville Female Correctional Centre.

**Cosmetic Economy**

The theory of popular culture as outlined by John Fiske (1989) is firmly situated within a consumer capitalist economy. I have argued previously in the chapter for the inclusion of the post-apartheid South African economy into this fold. While battling unique pressures such as high levels of unemployment and thus poverty\(^\text{123}\) not experienced by the West, it has

\(^{123}\) According to the Labour Force Survey conducted and published by Statistics South Africa (March 2007) the unemployment rate has remained virtually unchanged since March 2001 and currently sits at 25.5% ([www.statssa.gov.za](http://www.statssa.gov.za)) of the total population. However this translates as some “41% of working age people” (Frye 2006: 2). Isobel Frye of The National Labour and Economic Institute (NALEDI) argues, “Levels of
nevertheless embraced its motto of ‘business first’. Van der Westhuizen (2007) argues that this has protected white power and created a buffer black middle-class. Nevertheless, this is not the economy of the Correctional Centre. The prison is no democracy, which is the political context that informs Fiske’s (1989) analysis (however sceptical one may be of ‘democracy’ in the West). Its apparent applicability within the duel economies (legal and illegal; monetary/symbolic and barter) of the Correctional Centre makes an interesting comment around the relative agency of ‘the people’ in Western democracies vis-à-vis those in a third world Correctional Centre.

Further, my observation has shown that prison economies are gendered. Objects of value differ, as do the unofficial economic operations. A detailed discussion goes outside the scope of this research, but it worth a brief mentioning particularly in terms of establishing ‘value’/ ‘what is valued’ in Westville Female which feeds into later analysis in Chapter 6.

In terms of economic operations the Numbers gang structure which dominates the male Correctional Centres (and described in the introduction) has established within it the control of the unofficial prison economy primarily through the 26s. This gang both maximises on the official economy (DCS payment for services rendered for example) and the ‘tit for tat’ barter system (what will you give/ do for me for this cigarette?) that operates in prison.

In order to curb crime in the Correctional Centres, in 2004 the DCS banned offenders from carrying cash and officials from carrying bags into the Correctional Centre (personal communication Dominic Zulu and Pooben Pillay July 2007). Currently, instead of cash all offenders are issued a ‘cash card’ that family and friends can ‘top up’ as can the DCS for payment. They can use this to purchase phone cards or sweets from the tuck-shop for example. However, although this may have curbed corruption by Correctional Centre officials, this has unfortunately done little to curb the economic violence in the male

poverty and unemployment in South Africa are critically high, despite the countries status as an upper middle income country” (2006: 1). Further she reports that in 2002, 23.8% of South Africans were living on less that $2 (approximately R14) a day and 10.5% were living on less than $1 a day (Frye 2006:1).

124 Some offenders are employed by the DCS. In Female Correctional Centre, Medium sentenced offenders only are allowed to work; however they earn a pittance – between R7 and R79 / month. This is reviewed every 6 months although there is no guarantee of increased remuneration. Women used to send this money home to help take care of children on the outside. Now with the cash-card system they cannot. However there is a small government gratuity provided for the children of imprisoned parents.
Correctional Centres by the offenders themselves (personal communication Dominic Zulu and Pooben Pillay July 2007).

The cash card has simply come to symbolise cash – just as money itself is symbolic. Thus this has replaced cash as the means through which economic violence and control can be exacted. More powerful offenders will intimidate weaker and or wealthier offenders into getting the ‘victim’ offenders families to top up the ‘bully’ offenders card.

According to numerous discussions with Female offenders on this subject and eight years of observation\textsuperscript{125}, intimidation of this kind is rare in Westville Female. This is attributed to the relevant weakness of the gangs there. This is of course not to say that there are not bullies in the Correctional Centre and that power games are not played, however without the infrastructure of the gangs individuals have limited power. This makes economic exchange – and the social survival strategies connected to that exchange – more centred on interpersonal relationships: ‘If you are nice to me then maybe I’ll give you a cigarette.’ However just as on the outside, gifts are also used to gain favour/power\textsuperscript{126} and gifts are also manipulated/persuaded out of people.

When I first started working in the Correctional Centre, offenders would occasionally ask me for things. My access to the outside world was a popular prospect not to be passed up. It is illegal to bring anything into the Correctional Centre for offenders. Engagement in any such activity would not only seriously jeopardise the project but could result in criminal charges. The first time I was asked I felt extremely compromised and unsure how to respond. I was an opportunity, but I was also being challenged. The process of the interventions deliberately deconstructed the binary between ‘one’ and ‘other’ – I was being asked to literally put my money where my mouth was. However the thought of doing time always sharpened my senses and I found a way to refuse. When I did (and I always did) they never took it personally. I was surprised how casually the issue was dropped often leaving me standing there wondering if I had just imagined the whole thing.

\textsuperscript{125} In the five consecutive years of interventions, gang related issues have never come up as a suggestion by female offenders to explore in the PPT. The gangs seem simply not to be an issue and this has been repeatedly confirmed by the offenders themselves – most recently in March 2008. This is very different to the Youth and Medium B Correctional Centres where gang related issues have been raised as an area for debate (Youth Centre August 2002) and remain a key element of consideration when working in those Correctional Centres.

\textsuperscript{126} Example to be discussed in Chapter 6.
What is of particular significance however are the kinds of things that individual women would ask me for. Although I have on two occasions been asked for books, which lead me to getting books donated to start the library in Female Correctional Centre, value and desire was primarily cosmetic: A compact mirror, acne cream, moisturiser, shoes and hair accessories. When my answer was consistently ‘no – sorry’ the asking stopped; however a clear pattern had emerged. This is what the women wanted. This was the objective of their creative manoeuvring.

Questioning why, provided insight into understanding what motivated the women – what they desired and thus led me to useful conclusions around how the women have appropriated Prison Theatre in Westville Female Correctional Facility: Not primarily to change the system that dominates them (Fiske 1989:11), but rather a will to transform. A reinvention for the purpose of feeling good about oneself – perhaps even learning to love one’s self – inside and out. The final chapters explore this proposition.

I will now engage notions of popular culture, as it is understood within an African context.

**Views of the field**

It is a harsh style… it is a vigorous style, alive with rhythms, struck through and through with bursting life, it is full of colour too, bronzed sun baked and violent…it expresses above all a hand-to-hand struggle and it reveals the need that man has to liberate himself from a part of his being which already contained the seeds of decay. (Fanon 1965/ 1990: 177)

In her seminal text *African popular culture* (1997) Karin Barber, in the opening chapter attempts to define the field. Extending her (1987) argument she appropriates the western tripartite model of the arts: traditional/popular/elite, and adapts it to an African context. In the following section I will précis her analysis, drawing on relevant post-colonial literature to expand the discussion (Fanon 1965/ 1990; Ngugi 1986/2006). This will supersede a detailing of points of departure between popular culture in western versus African societies demonstrating how the African context demands the incorporation of certain other elements when engaging popular culture.

Western study – and acknowledgement – of African culture, as Barber points out, has until recently orientated itself on a binary system of ‘traditional’ and ‘elite’. Popular cultural
forms therefore have been disregarded or categorically marginalized to “a vague, shapeless, undefined space, demarcated only by what [they are] not” (1997: 1).

This binarising of cultural forms in Africa has, Barber argues, risen “in conditions defined by the extension of global capitalism on the one hand and the assertion of cultural nationalism by African elites on the other” (1997: 1). Traditional art, such as masks and totems, which is seen as ‘timeless’, ‘authentic’ and ‘static’ is given (monetary) value based on how successfully it can be detached from its social context (Barber 1997). Westernised/elite art such as acclaimed novel *The famished road* (Okri 1993) – although ‘located’ in Africa – is judged similarly. Therefore both forms, as recognised by ‘the centre’ cannot escape the liberal humanist\(^\text{127}\) judgements of ‘the centre’ as defined within the dictates of global capitalism. And both contribute to the perpetuation of essentialist (and romantic) conceptions of ‘the African’ and ‘African identity’.

In addition, ‘excellent’ examples of traditional and elite African culture are viewed as proof of the civilisation of the native, both in the idealised past and global present. For this reason, the African elite (Fanon’s ‘African intellectual’ (1965)) are implicated in upholding this binary. Ngugi Wa Thiongo, in his influential book *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature* (1986/2006) engages the notion of ‘elite’ literature as perpetuating the imperialist tradition. The propagation of this tradition being the African elite – or as he describes them “the flag-waving native ruling classes” (Ngugi 2006: 2).

In writing *On National culture* in *The wretched of the earth* (1965/1990) Fanon explains the post-colonial conditions that lead to a fervent desire in the African intellectual to reclaim a past ‘civilisation’. In giving the past, exemplified through traditional artefacts\(^\text{128}\), back its

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\(^{127}\) This of course recognizes that Liberal Humanism exists today alongside the cultural relativism of postmodernity (Kershaw 2004) but that in embracing the views and values of the dominant classes it remains hegemonically powerful.

\(^{128}\) Perhaps the most notable example of an artifact which ‘civilises’ the African past is the golden rhinoceros found at Mapungupwe, northern Limpopo province, South Africa. The kingdom which was a precursor of Great Zimbabwe existing between 1200 and 1300 AD is situated on and around a giant dome shaped rock at the confluence of the Limpopo and Zambezi rivers and so the boarders of Zimbabwe and Botswana. Archeologists discovered the rhinoceros in a vertical burial site on the giant rock itself. The placement of the valuable object, amongst others, in the tomb signifies a royal grave. As such it has been ascertained that this was the first societal structuration along class lines (royals on the hill, ‘the people’ down below) and thus evidence of ‘civilisation’ in Africa. The rhinoceros itself is proof of trade existing in the region far earlier than originally surmised (personal conversations with guides at the Mapungupwe site December 2005).
value (Fanon 1990: 170), the African intellectual can then affirm self worth (Barber 1997: 1). Although writing in 1965, Fanon’s observations were prophetic. Thabo Mbeki’s *African Renaissance* proposed at a speech presented at the United Nations on 8 April 1998 (www.unu.edu/unupress/mbeki.html), echoes precisely (in language more colonial than the coloniser) the impulse that Fanon was writing about over 30 years previously.

But whence and whither this confidence? I would dare say that that confidence, in part, derives from a rediscovery of ourselves, from the fact that, perforce, as one would who is critical of oneself, we have had to undertake a voyage of discovery into our own antecedents, our own past, as Africans. And when archaeology presents daily evidence of an African primacy in the historical evolution to the emergence of the human person described in science as homo-sapiens, how can we be but confident that we are capable of effecting Africa’s rebirth?

However, although Fanon understands this impulse (1990: 169) he rightly points out that “the efforts of the native to rehabilitate himself [in this way] and to escape from the claws of colonialism are logistically inscribed from the same point of view as that of colonialism” (Fanon 1990: 170). Further, “the native intellectual who has gone far beyond the domains of Western culture [to the birth of mankind no less] and who has got it into his head to proclaim the existence of another culture never does so in the name of Angola or of Dahomey. The culture which is affirmed is African culture” (Fanon 1990: 170). This is clearly evident in Mbeki’s *African Renaissance* and subsequent speeches such as “I am an African” (www.unu.edu/unupress/mbeki). If there is any true ambition for ‘liberation’ from the colonisation of the mind, adopting this approach according to Fanon, is to “go up a blind alley” (Fanon 1990: 172) for “you will never make colonialism blush for shame by spreading out little-known cultural treasures under its eyes” (Fanon 1990: 180)!

A search for a truly liberatory cultural expression, is to recognise the culture of ‘the people’ in ‘the present’ and so a return to the elusive ‘popular culture’ as manifest through a ‘structure of feeling’ (Williams 1968). Defining popular culture as ‘national culture’ Fanon attempts a description:

A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people *in the sphere of thought* [my italics] to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence. A national culture in under-developed countries should therefore take its place at the very heart of the struggle for freedom. (1990: 188)
Liberation struggles at the national and grassroots levels have and continue to be galvanised through African popular culture (Kerr 1995; Steadman 1994); although what is the situation post-independence – in the ‘post’-colony? For cultural workers, ‘liberation’ is now more equated with social change (Barber 1997: 119), or as explained earlier the realisation/exploration of alternatives but is this the primary impetus behind popular culture? In the June 2007 national strike of teachers, nurses and municipal workers in South Africa, popular song was (rather amusingly) used to voice dissatisfaction with the current economic policies through personal critique: uMbeki unekhanda elibukhuni /Nenhliziyo ebukhuni /Nesisu esikhulu /Newewe encane /Eshaya ikhwela. This translates as “Mbeki you are very stubborn. You have a terrible heart, a fat stomach with a small penis that blows a tune like a whistle” (Sunday Tribune June 17 2007: 24).

In his chapter ‘The aesthetics of vulgarity’ Achille Mbembe (2001: 102 – 141) confirms and attempts to explain this postcolonial sub-Saharan form of popular expression. The issue of whether the crude humour of the postcolony (and indeed the working class of the world) is an expression of active ‘resistance’ or simply a manifestation of hostility towards authority is an area of contestation – I would suggest it certainly expresses the desire for social change if not the will. Yet, for Mbembe it is of secondary importance (2001: 108). In the post-colony ‘the commandement’ (2001: 24 – 58) or ruling elite “aspires to act as a total cosmology for its subjects – yet owing to the very oddity of this cosmology, popular humour causes it, often quite unintentionally, to capsize” (Mbembe 2001: 109). What gives rise to conflict, he writes “is not the frequent references to the genital organs of those in power, but rather the way individuals, by their laughter, kidnap power and force it, as if by accident to examine its own vulgarity” (Mbembe 2001: 109). As Johannes Fabian points out, popular culture is not simply about responses to conditions and questions, nor did it come about that way. Rather “it asks questions and creates conditions” (Fabian 1997: 19). This concept is relevant and applicable to the object of this study and the thesis will demonstrate how this occurs.

However not all ‘culture’ (that which involves meaning) made by ‘the people’ is liberatory, in reality much is imbued with false (oppressor) consciousness (Freire 1996). Numerous theorists (Barber 1997; Drag 1993; Etherton 1982; Kerr 1995; Steadman 1994) have engaged this problematic and attempted to differentiate ‘people’s culture’ from ‘popular culture’.
Simply, ‘people’s culture’ is that which comes spontaneously from the people but reflects “a mixture of values from the people and those from the dominant class” (Etherton 1982:321). As such it is taken up and inserted into the ruling culture and becomes domesticating. Popular culture, on the other hand and in keeping with the current argument, is distinguished “as part of the larger process of political conscientising” (Drag 1993:155). It is self-conscious in its projections of aspirations (Kerr 1995: x).

Yet while David Kerr (1995) and others (Drag 1993; Steadman 1994) are sympathetic to this distinction, in practice “the search for ideological purity can become almost masochistically self-indulgent” (Kerr 1995:x). Kerr (1995) prefers to incorporate a variety of genres, including some slightly more ‘tainted’ with ruling class rhetoric. Marianne Drag (1993) in writing on popular theatre in Zimbabwe, also finds the distinction slightly problematic stating “the way I see it [popular theatre in Zimbabwe] encompasses both meanings” (1993: 155). The case of Westville Female Correctional Centre is case in point. It too “encompasses both meanings” (1993: 155), although has predominantly been about conscientisation and social change129.

As such ‘popular culture’ in Africa may be “explicitly committed art” (Barber 1997:2) with an overt political and liberatory intention. It may also deal with concerns and problems and offer solutions (Barber 1997:2). It may err on the side of the ‘populist’ – or escapist (Kerr 1995:x). However there are certain traits in African popular culture that are more or less consistent. I will attempt to address this by systematically and briefly exploring the creative process and product.

African popular culture is typically created collectively. It is seldom the work of one individual. In this sense there is no author. There is collective vision and collective ownership. This is perhaps less so with works of art but is certainly true of the performative genres: music, theatre, story-telling and dance. It is also consumed collectively this goes for media, such as television as well as low-tech cultural products.

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129 Although this has been problematised by Ross Kidd and Martin Byram (1982), in effect Popular Participatory Theatre through the aspect of ‘intervention’ (Mda 1993) discussed in Chapter 3 has attempted to address its / popular theatre’s potential for domestication.
However, in extending the problematic of ‘the people’ in (South) Africa in terms of the blurring class categorisation, there is equally “no one to one correspondence between class and culture” (Barber 1997:4). Viet Erlman using the South African case-study states “you cannot deduce an individual’s position in the social process, his or her class position, from the musical forms, styles and genres he or she performs listens to or patronises” (1991: 4). The drama group at Westville Female was formed of women from disparate locations: urban / rural and differing levels of education (Standard 1 up to University Educated). All the women knew the same songs, dances and games.

In focusing specifically on popular theatre, most theorists would agree that “Popular theatre works to facilitate independence, to assist communities in a process of building a capacity for autonomous self-development” (Prentki 2000:200). In addition, popular culture – and by extension – popular theatre involves a fusion of styles and/or genres, as has been exemplified in the chapter on Prison Theatre in Westville Female Correctional Centre. In this sense it is about appropriation and transformation, not simply cultural consumption. However there is some dispute around what forms/genres can be included for it still to constitute African popular theatre. Drag (1993:155) seems to suggest that the dramatic expressions that constitute it must exist at “grass roots level” whereas Christopher Kamlongera and others (Leis 1979 in Mda 1993:46) are happy that it takes “the good from international theatre practice and …indigenous forms” since it should “enrich and expand the people’s own forms of expression” (Leis 1979 in Mda 1993:46). To my understanding, the latter seems more in line with the postmodern syncretism it embraces.

Most fundamentally it is theatre that is “aimed at the whole community, not just those who are educated” (Mda 1993: 46). David Kerr (1982 in Mda 1993:47) offers a tabled description of popular theatre vis-à-vis literary (elite) theatre. Its main tenets are that it is primarily an improvised, collective creation that is free, involves audience participation and post-performance analysis. All these elements were actively embraced by the Westville Prison Theatre.

In style it is entertaining, full of humour – often appearing to laugh in the face of suffering. As has been alluded to it is crude and loud. It may appear ‘unsophisticated’ and ‘simplistic’

130 Refer to Chapter 2 for more detail regarding the demographics of the group.
to the judgemental eye; but a closer look reveals that it concerns the stuff of life. The content therefore is about things which matter to people (Barber 1997:2) – in the moment, but also indicative of broader struggles.

**Points of departure and cross-over**

In my appropriation of both Western cultural theory and more anthropological focus of African popular culture in my study of Prison Theatre and Prison as Theatre, I will here focus on points of departure as well as points of cross-over. Some of these may have already become apparent in the chapter thus far; however this section provides a more detailed dissection.

In John Fiske’s (1989) classic text *Reading the popular*, he analyses popular culture in the West. According to Fiske popular culture is made by subordinated people out of the resources that are provided by the social system that disempowers them (1989). In Fiske’s framework, this is consumer capitalism coming out of a postmodern trajectory of the rise in mass communication/ technology. Although this paradigm shift has not by-passed Africa (in particular South Africa) and African popular culture engages the notion of appropriation by ‘the people’, this is not the African reality that has grown popular culture. Here, it articulates with traditional African culture and present day global and local economics/politics for both form and content. And so the ‘stuff’ of popular culture in these contexts while demonstrating some similarity has been primarily different.

Nevertheless, although popular culture in these contexts is different, popular culture in both contexts is a response to the here and now (space/time) and so reflects Raymond Williams (1968) ‘structure of feeling’. Drag (1993) in an unwitting appropriation of Fiske’s usage speaks of the ‘relevance’ in popular culture within an African context: A clear point of cross-over.

Another point of cross-over concerns the ‘quality’ (not as an aesthetic judgement but rather as a descriptor) of popular culture in both spaces. Although as has previously been mentioned popular culture in consumer capitalism engages technology and new media more fully and African popular culture tends to be more ‘low tech’, both engage below the radar techniques of crude humour, sexual innuendo and violence to defy social control in a way that is
pleasurable and entertaining. It is deliberately disobedient and therefore counter-hegemonic. Further, both Fiske (1989) and Mbembe (2001) would agree that while this vulgarity is intentional and reactive, it is not always purposely political – although it of course may be read as such.

Yet there are subtle differences for which Fiske’s argument presents a good starting point. Fiske proposes as I have already stated that “taste is social control and class interest masquerading as a naturally finer sensibility” (1989: 6). The ‘peoples’ subversion of that taste is a rejection of the values that the elite present as superior. Mbembe’s presentation, relating very specifically to context, takes it further. Within the postcolony the lascivious imagery evoked in the humour; first, is typically directed at specific individuals (the president for example) or ‘types’ (in the women’s plays it was inevitably an abusive patriarch) who represent the commandement. It is not a general characteristic of all popular culture. Second, the humour is not just a negation of values but a mirror. It exposes the violence and ridiculous excess of the commandement, who are under the illusion that they are playing the part of civility. Further, they are under the illusion that ‘the people’ have embraced this illusion as ‘the truth’. The humour reveals that they have not. In this sense, while it may not be resistance per say, it is a very meaningful expression.

When looking at the role of popular culture however, one point of departure would appear to be that African popular culture as post-colonial (in which I include post-apartheid), has been linked more directly to the overt conflict of liberation struggles (Fanon 1990; Kerr 1995) and social change (Barber 1987, 1997). It is mobilising in form and content. As will be demonstrated in the following chapters which look at examples of the plays themselves, popular culture in African societies is often more consciously – although not exclusively – concerned with matters of resistance and liberation. At least in the sense of an overt ‘speaking back to’ – to use Mbembe’s term – the commandement (2001: 24 – 58).

Popular culture in the West is too a site of struggle (Fiske 1989) made by the subordinate who resent their subordination (Fiske 1989); however where African popular culture is

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131 Within a Western frame political satire such as the British comedy television series ‘Spitting image’ which ridiculed politicians in form and content through portraying them as puppets, could be considered similar; yet to what extent this rather sophisticated form created by and aimed at the middle classes is popular culture is again an area of debate.
responding to a typically coercive terrain, popular culture within capitalism “is structured by the attempt of the ruling class to win hegemony and by the forms of opposition to this endeavour” (Bennett 1986: 352). Culture, as a process of producing meanings from our social experience, can only circulate in relation to the prevailing social system (Fiske 1989).

The prevailing system is therefore pivotal to how popular culture manifests. Within an individualist culture, as perpetuated by capitalism and the liberal humanist centrality of ‘man’ (outlined in Chapter 1), coupled with a post-modern incredulity towards grand-narratives (Hebdige 1993:71) means that mass mobilisation is a less common occurrence. Consequently resistance against the power-bloc, as a common role of popular culture in both instances, is more ‘interior’ and at the level of the meaning. Although Barber does acknowledge that African popular culture is about meaning (1997: 5) and Fiske is not averse to the idea of popular culture concerning a broader issue of ‘social change’ (Barber 1987; 1997); he sees this change filtering from the bottom up affecting the ‘micro’ rather than the ‘macro’ -political.

African popular culture is far more communal; as stated it is created collectively and consumed collectively. Resistance is often – although not always – overt or ‘exterior’, criticism: direct as exemplified in the song about Mbeki. Although the arsenal of cultural forms that the women possessed were indisputably African and therefore collective, prisons are individualistic by design (Foucault 1977), for the purposes of overt power and control. Little space for ‘exterior resistance’ exists within prison architecture. As will be argued, the theatre provided such a space with interesting consequences; however in the daily performance as prisoner, whose objective is survival, prisons are less impervious to the erosive and evasive resistance Fiske describes. Therefore, in looking at Prison Theatre in Westville Female Correctional Centre and the larger arena of Prison as Theatre, both trajectories of popular culture need to be considered.
The zone between

The concept to be engaged with here is of central importance to this thesis as a whole. It is through the formulation of this theory that I am able to link the space-time\textsuperscript{132} (Massey 1993) to the conceptual, demonstrating what is essentially an engagement with the politics of space-time/place and the ability of form and intention (of Prison Theatre) to impact its nature. As Pat Jess and Doreen Massey argue, “the identities of places are a product of social actions [my italics] and of the ways in which people construct their own representations of particular places” (1995: 134).

To begin with the tangibility of bricks and mortar: Kershaw writes of the space which typically houses theatre:

A theatre building is not so much the empty space of the creative artist, nor a democratic institution of free speech, but rather a kind of social engine that helps to drive an unfair system of privilege. (1999: 31)

It is clearly Kershaw’s intention to highlight (traditional) theatre – and the space it occupies – as an instrument for ideological and thus social control.

This argument extends to some degree the fundamental proposal presented by Augusto Boal (1979) around “Aristotle’s coercive system of tragedy” (1979.ix). He states in the foreword to Theatre of the oppressed: “

The theatre is a weapon…for this reason the ruling classes strive to take permanent hold of the theatre and utilise it as a tool for domination. (1979.ix).

What Boal is essentially arguing is that through the establishment of the audience/actor/active/passive binary by the “aristocracy” (1979.ix), ‘the people’ became unwittingly docile receptacles for the values of the elite in the maintenance of their hegemony.

\textsuperscript{132} Please see the introduction for a recap on my adoption of Massey’s (1993:141-161) gendered conception of space-time.
However, where Boal’s primary focus is ‘form’, Kershaw’s concern is the space-time thereby engaging with that which while enclosed in (the) concrete, is slightly more abstract. Further, with its inclusion of the human element which invokes place since “it is people themselves who make places, but not always in circumstances of their own choosing” (Jess and Massey 1995:134), it is dealing with the level of feeling and emotion, of possibility and agency – of meaning. Space-time/place must therefore be considered – not natural – but cultural: “That is to say, it is part of, and is produced by, the systems of meaning through which we make sense of the world and thus is open to being reworked and transformed” (Hall 1995:178).

In his argument regarding theatre as a ‘space of domination’ (1999:31), Kershaw ironically for this thesis, draws on Foucault’s (1977) investigation into ‘the birth of the prison’ and his famed appropriation of Bentham’s panoptic modality of power (Kershaw 1999: 130). Thus the question of this thesis is extended momentarily, not simply to ‘Prison Theatre, Prison as Theatre’, but Theatre as Prison.

By way of explanation, Foucault describes the socio-cultural paradigm shift which brought about a change in the exacting of power and control: “In a society in which the principle elements are no longer the community and public life, but on one hand, private individuals and, on the other, the state, relations can be regulated only in a form that is the exact reverse of spectacle” (1977: 216). That being the increasing intervention of the state in all aspects of social life with the least amount of effort such that the architecture or fabric of the city/building conspires to make it possible to observe “a great multitude of men [and women] at the same time” (1977: 217) thereby controlling them.

The antithetical binary being proposed here is that of surveillance versus spectacle, which Foucault describes as “a predominance of public life, the intensity of festivals, sensual proximity” (1977: 216). Clearly, popular participatory theatre, with its marriage of

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133 Research done in Brazil in January/February 2004 (video footage of Forum with CTO and PPP 13 March 2003; personal communication with Magno Barros and Alex Britto 22 January 2004) revealed that Boal often conducts Forums in theatres. This has always struck me as inconsistent with the Forum process, which purports to deconstruct the binaries of actor/audience. The challenges of overcoming the psychological power of the space seem overwhelming and counter-productive.

134 My argument in Chapter’s 5 and 6 regarding the use of theatre by the women for the management of emotional states cannot be extricated from this argument regarding the impact of space on feeling.
‘dialogue’, which encourages public life, and performance, which is both festive and sensual can be considered in terms of this definition: spectacle.

Thus the Prison Theatre projects created a place for spectacle to occur from within the prototypical panopticon – the prison itself. My contention therefore is that these interventions were able to invert the panopticon and thus divert the “disciplinary gaze” (1977: 174). Not simply to return the gaze; but through their focus on both prison and societal issues they were able to extend the gaze to beyond the prison walls effectively dissolving them. It is my conclusion that this, coupled with ‘evasion’ (Fiske 1989), enabled a personally transformative experience compounded by the ‘rehearsal for change’ that the theatre facilitated. This is why consistent feedback from offenders’ post-performance emphasised the theatre as conjuring the experience of freedom.

Before drawing space-time connections which bring in the notion of the in-between; it becomes necessary to highlight the gendered significance of this occurrence. Drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis, Feminist Film theorist Laura Mulvey in her classic essay (1975) ‘Visual pleasure and narrative cinema’ makes a compelling argument for the patriarchal imposition implicit in ‘the gaze’. The gaze is inevitably male and objectifies the female other.

John Berger interestingly came to similar conclusions in 1972 with his highly influential ‘Ways of seeing’ (1972):

One might simplify this by saying: men act and women appear [his italics]. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women towards themselves. The surveyor of women in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight. (1972:47)

Again, the gaze is male. He is the surveyor – to the extent that a look which objectifies, even if coming from a woman, is male. The panopticon of the prison, the architecture of surveillance (Foucault 1977), is thus a patriarchal construct. To divert that gaze is therefore a feminist achievement since freedom from this gaze is freedom from objectification. Incarcerated women may not typically be sexually objectified but are nevertheless ‘othered’
through a gaze that is most definitely masculine. The extent to which they are objectified and ‘othered’ due to their lack of conformity to the patriarchal norm, is discussed in the following chapter.

To connect back to the space-time issue of surveillance vs spectacle (Foucault 1977). I propose that in creating spectacle in a space typified by surveillance you are neither ‘one’ nor the ‘other’, you are in ‘the zone between’ and therefore invisible in your visibility. Spatially this is a powerful position. John Fiske (1989) and Karin Barber (1997) both allude to it in their discussion of popular culture, which is why this concept is so integral to the thesis.

Karin Barber describes African popular culture as situated in “the zone between” traditional and elite art (1997:1). She bemoans the fact that this has meant that it has occupied a space that is ‘vague’ and ‘shapeless’ demarcated by ‘what it is not’ (1997:1). This has rendered it invisible. But invisible to whom? Not to those who are producing the work. Not to ‘the people’ for whom the work is made. Invisibility from ‘the gaze’ (male, colonial, western, academic?) I would argue is nothing to lament, it is its strength. It is necessary for it to flourish. Popular culture is birthed in the zone between, it is here that “social actions” (Jess and Massey 1995:134) can occur which from within and below (Fiske 1989) (and occasionally as radical cultural action) can facilitate transformation.

Within the area of popular participatory theatre, much focus is given by academics to issues around margins (and hence marginality) and peripheries. Tim Prentki’s concern described in Chapter 3 that “popular theatre should migrate out of the ghetto’s of ‘fringe’… to announce itself as the new mainstream” (2000:199). Paul Heritage (personal communication 11 May 2007) claims to be facilitating just that: “I am interested in the energy of the periphery. I am trying to bring the periphery to the centre – but in a way that keeps the integrity of the work”. I am not convinced that it is possible to keep entirely the ‘integrity’ of popular culture by making it ‘the new mainstream’. In Fiske’s argument this would render it no longer popular culture since popular culture must always exist in-between “forces of closure (or domination) and openness (or popularity)” (1989:5). The energy of the centre is one of domination, intentionally or not. Absorption into it is to render its politics impotent.
bell hooks (1991) identifies the margins as a place where radical practice can occur: “For me, this space of radical openness is a margin – a profound edge. Locating oneself there is difficult yet necessary. It is not a ‘safe’ place. One is always at risk. One needs a community of resistance” (1991:149). Conceptually I embrace hooks’ recognition of the power of ‘marginal’ space; however I propose that these margins or peripheries in fact don’t exist at all, at least not in the way that Prentki and Heritage – and even hooks are contending.

Although the space-time conception or perception of a margin may be an important part of political identification (Feminist for example); my proposition is that the notion of a periphery is problematic: Its definition implies a fixed connection to its opposite – ‘the centre’ and the hierarchical associations implicit in that. It fails to acknowledge the geographic (and thus cultural) reality that the notion of a margin or periphery is always relational. To take Durban as a geographical example (never forgetting the politics of that geography), The shopping mall Musgrave Centre is considered ‘centre’ to suburbia; yet it is peripheral to the city – arguably the ‘real’ centre. Cato Manor is considered a periphery yet to people living in outer lying peri-urban or rural areas, it is very much a centre. And so we continue. This dissolution of the binary is to acknowledge existence of ‘the in-between’. This radical space that hooks seeks I would argue is therefore not ‘the margins’ but ‘the zone between’ – unfixed, uncontained, fluid, dangerous and full of possibility.

Further, as I will discuss in the following chapter, the so-called first world/third world binary which is essentially describing a centre/ margin dynamic is also geographically dissolving. Third exists within – ‘between’ – First: In ghettos, in the bodies of people who wear their identity on their skin and walk the places of privilege and power, creating their own meanings and culture onto the places as they move through them.

In conclusion, I am not disputing the unequal distribution of power that silences, that judges, that takes, that objectifies. I am not suggesting that this is something that I am prepared to watch perpetuated. What I am suggesting however is that often well intentioned people of the centre don’t see – or want to see – the power and activity of ‘the people’ in the creation of culture and in the innovative survival of everyday life. Prison Theatre provided one opportunity for the women at Westville to negotiate and create; but the energy of the in-between I am confident would have revealed itself in some other form had I not been there.
CHAPTER 5

Offensive Women:
Women in prison / women of the third world act out

Let us pay attention now, we said to women: let men and women make a conscious act of attention when women speak; let us insist of kinds of process which allow more women to speak; let us get back to earth – not as a paradigm for ‘women’ but as a place of location. (Rich 1984/ 2003: 32)

And . . Action!

Imprisoned women and women of the third world share commonality: they are offensive to global hegemonies of race, class and gender. Thus, when investigating third world women in prison, the multi-layering of oppression becomes quite overwhelming: the triple oppression that characterises the majority of women in South Africa in terms of the interconnections between gender, race and class (Davis, 1984; hooks, 1989) here include being stripped of civil liberties (Agozino, 1997). However, it is far from the intention of this thesis to monolithise the women at Westville in terms of western perceptions of ‘underdevelopment’ and ‘oppression’ that Chandra Mohanty (1991a: 6) argues “freeze third world women in time, space and history” thereby negating the everyday dynamic meaning of their lives. To the contrary, I hope, through my narratives, to reinvigorate and animate these ‘offensive’, ‘offending’ women. Further, through the narrative of this chapter, it is my aim not only to outline the theory of women of the postcolony generally and incarcerated women in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal specifically; but I intend to illuminate some powerful examples of resistance and revolution through popular participatory theatre and in their daily lives. In this sense they embrace the second meaning of offensive that being “of or designed for attack; aggressive or attacking” (The New Penguin English dictionary 2000). This remains the focus for the remainder of the thesis.

However as with the postcolonial feminist project generally, conceptual maps that are drawn will of necessity have to be redrawn as new knowledge develops and transforms the way we
understand questions of history, consciousness and agency (Mohanty 1991). Investigation into the culture and identities by and of third world women is contradictory and conflicting terrain (Spivak 1998) implying the need for “reconceptualising resistance, community and agency in daily life” (Mohanty 1991a: 3).

In this chapter, I first outline some of the key debates in post-colonial / third world feminism (Lewis and Mills 2003; Mohanty et al 1991; Spivak 1998; Spivak 1999), which describe the broader politics of the women in Westville Correctional Centre. I will then move in to focus more specifically on issues of incarcerated women mapping a global terrain before generally and explicitly drawing attention to the parallels between the theory and the specific example. Two examples of cultural action for liberation (Freire 1970) at Westville Female Correctional Centre, will serve to develop my argument vis-à-vis the broader operations of power within the Correctional Centre and society at large.

**Feminism in the third world**

“Definitions,” writes Toni Morrison in her award winning *Beloved* (1988: 190) “belong to the definers – not the defined.” In engaging Feminism as a discourse this is significant; however when carving out an even more distinctive (African) post-colonial or third world feminist space, the claiming and naming becomes even more significant.

This engages with postcolonial feminist theory (Mohanty et al 1991; Lewis and Mills 2003); however it must be noted right at the outset that even from within postcolonial feminism ‘African’ (as differentiated from ‘black’) women are grossly underrepresented – both as researchers and research subjects. This is to be distinguished from postcolonial studies whose main contributors are predominantly African and male.

Mohanty, Russo and Torres’ (1991) seminal text on *Third world women and the politics of feminism* covers a broad geography through its chapters: China, the Caribbean, Brazil, the Middle-East, Latin America and African-American communities. Africa although present ‘by proxy’ is effectively absent. Similarly Reina Lewis and Sara Mills 754 page reader on *Feminist postcolonial theory* (2003) has not one essay that engages sub-Saharan Africa.
Under the subheading ‘Harem and the Veil’ there are a couple of essays by North African women on Islam, but this subject hardly speaks for Africa. Again Africa is absent.

This absence points more to a serious lack of feminist research being done by and about (to be as specific as possible) sub-Saharan African women135, than any deliberate exclusion. One forum does exist namely the feminist journal *Agenda: Empowering women for gender equity* (see [www.agenda.org.za](http://www.agenda.org.za)) based in Durban; however there seems to be ceiling for these few researchers. To demonstrate how little feminist studies in Africa is valued – and by extension African women, the Gender Studies department at UKZN, a comparatively well-resourced university excellently positioned to carry out such research only has one permanent member of staff (2007) despite high student numbers. Her role as academic coordinator means that all her efforts must now be put into administration – another good researcher lost. Let us now engage the theory.

Third world feminism (Mohanty et al 1991) or post-colonial feminism (Lewis & Mills 2003) is essentially defined by its relationship to two established bodies of theory and praxis: western feminism on the one hand and ‘post-colonial studies’ on the other. Thus it has engaged in a two-fold project “to racialise mainstream feminist theory and to insert feminist concerns into conceptualisations of colonialism and post-colonialism” (Lewis & Mills 2003: 3).

**Thoughtlessly male**

Lewis and Mills (2003) in their substantial reader on Feminist postcolonial theory, aim to highlight the contributions by feminists including Adrienne Rich (1984), Gayatri Spivak (1985), Chandra Mohanty (1991), bell hooks (1992), Ania Loomba (1993) and many others, to the early and more recent development of critical studies in colonialism, imperialism, race and power that have often (with the exception of Gayatri Spivak) been disregarded. It is far more common, they write, “to see allegiances proffered to the line of male greats… than to acknowledge the contributions of women scholars and activists” (2003:1).

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135 As Chandra Mohanty (1991:4) acknowledges there is a growing body of literature on ‘women in developing countries’. The AIDS pandemic in Sub-Saharan Africa with its inevitable ‘gendered’ aspect has also contributed to this field; however this work is not necessarily feminist “it does not necessarily engage feminist questions”.


Some of the early ‘male greats’ that I must admit to have drawn on in this thesis include Frantz Fanon (1965) Paulo Freire (1970; 1974) and Ngugi Wa Thiongo (1981). and Achille Mbembe (2001). However, their contribution is only useful up to a point due to the often glaring omission of gender concerns\textsuperscript{136}. The binarising of coloniser: colonised is essentially a racial division, thus postcolonial struggles – active and theoretical – have typically been about issues of race\textsuperscript{137} (Fanon 1965, 1986; Ngugi Wa Thiongo 1981) which has sidelined gender concerns. In recognising the complexity of post-colonial relations, more recently male postcolonial theorists such as Achille Mbembe (2001:103) do recognise the binary as a crude oversimplification: “To account for both the mind set and the effectiveness of postcolonial relations of power we need to go beyond the binary categories used in standard interpretations of domination…These oppositions are not helpful, rather they cloud our understanding”.

However, in his discussion of the ‘African self’ and the ‘African subject’ vis-à-vis the ‘Western self’ (2001:1 – 23) the binary is (re)established and ‘men/women’ although grammatically separated in his discussion are in effect merged into one. Thus, although there is clear understanding of complexity around “activity vs. passivity” (2001:103) for example, in terms of identity the overriding tendency is to monolithise. The African is (naturally) male. As a consequence of this tendency, Lewis and Mills (2003) emphasise the need for a separate area of post-colonial feminist studies that acknowledges a different intellectual lineage and focus. Further, from this distinctive position it is able to operate as the ‘gender watchdog’ of mainstream postcolonial theory “in its constant iteration of the necessity to consider gender issues” (2003:2). This thesis aims to contribute to postcolonial feminist studies.

\textit{Thoughtlessly white}

“Feminism”\textsuperscript{138}, as Stuart Hall (1996b: 125) argues has had a profound impact – both as theoretical critique and as a social movement in the decentring of the Cartesian and

\textsuperscript{136} Paulo Freire’s binarising of ‘oppressed’ and ‘oppressor’ coupled with his Marxist orientation has the tendency to overlook questions of gender with his focus on class. Further, in his early work, which this thesis has primarily engaged, there is the assumption of a male subject. My inclusion of postcolonial feminist theory and post-structural theory goes beyond these limitations.

\textsuperscript{137} Freire’s Marxist leaning does try to escape race through his focus on class and issues of poverty.

\textsuperscript{138} Feminism, as has been indicated is not a unified discourse. As Loraine Code (2000: xv) writes in her introduction to the \textit{Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories} “the scope and diversity of feminism(s) are wide, their
sociological subject. It questioned the classic distinction between “‘inside’ and ‘outside’, ‘private’ and ‘public’”\(^{139}\). In its propagation of ‘the personal is political’, it ushered in anti-essentialist conceptions of identity. This is the historical birth, writes Hall “of what came to be known as identity politics – one identity per movement” (1996b: 125).

There can be no doubt that mainstream (read ‘western’/ ‘liberal’) feminism\(^{140}\) – which Hall simply refers to as ‘feminism’, played a pivotal role in the reconceptualising and politicising of identity opening up to political dispute whole new areas of social life (Hall 1996b: 125). However, notions of ‘one identity per movement’ were problematic for black women who had a history of colonial and racist oppression that they experienced with black men. Postcolonial / third world feminism, which shares theoretical accord, but not necessarily focus with post-structuralism\(^{141}\) (as represented by intellectuals such as Stuart Hall, Michel Foucault, and Laurence Grossberg amongst others) was in many ways a response to this predicament.

Further, Western feminism’s focus on the opposing dynamics of patriarchal oppression on the one hand and ‘sisterhood’ (indicating the universalising of women) effectively silenced poor women and women of colour in their naturalisation of ‘women’ as white and middle-class. Adrienne Rich (herself a white middle-class American), voices this concern: “Marginalised though we have been as women, as white and Western makers of theory, we also marginalise others because our lived experience is thoughtlessly white [my italics]” (2003: 34).

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manifestations disparate, complex and changing.” Through shear necessity therefore this thesis is focused specifically on post-colonial feminism, which has some cross over with post-structural feminism. A detailed discussion of western – ‘Liberal’ – feminism therefore goes beyond the scope of this thesis except where it becomes integrated as part of the broader discussion on third world feminism.

\(^{139}\) Western middle-class assumptions around these notions will be engaged with in Chapter 6.

\(^{140}\) As mentioned in the previous footnote feminism is not a unified discourse, therefore the tendency of postcolonial feminist to paint all ‘Western’ feminisms white is quite contentious. However, it is a necessary label to describe those feminists who uncritically adopt a white middle-class hegemonic position insensitive to complexities of race, class and other dynamics. This would be primarily Liberal feminists. Their alignment with democratic principles (equality) has meant an political affinity with white men of power in addition to a familial one (Mohanty 1991). This access to power black and poor women have never enjoyed.

\(^{141}\) Academics such as bell hooks and Angela Davis are however considered both third world/ post-colonial feminists and post-structural feminists as their focus is simultaneously, post-coloniality, feminism and cultural studies. This does appear to be the theoretical approach of this thesis.
Thus, the implicit racism evident in much mainstream feminism (hooks 1992) has demanded a conscious engagement by third world feminists with it. Chandra Mohanty takes up this imperative (1991: 51). For her,

Any discussion of the intellectual and political construction of ‘third world feminisms’ must address itself to two simultaneous projects: the internal critique of hegemonic ‘Western’ feminisms, and the formulations of autonomous, geographically, historically, and culturally grounded feminist concerns and strategies. The first project is one of deconstructing and dismantling; the second, one of building and constructing.

In the above discussion, I engaged in critique of both ‘Western’ feminism and postcolonial studies. My research and the interventions in Westville Female Correctional Centre attempt to address’ the second ‘constructive’ project.

**Cartographies of struggle**

In mapping the cartographies of struggle, Mohanty (1991: 10) outlines the central concerns of third world feminism. First, is the concept of the simultaneity of oppressions (class, race, gender, sexual orientation etc) as fundamental to the experience of social and political marginality and the grounding of feminist politics in the histories of racism and imperialism. Secondly, the fundamental role of the hegemonic state – which I extend to the prison – in delineating the daily lives and survival struggles. Third, she includes, the importance of ‘memory and writing’ in the creation of oppositional agency. Here, I add communally created theatrical creative expression and finally, the conflicts and contradictions that are internal to third world women’s organisations and communities. The commonality of these objectives/ concerns with this particular project situates it theoretically and politically firmly within the ambit of third world / post-colonial feminist discourse.

**Where in the world is the third world?**

Third world feminism is feminism that by its very definition engages the politics of space/ context. As my focus has shown, in engaging the culture of women in prison in Westville, this thesis is acutely aware of the politics of location (Rich 1984) – and by extension the centrality of ‘claiming’ space – physically, personally, politically and creatively. Thus in mapping the terrain, I will start from the outside/in: globe/body in order to move from the inside/out. This essentially demands the asking of two interconnected questions. **Where in**
the world is the third world? And by extension, who is a third world woman? The concept ‘third world’ itself is contentious, however it is perhaps less litigious than the alternative ‘developing’ with its (western capitalist) associations of ‘development’ outlined in Chapter 3.

Historically, notions of ‘third world’ become inextricably connected with notions of ‘post-colony’, as is evidenced in the interchangeability between the definitive ‘third world’ and ‘post-colonial’ feminisms. Mbembe identifies the post-colony as a society on a given historical trajectory – “societies recently emerging from the experience of colonisation and the violence which the colonial relationship involves” (2001: 102). This is useful when acknowledging the specificity and location of this research: a South African Correctional Centre; and the ‘broad problem’ which motivated it: the increase in violence (crime) to and by women.

Nevertheless, it is perhaps more useful to consider for this discussion ‘third world’ as both a term and a concept since, while it retains the spatial emphasis it releases it, from ‘the soil in which our ancestors are buried’. It could be argued, therefore, that ‘Post-colonial’, with its emphasis on ‘time’ (‘historical trajectory’) (Mbembe 2001) traps the space. Although certainly not mutually exclusive it seems to prioritise historicity over the political. It offers more possibilities for analysis in a contemporary ‘globalised’ society and impacts conceptually on deconstructing hierarchical binaries.

On this question, Mohanty (1991) tackles the problematic of a geographic location for the ‘third world’ in a post-industrial society:

Contemporary definitions of the ‘third world’ can no longer have the same geographical contours and boundaries they had for industrial societies. In the post-industrial world, systemic socioeconomic and ideological processes position the people’s of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, as well as ‘minority’ populations (people of color) in the United States and Europe, in similar relationship to the state.

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142 Freire’s definition of colonial violence is ‘dehumanisation’; thus the colonial project vis-à-vis theatre (missionary) and theatre studies (Liberal Humanist) to ‘civilise’ (outlined in Chapters 1 and 3 respectively) can be seen as part of the ‘violence’ since it starts from the premise that ‘colonial subjects’ are not ‘fully human’ (Freire 1970).
Thus, much like the traditionally defined ‘third worlds’ of Africa, Asia, Latin American and the Middle East, where pockets of ‘first’ world exist in a geographically defined ‘third world’ (South Africa being an excellent example), so in a globalised world, pockets of ‘third world’ exist in geographically defined first world spaces (Europe, North America, Australia). The ‘other’ is part of the ‘one’; ‘the one’ is part of ‘the other’143. What this in effect does is release the fixedness of geographic circumscription (and associated power binaries) around ‘third world’ and lodge it in the body itself. Further it allows for the possibility to move beyond notions of ‘the margin’ vs ‘the centre’ which I feel do not fully articulate the complexity of third world political experience or identity construction144. This brings us to the next question ‘Who is a third world woman?’

**Who is a third world woman?**

Within this trajectory, the body – in this case of the third world woman – becomes the site of/for struggle for the interplay of discourses of race, gender, class and culture145, which are, to use the title of Jeanette Winterson’s (1993) novel literally ‘written on the body’146. As will be demonstrated incarcerated third world women (and children) feel this interplay politically and corporeally more than any other identity stratification. It is this recognition of the ‘body politic’ that third world/ post-structural feminists acknowledge in their stress of the interconnectedness of oppression.

Patriarchal domination, they argue, shares an ideological foundation with racism and other forms of group oppression (Davis 1984; hooks 1989, 1993; Mohanty 1991a, 1991b). Drawing on Fanon (1965/1990), Angela Davis (1984: 36) makes the parallel between ‘sexual violence’ against individual women and neo-colonial violence against people and nations since the conditions, which spawn racism, and racist violence, are the very same conditions which encourage sexism and sexist violence. Thus we cannot fully understand the way in which (third world) women are perceived and treated in society – of which the criminal justice system is part – without acknowledging these interconnections. As feminist

143 In Chapter 3 on ‘form’ the extent to which this was able to impact on cultural cross-over was engaged.
144 This debate was engaged in more detail in the previous chapter in ‘the zone between’.
145 The key interlocking power dynamics at play with the women at Westville Correctional Centre were according to my research: gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, age, religion and health. How these are negotiated in the construction of identity and power is the focus for the final chapter of the dissertation.
146 Issues of subjectivity have been engaged with in the methodology.
criminologist Pat Carlen (2002: 3) argues “punishment involves gendered bodies”. Her proposition is a penal reform that acknowledges and accommodates these interconnections in a way that benefits women (Carlen 1990; 2002). Since as Biko Agozino (1997: 17) argues “although race, class and gender relations are different, they are not separable in theory or in practice”. The final analysis chapter will therefore unpack these dynamics as theatrically articulated by the women.

However, while this would appear to be a restrictive determination in fact, it embraces the anti-essentialist conceptions of identity as constructed, dynamic and always in process (Hall 1997; Grossberg 1996). The engagement with, and acknowledgement of, the body as a ‘site’ or ‘text’ which communicates relational meaning, moves the body out of the essential (biological and cultural) and into the political. Thus, through being invested in the politics of third world struggles, Mohanty (1991) argues the potential exists for the inclusion of white women. To consolidate her point, she invokes Benedict Anderson’s (1983) “imagined community” of in this instance, politically aligned women, which becomes useful in a later example. This is contentious point, since what is effectively being proposed is that a ‘white’ woman can be (politically) ‘black’ and by extension a black woman can be (politically) ‘white’.

Nevertheless, it is my position that any reconstruction or re-imagining of identity – albeit theoretically and/or politically – from ‘white’ to ‘black’ in South Africa must be constantly renegotiated and re-earned. I am wary of white South Africans who are too quick to name themselves ‘African’. It is a political assignation not simply a geographic one. Thus, while I feel hierarchies of race need to be constantly deconstructed in order to open up possibilities of new – liberatory – identity formations, the politics of these formations should not be forgotten.

**‘White’ offenders in the third world**

If, suggested above political commitment can be possible grounds for white feminists to be included into the fold (Mohanty 1991a; 1991b), what of white women in a South African Correctional Centre? First, it becomes necessary to clarify what I mean by ‘white’. While the binary white: black is an important entry point to any discussion on racial hierarchies, in a

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147 This becomes particularly relevant for later discussion on identity and power Chapter 6.
South African context it is insufficient. In apartheid ranking order: white, Indian, coloured, and black all need to be considered. However while the apartheid state’s basic differentiation was white and non-white; post-apartheid policy (as seen in affirmative action mandate) is essentially black and non-black. This conclusion is extrapolated from South Africa’s Affirmative action mandate which inverts the apartheid hierarchies (with the inclusion of gender but not class) in order to redress economic prejudice. One could argue that in the current political economy this translates as institutionalised value judgement. Coloured South Africans are known to complain “during apartheid I wasn’t white enough and now I’m not black enough!” (Terrance Finn): The invisibility of the in-between – although interestingly it is the in-between that deconstructs and disproves the binary.

It is not my intention to state any opinion on affirmative action policy and implementation; but rather to develop a point around the construction of race in Westville Female Correctional Centre. It is my position that while outside these delineations remain (although broadly under the banner black: non-black), within the post-apartheid prison space most of the women ‘write’ themselves black. No longer protected by a racist regime or penal separation, non-black offenders must learn to blend in. Eat the food, learn the language, and develop relationships with black offenders, members, section leaders and Correctional Centre heads who are now almost exclusively black. Of course they are not black, South Africans are still too over-determined to be that colour blind, but through the acceptance of cultural dominance non-black women are embraced.

Third world feminists (Hurtado 1989: 849; Mohanty 1991a: 7) argue that white heterosexual women’s proximity to white men and the corresponding distance of black women from white men “leads to the particular historical focus of white women’s feminist movements” (Mohanty 1991: 11). The logic here is that propinquity to power is power; thus although the prison structure is hierarchal the cultural/racial sameness cannot be ruled out of the

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149 As stated on the documentary ‘What kind?’ by Peter MacKenzie (2007), an investigation into the coloured community in Wentworth township just south of Durban.
150 I have on one occasion found racist resistance due to what essentially amounts to culture shock. The woman was the only white woman and an active member of the group on numerous occasions until her release in 2003. Her racist comments to me where in contradiction to her behaviour and acceptance by the group. Further, racism was a prejudice not reserved for non-black offenders only, as the plays (2001) revealed, racism – in terms of tribal affiliation – is overtly felt and practiced in the Correctional Centre.
operations of influence. Further as ‘third world women’ are not a unitary group with both alliances and divisions of class, religion, sexuality and history (Mohanty 1991: 2) and I add ethnicity, a case can conceivably be made for a division along racial lines. Therefore, as defined by “a common context of struggle” (Mohanty 1991: 7), non-black offenders at Westville Correctional Centre (and it becomes easy to extrapolate this conclusion) are third world women of colour.

Existing research into the area of black women in the criminal justice system (Agozino 1997) may disagree. Agozino argues that discrimination in the criminal justice system “is likely to affect poor black women in different ways compared to poor black men and poor white women who are caught up in the system” (1997: x). Black women as the most marginalised in society would therefore suffer greatest. While I do not disagree with that statement in principle, his study of ‘black’ women is based on a UK case-study. This requires more critical engagement with his findings since they are assume a minority situation for the women. As will be argued, although the present situation in South Africa has benefited poor black women the least (Sewpaul 2005) and gender based violence against black women remains devastatingly high (Sewpaul 2005), the dominance of Zulu culture once inside the Correctional Centre (post 1994) – which includes the Correctional Services staff – puts them at an advantage over women of other races. This does not necessarily include the courts, which still remain in a state of transition in terms of race and gender.

**Black woman or woman who is black?**
As implied above Mohanty (1991), is evoking the politicisation of experience and alliance. However with regards to third world women’s particular politics, feminism has been regarded with suspicion since it appears to demand a commitment to one facet of identity (woman) over another (black). This may very well be another reason why African feminist research is so scarce. Mohanty’s argument regarding this political distancing has been iterated above (Mohanty 1991; Lewis & Mills 2001) and is the primary motivation behind consolidating a separate trajectory for ‘third world’ feminism. Namely its concern with “cultural imperialism and … the shortsightedness in defining the meaning of gender in terms of middle-class, white experiences and in terms of internal racism, classism and homophobia” (1991: 7).
This may be a legitimate position for conscientised women of colour; however, in looking at this in terms of the women at Westville Correctional Centre, it is more a case of trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. As will be shown, the women were able to mobilise with a political agenda and engage in cultural action that thematically and conceptually appeared feminist – even radical. However the majority of the women are inherently conservative and remain inherently divided on issues such as homosexuality (see Chapter 6) and even racism. Thus, although they were able to feel moments of female solidarity and articulate ‘the lot of women’ in South African society with great eloquence and passion; I would not describe them as feminists – nor would they want to be. Feminism implies an enduring commitment to a political position regarding women in our society, which they did not exhibit. Nevertheless, in recognising their engagement in political practice/ cultural action, as a direct result of patriarchal oppression, one could make a case for the women at Westville Correctional Centre being ‘fleeting feminists’.

**African women organising**

Although black women have often found feminism an uncomfortable affiliation\(^\text{151}\), this has not meant that women’s organising is a foreign concept to women of the third world. For example the Kamiriithu theatre of Kenya was essentially a woman’s organisation, whose political power caused insurgencies that resulted in both unrest and arrest for teaching politics under the cover of culture (Ngugi Wa Thiongo 1986/2006 34 – 62). A case has been made for the Kamiriithu being the birth of cultural studies (Wright 1998)\(^\text{152}\) globally, which essentially places cultural studies as a women’s initiative.

South Africa has had a rich history of black women’s organising. Marches held by women as early as 1913 to protest against entry permit laws. In 1956, the 20 000 women strong march on Pretoria against the pass laws and in 1959, 2000 women protested in Cato Manor, Durban

\(^{151}\)Catherine Obianuju Acholonu’s ‘Motherism’ and earlier conceptions of ‘Womanism’ have been theoretical alternatives to Western Feminism through their identification as race as central to identity and in the case of motherism, the conviction that “an Afrocentric feminist theory…must be anchored on the matrix of motherhood which is central to African metaphysics and has been the basis of the survival and unity of the black race through the ages” (2002: 3). This becomes more relevant for later discussion in Chapter 6.

\(^{152}\)The (inter)discipline Cultural Studies has been claimed by Birmingham (Wright 1998) and the CCCS. However, as articulated by Handel Wright (1998), Cultural Studies has firm roots in Africa, specifically with regard to the Kamiriithu Theatre project in Kenya in the 70s. The purposes of my aspersion here is two fold. First, it locates the discipline in Africa and not as some colonial import. Secondly, it draws attention to its (African) origins in African popular performance.
against the criminalization of home brew alcohol. The South African example has been inspiration to postcolonial feminists throughout the world (Rich 2001:39).

In the transformation to democracy women have ensured that gender machinery is firmly in place with the inclusion of a Women’s charter and now the proposal for 50/50 representation in government structures. There is deep-seated understanding that sexism and racism are deeply interconnected. This is the historical context that the women at Westville Correctional Centre come out of. Their mobilisation was not simply a case of me coming in from the outside and motivating them through dialogical theatre. South African women have a legacy of political organising.

Nevertheless, as Shireen Hassim (2006) discusses in her recent book *Women’s Organizations and Democracy in South Africa: Contesting Authority*, there has always been a tension within women’s organisations in South Africa. The struggle against apartheid, made race the dominant concern. How and to what extent could – or should – these organisations maintain a degree of autonomy, while forming part of wider political alliances.

Consequently it was only in the 80s that some women began claiming openly a feminist positionality. Other organisations such as the ANC’s women’s league, has never positioned themselves as feminist although individual members of the league may be. In fact the recent support of Jacob Zuma, known traditionalist and acquitted rapist, for ANC president, is case in point 153.

However, Hassim (2006) finds that although the transition to democracy has brought many institutionalized gains for women, it has ultimately compromised women’s grassroots organising through its co-option of many women organizers into the elite. Consequently these achievements are largely at the expense of a transformation in the social and economic conditions that produce gender inequality. As such while there is an awareness of the interconnections of race and gender there has been less consciousness around issues of class. What is required she argues, is a real commitment to the principles of democratic

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153 Interestingly the leagues justification for the support of Jacob Zuma was his mandate to improve the lives of the poor. Perhaps this is an acknowledgement of the distance that women’s organisations have got from the majority of women in the country.
participation – that, I feel this research methodologically embraced. This brings me to the next important area of discussion.

**Incarcerated women in the third world/postcolony**

There are many similarities between the experiences of incarceration and living under colonial rule (in which I include apartheid). The system surveillance through architecture which Foucault describes through Bentham’s ‘panopticon’ (1977), was a principle well understood by apartheid engineers and architects in their development of the townships (Steinberg 2004). Yet similarly the organs of authority maintained power over the vast majority not simply through coercion but through a hegemony that reveals consent amongst the offenders/colonised to being controlled. One only need go into a typically understaffed overpopulated maximum security Correctional Centre in South Africa to experience this first hand.  

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I experienced this most starkly on a tour of Medium B (Maximum Security male) Correctional Centre with students for the post-graduate course. The member who was conducting the tour took us into a communal cell, one of many off a central quad. We walked into an airless room, with three rows of bunks about six deep with
Further, Fanon describes the unconscious plane of colonialism “as a mother who unceasingly restrains her fundamentally perverse offspring from managing to commit suicide and from giving free reign to its evil instincts” (1990: 170). This situation quite accurately describes the role of a Correctional Centre warder who must both protect and control the offender. Thus colonialism can be likened to incarceration in that it was/is corrective and through its perception of the African/criminal as ‘ill’ – a pathology which must be fixed (Foucault 1977).

Moving our focus inward, the study of imprisoned populations offers us striking evidence as to the broader operations of power in our global society (Agozino 1997; Parenti 1999). Consequently, questions like ‘who is being incarcerated?’ And ‘what is the rate of incarceration?’ proffer us unique and disturbing insights that could be seen as decentralised, global colonisation. It is a well known fact that the prison population in the west is disproportionately black (Agozino 1997; Parenti 1999). In the United States one in ten black men is in prison and although African Americans only make up 13% of the population, half of the prison population is black (Parenti 1999). Criminologists – Feminist and otherwise have long argued about bias in the Criminal Justice system (Agozino 1997; Mead 2000; Parenti 1999; Sudbury 2000; Worrall 1990). The post-apartheid move to transform the judiciary is also informed by an awareness that as much as justice may try and be blind, it makes a difference who in on the bench.

Next is the rather incestuous relationship between capitalism, poverty and crime. It is widely acknowledged that poverty – in a capitalist system which stresses wants over needs – is one of the key factors that exacerbate crime (Mead 2000; Parenti 1999); however as Parenti argues “capitalism needs the poor and creates poverty, intentionally through policy and organically through crisis” (1999: 238). The contradiction lies in the fact that while it creates surplus populations of poor to keep the machinery going it is also threatened by those populations that could potentially disrupt the status quo; consequently, “prison and criminal justice are about managing these irreconcilable contradictions” (1999: 239).

less than a meter between each row and three bunks high. The top bunk almost touched the ceiling; it was a mystery how anyone could even sleep up there. The room was thick with people perhaps forty. We greeted the men and they politely returned the greeting. Standing there in that oppressive – yet highly personal – space, five non-offenders and one warder, it was patently clear that in numbers and strength, offenders have the upper hand. Why then are there so few riots or incidents of violence? It seemed clear to me that there is more at play than authoritarian power in maintaining the order of the Correctional Centre.
South Africa, while attempting to move beyond institutionalised racism, has wholeheartedly embraced global capitalism, which is implicitly racist and sexist. This has serious implication for the situation of poor black women in our society. I will now examine in more detail the material/physical implications of this discourse on third world women that Mbembe (2001) warns us not to forget.

Research shows that economic globalization with its dominant neo-liberal capitalist orientation has had its most overwhelming effects on African women and children in third world countries (Bond, 2005; Sewpaul 2005). In South Africa black women are poorer and sicker than they have ever been (Sewpaul 2005). Between 2000 and 2002, Vishanthie Sewpaul (2005) notes that unemployment increased for African women by 9% (3% more than African men) which amounts to a total of 757 122 more unemployed women. This impoverishment has a knock-on effect which makes South African black women particularly vulnerable to HIV. Citing the Medical Research Council’s 2004 report, Sewpaul notes “that in the 20-24 year age group, 24.5% of women were HIV+ compared with 7.6% of men. Women also carry the burden of care for HIV+ children and partners and other family members dying from AIDS” (2005: 107). Rampant capitalism (which increases the disparity between rich and poor) coupled with patriarchal culture can therefore be considered a significant element in worsening the lot of (black and poor) women in society. This comes out most starkly in the statistics on gender-based violence.

Black South African women are also enduring unacceptably high levels of abuse. Over one million women in South Africa are raped annually – the highest in the world. Report’s on gender based violence reveal that a woman is shot dead by her partner every 18 hours in South Africa and the Medical Research Council reveals that three in every five men admit to beating up their wives or partners (Sewpaul 2005: 106). These statistics can only be described as a shocking indictment not only on how our society values its women but how it treats those who are most vulnerable.

If we follow the argument then that Correctional Centres – as part of the broader Criminal Justice System – are a mechanism for the containment/social control of the oppressed (Parenti 2000a; 2000b), it is hardly surprising then that statistics reveal that women the world over are being incarcerated for longer and for more minor crimes than ever before (Agozino
The United Kingdom has seen a rise in female imprisonment of 100% since 1970 (Hughes 1998). In the United States the number of specifically black women in prison rose by a shocking 828% from 1986 to 1991 (Parenti 1999: 239). In South Africa there has been an increase of 68% between 1995/6 and 2002/3, from 1 905 to 4 152 (JIP 2004 in Haffejee et al 2005: 41). Since 2002/3 this has dropped slightly to 3 550 (JIP 2006/7), but there are degrees of fluctuation in any prison population.

Most vulnerable are poor women. Joanna Phoenix’s UK study (2002) of women offenders showed the more disadvantaged women are, the more likely they are to land up in the criminal justice system. Poverty constrains the choices of women which inevitably structures their involvement in prostitution (Phoenix 2002: 71) as well as other crime. The criminalisation of activities such as prostitution and marijuana possession, under the guise of protecting women and the poor, ultimately cause them greater injury by making their entry into the criminal justice system far more likely. A system that essentially perpetuates recidivism.

Further as Haferjee et al reveal, “HIV/AIDS infection rates appeared to be higher than those for the general population and higher than those for incarcerated men” (2005: 41). HIV/AIDS revealed itself as a major area of concern and debate for the women at Westville. It was itself a topic of intervention twice (2000, 2004), but found its way in as a sub-theme on two additional occasions, once through the topic of illness (2002) and another through the topic of sexuality/lesbianism (2004). Many of the women in the drama group disclosed their status in the four years, others did not.

However, despite this rather dire situation, as an area of research ‘women in prison’ both globally and locally remains marginal (Carlen 2002; Haferjee at al 2005:). Women in prison seem to have fallen off the radar. According to Sadiyya Hafferjee, Lisa Vetten and Mike Greyling (2005), this is due to three reasons. First are the numbers, as the figures indicate above, although there has been a marked increase in women’s imprisonment, it amounts to only 3% of the total prison population in South Africa. Second is that female offenders lack the “sensational and esoteric details of gangs, numbers and tattoos associated with male prisoners” (2005: 41). The final reason is the issue of women and violence discussed below.
A question of violence: Women crime and intersections of power

Medea: Of all the creatures that have life and reason
We women have the worst lot.
First we have to buy a husband, at vast expense,
And – to make the bargain more painful –
What we buy is someone to lord it
Over our body. For us, the biggest question is
Whether the man we get is good or bad.
Divorce is not respectable for women,
And we may not refuse our husbands.
(Euripides lines 218 – 116)

It is the position of this dissertation that the trend towards female imprisonment is symptomatic of intersecting patriarchal, capitalist, imperialist and racist systems: Systems which perpetuate crime\textsuperscript{155} “because they promote inherently repressive relationships and social injury” (Klein & Kress 1976 in Worrall 1990: 3). Thus the incarcerated woman of the third world is a political entity, whether acknowledged or not. The crime and punishment of women therefore has less to do with individual morality or societal moral decay. This implies an important shift in focus for any cultural intervention in a Correctional Centre.

In justifying the study of female offenders and the social/historical conditions that land them behind bars, Anne Worrall (1990: 4) states, “The conditions and processes that over determine the fate of this group of deviant women are intrinsically no different from those within which ‘conventional’ women are also controlled.” Thus the argument is that the hegemonic status quo in South Africa, far from promoting the liberation of women, is evidentially invested in containing women politically and physically.

Extensive work has been done by feminist criminologists to expose the way that the criminal justice operates as a mechanism for the reinforcement of (white) patriarchal authority (Carlen 1990, 2002; Faith, 2000; Worrall, 1990). Women who find themselves caught up in it are

\textsuperscript{155} Although South Africa has increased levels of crime since 1994, it must be recognized that ‘crime’ itself is a relative concept that is largely determined by the ideological systems in place (Mead 2000). For example in a communist system it is a crime to own property, while in a capitalist democracy it is a right. Most would agree murder is a crime, but killing during war is defeating ‘the axis evil’ to use a ‘Bush-ism’. Further, so much state sanctioned violence during the apartheid regime was hidden and conceived of as ‘fighting terrorism’; today this violence is undoubtedly seen for the crime it was. One wonders how much crime/violence there actually is in South Africa today compared with 20 years ago?
“assessed, judged, treated, punished – not because they are understood but because they are not” (Worrall, 1990:2). This is confirmed in O’Dwyer et al who state that the prosecution of women is often based on patriarchally defined deviance such as “their own refusal to comply with culturally conditioned female gender stereotype requirements [which] …have resulted in it being denied that they are real women” (1987 in Hughes 1998:47).

This essentially amounts to a concern with women and violence. A more extensive analysis regarding female offenders and femininity (as a counterpoint to violence) will be explored in the final chapter; nevertheless it is important to engage it here. In her introduction to Fatal Females: women who kill, well known South African psychologist and criminal profiler Micki Pistorius (2004) discusses the enigma of female criminality. She highlights current – and ancient – thinking that “it is against a woman’s nature to commit an act of violence, especially murder” (2004: 2). Making criminal and violent women “doubly deviant – violating both the law and gender role expectations” (Worrall 2002: 49). This is of course ideological brain-washing since at a very basic level the idea of women as innately violent is profoundly threatening to patriarchal authority. It is a vicious exhibition of ‘the wildish nature’ of women that Jungian anthropologist Clarissa Pinkola-Estes argues in Women who run with the wolves (1995) has been suppressed through cultural oppression and over-domestication (1995: 10). Women who kill say to other women that it can be done.

Psychoanalytically speaking the structuration of the male unconscious is quite significantly developed around trying to allay the potential threat that the female represents to the male phallus. As ‘the bleeding wound’ (vagina) she comes to represent a ‘fear of castration’ in men (Mitchell 1971; Mulvey 1988). Feminist psychoanalysts use this to explain the hegemonic representation of women as fetish objects in the mainstream cultural arena (Mulvey 1988). The fetish being more than the sum of the parts compensates for the lack of phallus and therefore eases the anxiety that her potential violence/threat causes. Or in the case of the representation of violent women (think Glen Close in Fatal Attraction), the mainstream cultural arena makes sure that she is killed off, labelled insane – or both. Such is the discomfort with women who are violent – and particularly women who have been violent against men.
It is hardly surprising then that ‘the plight of incarcerated women’ is not an area that the mainstream has enjoyed exploring. What is surprising is that within the area of women and crime, the feminist movement has on the whole been more concerned with women as victims of crime than as victims of criminalisation (Sudbury 2000: 144). This demonstrates a failure to make the connection generally between crime (violence) and oppression (see Fanon, 1965; Freire, 2000) and specifically women’s crime as by and large a consequence of patriarchal oppression. Studies show (Faith, 2000:164; Hafferjee et al 2005:41; personal communication Ms. L. Dlamini social worker Westville Female Correctional Centre;) that around 80 percent of imprisoned girls and women have been physically, sexually or emotionally abused by men. This is significantly higher than women who have not committed crime (Faith, 2000; Hafferjee et al 2005).

In their recent study into the connection between women’s crime and abuse in South Africa Hafferjee et al (2005) made some further interesting findings. The researcher interviewed 569 female offenders through random but proportional sampling of adults and juveniles in Gauteng province (2005:42). They found that not only are women who have experienced violence at the hands of men more likely to commit crime as noted above but “women convicted of murder are much more likely to have experienced sexual violence in their previous relationship...Women convicted of theft are considerably more likely to have experienced economic violence156,” (2005:45). Thus not only is the correlation between women’s crime and patriarchal oppression clearly proven but the type of crime points to the exact manner in which this abuse manifested. It would appear that crime is looking more and more like (unconscious?) rebellion.

Of the stable group of 14 offenders who participated in at least 6 of the 8 interventions 11 (79%) were convicted for murder. Four of these women were in prison for murdering their abusive husbands and two of these four women, Nonkululeko and Philile were part of the group of four women (Virginia, Rose, Nonkululeko and Philile) who were my invaluable partners on the inside. The example to follow involved the mobilisation of the women to communicate through theatrical cultural action around this very issue.

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156 Economic violence refers to deliberate economic deprivation or control on the part of the man towards the woman in a relationship. It may include demanding any monies she may have earned for his exclusive use or withholding money for food or child support for example.
In these cases, what could conceivably be interpreted as self-defence or the result of battered women syndrome\textsuperscript{157}, has been regarded in many instances by the criminal justice system and media as heinous crime committed for material gain (Sowetan, March 27 2002: 3; conversations with offenders 2002). Nonkululeko wrote her story as part of a writing programme that was mentored and published in \textit{Agenda} (2005: 110 – 116). She entitled her piece ‘Born to suffer’. Hers is not a story of poverty. Married to a successful doctor she had all the material possessions she desired, but was subject to racist abuse (his family is Tswana hers Zulu) by her husband and his mother and sisters\textsuperscript{158} which escalated into physical, sexual and emotional violence: A clear example of the deeply intertwined ‘root systems’ of oppression (Davis 1984; hooks 1989; 1993; Mohanty 1991b). She writes:

\begin{quote}
I am serving a 30 year sentence for my actions, substituting the prison of abuse for a prison of bricks. A prison where even my thoughts and feelings are being held captive. My pain is for my children who lost both their parents, and every day I am reminded of what I have done. (Manyaapelo 2005: 110)
\end{quote}

It is typical for these women to receive maximum sentences (statistics provided by Correctional Services). Past abuse is invariably inadmissible in their court cases (discussions with offenders 2001, 2002, 2003; radio interview with advocate Lindy Saunderson SAFM 6 April 2004). This is indicative of how patriarchy, at every turn – within the criminal justice system within the media have undermined, undercut and attempted to disempower and punish women who would dare to strike back or talk out. In a recent precedent (April 2004) a white\textsuperscript{159} South African woman who murdered her abusive husband was released on time served (radio interview with advocate Lindy Saunderson, SAFM 6 April 2004).

As indicated in Medea’s lament quoted at the beginning of the section, it seems ‘the lot of women’ has changed very little since the time of ancient Greece. However as much as society may demonise women who are vengeful and violent in order to contain them; as long as women are disrespected and abused, another Medea will rise from the flames. And yet, these women although humiliated and angry (Manyaapelo 2005: 111) do not see themselves

\textsuperscript{157} Battered woman syndrome is still not regarded as a defense to murder, but advocates in such cases are using it to answer the question ‘why didn’t she leave?’ (Worrall 2002: 57).

\textsuperscript{158} The complicity of other women relatives with the abuser in the abuse of a wife or girlfriend came out as a finding in the plays (2002). We dealt with this issue of why women undermine other women as I had seen how divisive the prison environment was, bringing out the worst ‘unsisterly’ elements.

\textsuperscript{159} Race is significant here in the light of analysis regarding the Criminal Justice system in South Africa (and the globe) as part of the mechanism for the perpetuation of the hegemonic status quo.
as simply vengeful. They ask the question “who killed first” (poster justice for women campaign 2001; women’s day 2002/3 Westville Female Correctional Centre).

In explaining the violence that typically erupts amongst the oppressed in a post-colonial situation Freire contends that “any situation in which ‘A’ objectively exploits ‘B’ or hinders his and her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person is one of oppression. Such a situation in itself constitutes violence, even when sweetened with false generosity” (1993: 37). Thus, any violence on the part of the oppressed is merely reciprocal. As Freire states “never in history has violence been initiated by the oppressed. How could they be the initiators, if they themselves are the result of violence?” (1993: 37). This forces an alternative reading of women and crime/violence particularly since this violence is distinguished from oppressor violence as it is “grounded in the desire to pursue the right to be human” (1993: 38). Within this frame is it is not surprising the feminist criminologists call of the abolition of the formal incarceration of women altogether (Carlen 1990, 2002).

**Women offenders’ thoughts on crime**

In September/October 2004 as part of the postgraduate intervention with offenders, one group of offenders decided to discuss the issue of crime. The narrative of their play involved a young man who committed robbery to help his mothers and sisters survive. The alcoholic father continuously rapes the daughter and the mother chooses to ignore this. The son is then caught and sentenced. Upon his release from prison he sees his father who has just been arrested for child abuse. Popular song was used to link the scenes as was a narrator figure. The ‘audience’ was asked to break into groups and engage the following questions: What do you think are the reasons for crime? What do you think can be done to prevent it?

Far from binarising men and women, it showed a complex understanding of men and women and both potential victims and perpetrators (colluders). It also showed the relative nature of crime – that there can be ‘good’ intentions behind ‘bad’ acts. It also clearly positioned crime as a consequence of interconnecting dynamics of power: class/race/gender.

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160 Although this argument moves beyond the binary, I do not feel my engagement with it here is inappropriate. The intersections of power would accommodate for the third world women who have been abused and now incarcerated as structurally and physically oppressed.
Interestingly while the play was workshopped and played by ‘criminal women’ they cast both of the criminals in the play as men. This points to the fact that they do not see crime as necessarily ‘female’ and this would be supported by the statistics cited above (Hafferjee et al 2005). Female crime is marginal; however it is also interesting as they don’t really identify women’s crime as ‘crime’, they see their involvement in the cycle of crime in a different way: As victims who may or may not strike back through various means and as colluders.

When work-shopping the play the student facilitators (Sabina Schreck & Nonhlanhla Dlamini) used image theatre (Boal 1979) to explore possible reasons for crime within the play. What ostensibly resulted was a series of images around oppressive relationships: father as oppressor of the daughter; warder as oppressor of the son once in prison. They did not identify the mother as an oppressor in the image theatre, although the play showed her culpability. When the white student asked why they thought the mother ignored the sexual abuse, an offender responded with a question: Is it true that amongst white people it is a custom that the father is the first one to sleep with the daughters? The student was dumbfounded. It remains unclear as to whether the offender was challenging the student for her judgement or she actually was voicing a myth, but it is my belief that the naiveté of the student, who couldn’t comprehend the psychological and physical constraints of the situation of the ‘character’ angered her. There are also women in prison who have murdered their husbands for precisely that reason\(^{161}\).

Further discussion that ensued from these images was rich and lively and centred predominantly around the consequences that the ‘characters’ (at this stage ‘real life’ and ‘art’ become blurred) had to face due to the choices they made. Separation from families was felt to be the worst consequence. This indicated that the women felt that they – and their families – are made to suffer further for being oppressed.

In the post-performance discussion with the broader Correctional Centre community many reasons for crime were revealed. Again the issue of poverty was dominant. Poverty was seen to cause crime in three ways: due to desperation and despair in other words – survival; due to

\(^{161}\) A situation as the one described demonstrates how few ‘alternatives’ are available or conceptualized for these women. PPT therefore is seen as entirely appropriate and necessary.
boredom from being unemployed and due to ‘illiteracy’ which I interpret as lack of education.

Anger was seen as the second reason for crime. People who have been or are still oppressed within families or at work attempt to solve their problems through offensive behaviour.

The third aspect mentioned was ‘laziness’ (offender comment 1 October 2004). Young people particularly they felt wanted to get rich quick. Offenders felt that crime did not always go punished – money could be made. Many people chose to access wealth this way rather than though ‘hard, tedious and underpaid labour’ (offender comment 1 October 2004). The position of the offenders is understandably quite contradictory: ‘laziness’ in this discussion is justified and becomes again about limited access.

The final reason was the destructive influence of ‘white’ culture (offender comment 1 October 2004). This may appear like a traditionalist view but it is actually revealing a conflation of race with class, which is always a messy distinction in South Africa\(^{162}\).

Thus the women’s play confirms the academic debate that crime is relative (Mead 2003). It is a consequence of intersecting dynamics of power race/class/gender (Davis 1984; Hafferejee et al 2005; Parenti 2000a, 2000b) and third world women are the ones who suffer most from these inequalities. Women were portrayed in this play as trapped by circumstance.

**Stereotyping and sentencing a small study**

The criminal justice system in democratic countries is premised upon the idea of being ‘gender-neutral’ (Carlen 2002); however feminist criminologists (Carlen 2002; Faith 2000; Worrall 1990, 2002) have shown that it is not. Far from it, as has been argued it seems to target the most vulnerable in society those who are black and poor. With women this includes those women who stereotypically don’t conform to societal norms (Faith 2000; Worrall 1990, 2002).

In 2002 I conducted a study of the 28 members of the drama group at the time to analyse sentencing in relation to the articulation of power and stereotyping. It revealed some

\(^{162}\) Post 1994 consumer capitalism is seen as ‘white culture’. The idea that capitalism causes crime has been theoretically established (Parenti 2000a; 2000b).
interesting information. While only a small study, the outcomes do confirm perceptions held by the offenders themselves (Hurst, Nkala & Young, 2002) as well as feminist criminology studies abroad (Worrall, 1990; Carlen 1990; O’Dwyer et al, 1987 in Hughes 1998). In the group of 28 women 50 percent were convicted for murder, and 21 percent for murder and robbery (that makes 71 percent of women in the group guilty of a capital offence). The remaining 29 percent is split between fraud (1), robbery (1), assault (1), possession of weapons (political crime) (1) and interestingly one woman convicted for rape. The demographics of those 28 women are: 82% black (75% of who were Zulu, 12% Sesotho, 4% Xhosa and 4% Shangaan and 4% Tanzanian); 7% coloured, 7% Indian and 4% white.

The spread across race/class groups in the Female Correctional Centre is far more representative of the South African population than in the Medium B (male) and Youth Correctional Centres, which are 100 percent black and Zulu speaking (Hurst 2003: 123). This seems to indicate that the conditions which propagate crime amongst women tend to cut across boundaries of race and class. A lot of serious crime in women tends to be retributive rather than indicative of a cycle of arbitrary criminal behaviour – although this is also increasing for the reasons discussed above (Fanon 1965; Freire 2000).

Averaging the sentences across race groups, the disparity between the black and Indian sentencing for murder is not significant, besides the fact that it is high: black: 20 years; and Indian: 22.5 years. What is significant is that the coloured women’s sentencing averaged 31 years – notably higher; and the only white woman, who was convicted for murder in my group received only seven years, the lowest sentence for murder by far.

A look at class/ education, proved even more interesting. The statistics revealed that that the less educated women, (below grade 10 education) who come from a predominantly rural background received significantly shorter sentences for murder – an average of 15 years as compared with better educated (urban) women – above grade 10 education, who received an average of 20.6 years. Class is acknowledged as an interconnected power dynamic that influences the treatment and perception of women in society (Davis, 1984) and consequently

163 The difference between straight murder and murder and robbery is obviously the motive. Murder involves the intent to kill or do harm; murder and robbery is motivated by robbery where someone has been killed in the process.
has the potential to influence sentencing (Sudbury, 2000); however in this instance, it seems cultural stereotyping has played a stronger role. Stereotypes around rural women tend to be passive, dutiful and long suffering, while those around educated (urban) – particularly black women tend to be that she is sophisticated, manipulative and opportunistic.

Since a detailed knowledge of their individual cases is not available, other than what has been revealed to me personally, we cannot state conclusively that there has been blatant prejudice here, but an understanding of stereotypical perceptions of race/class (for example that coloured people are violent gangsters) propagated by the media and which feed into the interplay of power dynamics – particularly as it concurs with the perceptions of those who have experienced it first hand – makes it worth noting.

Speaking up and Acting out

Feminist analysis has always recognized the centrality of rewriting and remembering history. This is a process which is significant not merely as a corrective to the gaps, erasures, and misunderstandings of hegemonic masculinist history, but because the very practice of remembering and rewriting leads to the formation of politicized consciousness and self-identity. (Mohanty 1991: 34)

“In that moment, it was freedom of speech” (Virginia 11 December 2002)

The previous arguments, theoretical and practical have exposed how much need there is for incarcerated women of the third world to speak up and speak out about their lives. I have revealed how although South Africa is increasingly listening to women at the top, the majority down below remain institutionally and culturally silenced (Hassim 2006). Incarcerated women in this context are further marginalised due to their inevitable status as ‘black’ (although the racial hegemony within Correctional Centres has by and large transformed)/female/poor and criminal which have stereotype implications that render them ‘un-female’ and therefore less worthy of being listened to.

Further, through mainstream media, third world women have been monolithised as ‘the helpless hopeless woman with a fly-ridden baby sucking at her dry breast’. These images speak for the women through their construction, silencing them further. It is not that the

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164 Clean Break discussed in Chapter 1 offers an example for the UK context.
situation is not serious, as I have shown; but it is worsened by these constructions which binarises ‘us’ and ‘them’ and structures the perpetuation of poverty and patriarchy through false generosity (Freire 1970): The beauty queen says: “I’m gonna help the poor starving women and children in Africa”

Thus, in attempting to untangle the problem of representation of third world women, Chandra Mohanty promotes ‘the creation of a discursive space where (self) knowledge is produced by and for third world women’ (Mohanty 1991: 34). It is proposed that this is precisely what Prison Theatre at Westville Female was able to do. The retelling of their own stories enabled these women to claim back some of the ‘truth’ of their own lives through providing a more accurate reflection of their contexts circumstances and conditions.

However, in describing third world women Ania Loomba warns of the bi-polar tendency to position post-colonial women as either victims or agents, she asks:

> When we emphasise the destructive power of colonialism, do we necessarily position colonised peoples as victims, incapable of answering back? On the other hand, if we suggest that colonial subjects can ‘speak’ and question colonial [patriarchal/ institutional] authority are we romanticising such resistant subjects and underplaying colonial violence? (1998: 231)

It is my contention that when in spaces dominated by the operation of current intersecting hegemonies, the subaltern, to reiterate Gayatri Spivak (1988) simply cannot speak. Or rather they cannot speak ‘directly’ and are reliant on creative social networks to access power, which may fail. However, if an alternative ‘discursive’ space is created, in this case through the organising principles of performance / PPT, then spaces can be opened up for the recreation of memory, the exploration of alternatives and the (re)scripting of identities.

As Spivak notes speaking for one’s self as a third world woman is an important position for political mobilisation (1990:59) however is it simply enough to be ‘allowed’ to speak? (Loots 2001; Spivak 1990). Or worse – be called on to speak by ‘the centre’? Should such ‘speaking’ not be assessed in terms of the extent to which women are or are not listened to seriously (Spivak, 1990: 60)? What is being introduced here is the concept of agency.

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165 Examples will be given in this and the following chapter of how the women as agents of popular culture found alternative ways to ‘speak’ in order to negotiate power within the prison context. Direct speech may be the most empowered form of communication but there are many ways to negotiate.
Traditionally agency has been concerned with intentionality, action, will and the ability to exercise that will. However in cultural terms issues of agency involve “the possibilities of action as interventions into the processes by which reality is continually being transformed and power enacted” (Grossberg 1996: 99). It is the ability to rearticulate and determine your own reality. This involves dialogue – participation. Yvonne Banning (1996: 69) too asserts the dialogic nature of agency since it implies both acting on and being acted on. It involves “action on the part of all participants – the speaker in speaking and the listener in listening.” Thus the extent to which the offenders are seen to have “oppositional agency” (Mohanty 1991: 10), is concerned with the extent of the dialogue in which they were engaged.

The examples to follow will tease out these elements in terms of popular female resistance both as action, which inevitably involves speaking – and inaction, which is typically silent; however, I think ultimately the important question remains – who is the ‘speaking up’ for and who needs to hear? If the intention is to affect change from without, then certainly stakeholders must be present. If it is to affect change from within (the institution), then the ‘audience’ is entirely different. However, if it is to effect change at the level of the individual – at the level of ‘feeling’ – which is where I observed the most profound changes (in working from the inside out) – then perhaps it is first about listening ‘seriously’ to yourself: Building up a sense of internal power, respect and self-worth – an obvious and essential first step – in the process of broader (albeit limited) transformation. This also shifts any measure of ‘success’ or ‘failure’ that might be (externally) imposed.

**Evasive Manoeuvres: resistance action inaction**

It is 2002 and I am conducting a session with offenders in the dining hall of 2B. I am doing weekly ‘drama’ sessions now and decide to start off with some voice exercises. We are standing in a circle. Repeat after me I holler: babbity, bebbity, bibbity, bobbity,ubbity! This strange string of words that comes from a legacy of (English) *Speech and drama* is repeated back to me. I can hear it sounds ludicrous and colonial and is clearly difficult for the women but now that I am on the path I am compelled to continue. I go through the alphabet trying not to draw attention to the fact that many of the women are battling. I am regretting this. I arrive at ‘L’- ‘Lallery, Lellery, Lillery, Lollery, Lullery!’ The exercise begins to break down in a mass of twisted tongues. Some women are embarrassed. This is not going well. Then Patricia steps forward – Now I’ve got one! She says challengingly: Xa,
Xe, Xi, Xo, Xu [frog twister]. Her voice ripples and clicks like music. The women repeat her with alacrity, except for me. My tongue has failed me, my limitations are exposed. We all collapse in a fit of laughter. I am silenced. Thank you Patricia! I think. That was brilliant.

Over the five years of intervention in Westville Female Correctional Centre which frame this research (2000 – 2004), involvement in ‘the Drama’ right from the inception was seen as a means for either exercising or accessing power and privilege. At an institutional level involvement in such projects are encouraged by Correctional authorities as ‘rehabilitation’. They become a means through which offenders are able to demonstrate willingness to reform, which can affect prison privileges. Involvement in ‘the Drama’, as they like to call it, has been a factor in the reclassification of at least four offenders from Maximum to Medium resulting in increased privileges such as being able to leave the Correctional Centre for outside competitions.

The receiving of certificates with the University of Natal/ KwaZulu-Natal logo, was also a major factor in the appeal of the project – initially. Certificates hold huge status and are often wrapped in plastic and hung on the walls of cells. As discussed in the Methodology however after three or so interventions the novelty of certificates was wearing off and new terms had to be negotiated. This came in the form of KFC (Kentucky Fried Chicken), which is still the desired reward for involvement (2008). Although the women always were overwhelmingly positive about the projects in and of themselves, additional terms always had to be negotiated. I was seen as an opportunity not to be passed up.

It is my proposition that this is due to the fact that as has been discussed in the previous chapter access to power/ speaking and being heard occurs in Sub-Saharan Africa via networks which connect those at the ‘bottom’ with those at the ‘top’ in what Byart describes as a rhizome state (1993: 218). It has been presented in Chapter 4 that this is the model of power in the Prison. It is hardly surprising then that the introduction of a new element – a

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166 These offenders are Virginia, Rose, Philile and Nonkululeko. The women who have been instrumental in assisting me from the inception. In a public statement at the Symposium on Prison Theatre held in Westville Medium B (March 10 – 17 2008), Rose, who was invited as a delegate, made a public statement (Friday 17 March 2008) that involvement in Drama has been ‘the’ key factor in transforming her classification from Maximum to Medium and that that had had numerous positive effects on her health and the quality of her life.
drama group for the initiation of Participatory Theatre projects – would be appropriated into the same model. The irony is of course that PPT in form and philosophy is primarily aimed at circumventing this more indirect covert form of accessing power. As the offenders became more familiar with what PPT was able to do – in other words as and when they put “meanings before pleasures” (Fiske 1989:2) in resisting – the more evasive manoeuvres became less frequent. Nevertheless the Prison Theatre has always remained simultaneously a way to speak out directly (Freire 1970; Boal 1979) and to acquire power and privilege indirectly (Fiske 1989; Byart 1993).

The most notable example of how the Theatre projects, through me, became a means through which to resist ‘evasively’ (Fiske 1989:2) came early on in the second intervention in 2001. A certain group lead by Pretty the particularly challenging and vocal offender I introduced in the methodology, used absenteeism (inaction/ evasion) as a means to gain power over me and therefore feel more powerful themselves. This particular group was surprisingly enthusiastic – and very positive in post performance interviews – but refused to show me their play on the grounds that certain group members were absent. She would always apologise for the inconvenience and the group were happy to discuss the plot in great detail, but flatly refused to act (in this case it was not a confidence issue). She even persuaded me to come in twice over a weekend to assist with their play, which I did – to no avail. Again, people were absent and they could not do the play for me. She was commanding the activity of others (me) yet “avoiding capture” (Fiske 1989:9).

It is worth mentioning that absenteeism is consistently an issue in Female Correctional Centre. My experience over eight years has found that women in Prison are often depressed and distracted, which makes them inactive and perpetuates absenteeism. Worrying about children on the outside (a very common concern) reinforces feelings of powerlessness and apathy. However it is only in this instance that it was used as an excuse by those present not to show me – even part of – a play. The form being workshopped is very fluid and flexible.

On the day of the intervention they arrived in full force. They had organised costumes – not typically used in the interventions – and props (also not encouraged). Their performance was by far the most exuberant – almost manic. Although chaotic and relatively disorganised they were very happy with themselves. They – ‘she’ entirely owned the performance – there had
been no outside hand. The group leader made a point of coming to me for praise, which I duly gave. Clearly the whole experience had been less meaningful in terms of conscientisation around racism but the resistance had been entirely pleasurable (Fiske 1989).

**Coming together through cultural action**

As one prisoner reaches across to touch another, you know that a contact is being made that only happens because of this activity we call theatre, and it is in direct contradiction to the ways in which people are meant to relate within that space. (Heritage 2002: 297)

**Women divided**

Prison is architecturally, institutionally, correctively and culturally designed around atomising, isolating and controlling the individual (Foucault 1977). It separates one from the social/communal (even when in shared cells) and perpetuates cycles of mistrust and anti-social behaviours.

Women themselves are divided (Lewis and Mills 2003). Patriarchal hegemonies have ensured that women are complicit in their own subjugation through participation in the inequality. In the prison context, I was able to observe many instances of women operating as ‘agents of the regime’, undercutting, undermining, judging and belittling other women. This directly lead to the intervention on ‘Why women undermine each other’ (2002), which I will discuss later in this chapter. Prison as an authoritarian system which has structurally determined their position as inferior exacerbates this division within an already fragmented group.

The women at Westville were case in point. Despite moments of solidarity, the women tended not to support each other – and definitely didn’t trust each other. For example when conducting a session in 2002, a rather literal – and unexpectedly dangerous – example of both of these aspects was demonstrated through what I thought was a harmless trust exercise. Participants were asked to stand tightly in a circle while each took turns to stand in the centre and fall gently back and be caught by a partner. During the exercise quite a number of offenders let their partners fall! – Shrieking with laughter at their partners’ foolishness for trusting them in the first place. Other offenders then quite rightly refused to do it. We changed our tack and I made a mental note: too soon to trust.
Further, although many had been victims of abuse – as discussed above – the vast majority had firmly internalised patriarchal Zulu values. A dialogue with offenders on rape revealed that most thought women brought it on themselves (16 October 2002). This is shocking when contemplating this was the opinion of many women in that circle who had themselves been raped.

Social impacts

To extend the discussion above, although the right to speak is viewed as essential in the recreating and validating of memory and for articulating a vision for the future (Mohanty 1991), women in prison are a divided community who would not naturally organise. PPT (in form and content) is considered an excellent medium for addressing the needs of – and undoing some of the damage to – incarcerated women of the third world.

Extensive reports have been done (Hurst, Nkala, & Young, 2000; Hurst, Nkala, & Young, 2001; Hurst, Nkala, & Young, 2002; Young-Jahangeer 2002) to analyse the impacts of the projects167 (Woolf 1999). It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to repeat all these findings here, except where it supports the specific social and political focus of this chapter.

Freire contends that cultural action is always a systematic and deliberate form of action which operates upon the social structure, either with the objective of preserving that structure or of transforming it (Freire 1970: 160). What are of interest here are the social impacts that made it possible for the offenders to mobilise and use cultural action for the express purpose of liberation: The liberation of women who have murdered their abusive husbands as part of the Justice of Women campaign (December 2001).

Findings revealed that the interventions enabled the women to see drama as a communicative and consciousness-raising tool. Each of the interventions demanded engagement with numerous issues which became politicised through the plays and post-performance dialogue which consistently showed raised awareness about the specific topic (Hurst, Nkala, & Young, 2000; Hurst, Nkala, & Young, 2001; Hurst, Nkala, & Young, 2002; Young-Jahangeer 2002).

167 Reports were initially done as part of our agreement with the Correctional Centre, which was structured around bringing benefits to all stakeholders: offenders, university, Correctional Centre. In 2001 and 2002 we received funding from CHESP who required that we produce reports. We did not apply for funding in 2003. Arts evaluation is essentially about turning so-called ‘soft’ skills into quantifiable outputs to satisfy the cause and effect demands of a society that ‘wants results!’ (Woolf 1999)
As one offender expressed after the racism intervention in 2001 “In my mind something changed… a lot of things changed in my mind.” Racism was not simply perceived as a black/white issue – but became equally focused on issues of ethnicity as Vera commented:

Before the drama programme I was too shy to speak to people of different nations [Xhosas, coloureds, whites, Indians] …but since I played the drama it is easy for me…I am not shy or scared of the people (September 2001)

Another offender in 2002 after the intervention of ‘illness in prison’ saw the potential of PPT to conscientise others:

I learnt a lot from acting, I have a wish and I don’t know if it will happen but when I am released I go and get people together, we do plays – drama and inform them about HIV/AIDS because we are dying…get the little kids together and we can play and learn. (30 July 2002)

The second most important social impact – and ostensibly ‘function’ of the Prison Theatre for female offenders which contributed to social cohesion was found to be the management of emotional states. Female offenders placed a significant amount of emphasis on the way that doing theatre made them feel – at times at the expense of consciousness raising. Most notably through increased confidence / raised self-esteem which presented as a result of the collaborative theatre process, the performance itself and through interaction with students/people from the outside on the performance day. It is proposed that the women saw the power of positivity as a fundamental prerequisite before any agency or will, can manifest. PPT was also able to do it through its energising and activating form (for example see comments on popular song in Chapter 3).

Rose commented after the first post-graduate intervention which discussed the topics motherhood on the inside and illness in prison:

I’m a shy person and working with the group my shyness went away I don’t know how but I think it’s working with people, different views and different ideas from each and every one. And we are always encouraged: “You can do it!” From this group I learnt a lot. I’m not scared anymore I got confidence from this group. If you work in groups you end up building your self-confidence and you’ll say: if she can do it, I can too. It did a lot for me.” (Rose 30 July 2002)
The isolation of the prison experience is also reflected here. Through working creatively in a team offenders were able to make friends – create emotional connections – or simply speak. As Virginia observed after the same intervention and “Before [the drama projects] it was not easy to talk… through the drama we learnt how to communicate with other people easier” (18 September 2002).

The participatory nature of the plays are devised around issues which the offenders are personally knowledgeable about (for example racism, spouse abuse, HIV/AIDS, motherhood on the inside). This enables offenders to feel validated by their ability to contribute expertly to the discussion with other offenders and particularly students who are assumed to be more knowledgeable than they are: As one offender emphatically stated: “The students learn from us!” (Philile, 24 October 2001).

The level of internalised oppression however was evident in these offender’s comments “I am so happy that they [the university] are prepared [my emphasis] to work with us.” And; “I didn’t think that we are so important to the other people, as we are prisoners, but to be together with the university has given me a good future” (2001).

For this reason, there was consistent Freirean emphasis throughout my interaction/dialogues with the offenders around re-evaluating ‘knowledge’ away from formalised ‘lifeless’ and ‘empty’ facts towards that which was infused with lived experience (Freire 1970) and the spirit of exchange. This woman’s comment was of great value to me:

You told us, lets share ideas, and we saw that you didn’t come here just to teach us, you were willing to learn from us. The manner you approach us is important. You don’t just take things and then she’s gone. We saw you wanted to learn just like we did. (Offender 11 December 2002)

The students and offenders (and I) also validate each other through mutual humanisation (Freire 1970) and the challenging of stereotypes as another participant noted “they [students] didn’t expect to see us as we are – good people” (offender 18 September 2002). The students’ coming from the outside /in, to occupy ‘their’ space, was seen as significant: “The important thing was that the students came here and acted here with us as well, and socialised with us” (offender 24 October 2001). After the 2002 first level intervention, Rose commented: “We enjoyed it and I would like you to thank the students for making us feel not
like criminals, giving us a chance to mix and talk like normal people, it made us feel good and thank you for giving us the opportunity” (18 September 2002).

Raised self-esteem and confidence, most significantly was found to have encouraged positive risk taking behaviour. Many women in Correctional Centre retain a hardened persona as a survival strategy. Jenny Hughes (1998: 49) similarly observes, that maintaining a strong or ‘tough’ image in prison is very important to prevent bullying and scapegoating. Involvement in a project that not only requires and encourages generous, supportive behaviour, but also places the participant in an emotionally vulnerable position is both risky and brave. This was evident in the conflicted and often contradictory behaviour demonstrated by certain ‘tough’ women during the project.

Aside from the fact that mere participation in a drama project was risk-taking behaviour for many participants, the project did encourage even further behaviour and attitude change (at least for a period of time) of this nature. One offender commented:

"Before this play I wouldn’t care what people thought of me. Now it worries me. I don’t want people to have that opinion of me. I want to try and better myself in life. (Rochelle September 2001)"

It is defensive/ guarded behaviour propagated by an oppressive environment that reinforces low self-esteem that paralyses the possibility for social cohesion and the positive unifying effects that this can manifest. The subjects of the plays too (mentioned above) were also effective in the promotion of acceptance within a heterogeneous community.

Through nurturing self-esteem, which encourages risk-taking behaviour and promoting acceptance through the form and content of the plays, the project was shown to have promoted social cohesion. Initially the effects seemed primarily to have affected quality of life – offenders and Correctional Centre warders noticed reduced levels of violence and conflict during and for sometime after the interventions (Hurst, Nkala, & Young, 2001; Hurst, Nkala, & Young, 2002; Young-Jahangeer 2002). This can be attributed primarily due to the alleviation of boredom: “…talking for myself I enjoyed it, it gives you something to do, like every week you know you’re going to practice and you look forward to that…” (18 September 2002). However their later organisational use of drama as the medium of communication for the Justice for Women Campaign, demonstrated the incarnation of
Freirean pedagogy. Effectively, social cohesion enabled the women to mobilize and organize themselves using drama as a form of activism. The women expressed:

We are more friendly with people: Especially this race thing we did…say for instance she had something against me being white, I would try and talk and get over that barrier. (Rochelle 24 October 2001)

Another thing that I learned from my sisters: we are unity as we are playing these drama – no matter she was fighting with me before or maybe she has got bitterness about me, as we are playing we are just sisters, we are the same family. (Pretty 24 October 2001)

**Inside/out activism**

It is Freire’s (2000: 175) conviction that “to achieve…indispensable unity [among the oppressed] the revolutionary process must be, from the beginning cultural action.” Cultural action which liberates and is therefore in essence dialogical – since dialogue is concerned with unity and the (re)naming/ creating the world. Anti-dialogical communication is typically the mode of communication used by the oppressors since it is anti-unity and serves only to domesticate and divide the oppressed. To take it further, Freire (2000: 175-176) asserts, “The internal unity of the dominant elite which reinforces and organizes its power requires [my italics] that the people be divided.” The danger of unity amongst the oppressed is for the oppressors the danger of organisation, since “organisation is not only directly linked to unity, but is a natural development of that unity.”

The Event Day, for the Justice for Women Campaign, which took place on the 8 December 2001, was a demonstration of organisation, as a result of unity made possible primarily by the social cohesion amongst the drama group (many of whom are serving sentences for murdering abusive men and most of whom have been victims of physical/ sexual abuse) as well as the support of the social workers. Freire (2000: 66) states that “true reflection – leads to action.” The day as organised, conscientised action can thus be regarded as indicative of ‘true’ reflection and not “mere activism” (2000: 65), “action for action’s sake” (2000: 88), which for Freire implies that it is devoid of serious reflection. For while I would choose to call it ‘activism’, I would not describe it as without reflection, since it was born out of and expressed through cultural action.
Aside from creating a general awareness for women abuse, the campaign centred specifically on 15 women who are all serving life sentences for murdering their abusive husbands. These women are requesting that they be released on time served – or at least have their cases reviewed. Their argument is based on the grounds that their crimes were provoked by torturous abuse and the laws under which they were tried and convicted were not gender sensitive. Offenders, staff, representatives from the Justice for Women Campaign, the Justice Department, the Gender commission and members of the media were present. The event took place in the central core of the Correctional Centre, which is surrounded by a ramp going up three stories. Offenders sitting on the ramp were separated from the performers by bars. Official guests were seated in the core behind a table adorned with fake flowers.

As an activist in women’s prisons Faith (2000: 163-164) has isolated ‘seven organizing and unifying principles’. She states as the third principle: “As a form of expression, music [and by extension all performance] is at the heart of social change.” She also states: “Grassroots organizing are the only effective means of growing a social movement.” Both these aspects were intrinsic to the event. The method of articulating grievances through cultural activity is also regarded as appropriate since it is a natural cultural response for Zulu women in communicating for change within an oppressive/patriarchal society. “Zulu society has always been largely patriarchal. Its women have been given minimal or marginal opportunity to air their views. Women have used visual and oral forms to express their feelings” (Magwaza, 2001: 25). Further, as has been discussed in Chapter 3, theatre/popular performance in South Africa has historically established itself as a tool for liberation (Kerr 1995). Thus the Freirean pedagogy, which informed our work, was in harmony with the innate customary and historically cultural response of the majority of the women. This is how the event unfolded:

The day began with individual testimonies from two of the women convicted for murdering their abusive husbands, they were heart wrenching and ended in emotional collapse. One woman, clearly in the final stages of AIDS told of her contraction of the virus through her husband’s adulterous behaviour. The other Philile, an active and enthusiastic member of the

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168 The Correctional Centre uses this space for all cultural activities, most notably women’s day celebrations which are always a major event in Westville Female Correctional Centre. Any interventions that I have organized have never used this space. We used either the Church Hall or the courtyard.
drama group, described torturous abuse to both her and their children. This included being locked in the bedroom with their children while her husband had sex with another woman in the lounge. Other cultural activities such as singing by the Correctional Centre choir and Zulu dance group performed, with the climax being the performance of the play by the drama group. The play was devised and workshopped by the offenders themselves, I was invited to tighten it up once it had been conceptualised. The play was popular theatre, but significantly it was not participatory.

The story told was a synthesis of stories – a narrative owned by everyone but without generalising or depoliticising. In writing about the construction of the self in Latino women’s autobiography, Lourdes Torres concludes that the women “do not create a monolithic self, but rather present the construction of the self as a member of multiple oppressed groups whose political identity can never to be divorced from her conditions” (1991: 275). The play presented told of a woman whose husband is abusive to both her and her son. She goes to her family for advice – they tell her that they have paid lobola\textsuperscript{169}, and that they can do nothing since she has been exchanged.

She then goes to the priest, who tells her to kneel down and pray. Realising the futility of this gesture in the light of her life circumstances she goes to the police to report the abuse. Her husband knows the policemen. He drinks with them regularly at the shabeen [tavern]. The policemen themselves beat their wives. One policeman sees her at the police station and gives Mr. Nene (her husband) a call. He comes down to the station and beats her in front of them. She then, in desperation hires another policeman to kill him for R1000-00. He does so and she is convicted for the murder with a maximum sentence since he has struck a deal with his fellow policemen. The tragic ending however lies not in the prejudice she endures at the hands of the criminal justice system that declares her a cold-blooded killer who murdered her husband for material gain, but the fact that her son – who is now effectively orphaned turns to crime. The play ends with his arrest, his cries for help, which no one hears. Shelters are not considered as an option for most black women. There are no shelters in the rural areas and are very few in the cities, Durban, a city of some 3 million people has only two. In addition,

\textsuperscript{169} The payment of lobola or ‘bride-price’ is a traditional Nguni cultural practice, which is extensively practiced by urban and rural Nguni’s today. It involves the payment of cattle (the amount to be agreed by the two families involved) as compensation (or thanks) to the bride’s family, by the groom in the case of marriage. It is controversial in that it is often perceived and experienced as being ‘bought’.
marriage is seen as a test of endurance and commitment, thus going to a shelter is considered going against family and culture (interview with offenders, 11 December 2002; Manyaapelo 2005).

The 15 women at the centre of this campaign have been seated around the action – they have enclosed it. As it ends they stand up, singing “Emhlabeni sibuthwele ubunzima…” [In this world we are bearing hardships, our heavenly father, oh what have we done to deserve this…(translated by Ntokozo Ndlela)] a protest song typically sung at the funerals of those who died in political violence during apartheid. Here, it has been appropriated by the women where political oppression has been substituted for patriarchal oppression. One by one they recite a few lines of personal testimony using a ‘spot-lighting’ technique. One of the most memorable testimonies was from a middle aged Indian woman who stated: “The 15 years of abuse by my husband, is nothing compared to 20 years of having to live without my children”. This poignant statement encapsulates the concerns of many women offenders around the world, indeed these concerns of violence against women and offenders as mothers\(^{170}\) have been the primary motivating factors for activism in women’s Correctional Centres the world over (Barry, 2000; Faith 2000; Sudbury 2000).

The Event day for the Justice for Women Campaign in and of itself went well. Although an intensely emotional experience for all involved, offenders felt positive and strengthened by the practice of their own liberation – of literally fighting for freedom. The media were invited to give legitimacy to the event and in particular to enable their voices to be heard beyond the bars. Indeed, Faith (2000: 166) writes, “It is an important time for feminist activists to mobilise media and movement attention to women in prison.” The assumption being that the media is a powerful educative force which is able to drum up the support needed to pressurise government authorities to bring about institutional change; however to what extent can the media be trusted to ‘truthfully’ and without bias convey the message that it was intended to convey. And to what extent mainstream media is even an appropriate mechanism to mediate, in this case, the gap between oppressed and oppressor in the practice of their mutual liberation? Taking the case of the *Sunday Tribune’s* reportage of December 9\(^{th}\), I would say not at all.

\(^{170}\) A look at why imprisoned women (who are typically black and poor) have invoked motherhood as a political rallying point will be discussed in Chapter 6.
The Media Merge

The headline on page five of the Sunday Tribune (December 9, 2001) reads in bold quotations: “I would kill him again” (Vapi 2001: 5). A smaller article on page one that entices us to the bigger article has the headline: “Jailed husband killers say ‘set us free’” (Vapi 2001: 1). As Eric Louw (1984) and John Keane (1991) point out, journalists are not all-knowing subjects but situated interpreters, mere products of their collective pasts, influenced by class position, ethnic background and of course gender. In this case the journalist was a black male.

The article begins with what appears to be a quote, but is in fact just an exercise in creative writing. “We killed our husbands, we do not regret our actions but we do believe that we should go free” (Vapi 2001: 1). In the first small paragraph he has effectively undermined the entire event – for the reading public – and labelled the offenders both psychopathic and delusional. He later goes on to say that “Most did not regret their actions and that they had no other way of ending years of emotional and physical violence” (ibid) – he does not explain why these women felt there was no other way; without providing us with this information – which would point to our societies serious lack of infrastructural and financial support for its women – we are left thinking, there must have been another way – why didn’t she just leave?

Within the articles the quote “I would kill him again” appears three times as do the words unrepentant/ do not regret. For a skill in which space is an issue and every word counts – this is quite a lot of repetition. The first paragraph of the main article is equally sensational and biased.

‘If he had to rise from the grave, I would kill him again.’ These are the handwritten words on the orange t-shirt which fluttered on a makeshift clothesline at Westville Prison yesterday as part of an “open-day” anti-abuse campaign at the prison. The woman responsible [my italics] for the words says she should go free. (Vapi, 2001: 5)

The rest of the article is ambivalent but the damage was already done, the bold headline alongside a picture that can only be described as zoolike, alien and depressing is enough to make the average person think “criminal” and leave it at that. The women had spoken and this was the reply. As it was not PPT there was no space to engage dialogically; however one wonders who they would have dialogued with in this instance. I will now attempt to briefly
theorise why in this instance certain media (for it would be false to assume that media are normatively homogenous) have chosen to subvert the intended message, not listen ‘seriously’ to the women (Loots 2001; Spivak 1990) and by doing so reinstate the lack of agency felt by the majority of women offenders.

“Cultural action either serves domination (consciously or unconsciously) or it serves the liberation of men and women” (Freire, 2000: 179). The drama projects in the Correctional Centre were action for the purpose of liberation; the reportage in the Newspaper, – or what Gramsci termed “the so-called organs of public opinion” (1971: 80) served the interests (consciously or unconsciously) of domination. When I asked Philile and the drama group how they felt about the newspaper article which they had all seen she replied “I just cried” when I asked why, she said that it was because firstly it had reminded her of the emotions of the day and secondly that they had “turned it all around”. This statement met with fierce nodding and exclamation from the rest of the group.

The manner in which cultural power is able to serve the interests of the oppressors is through social control gained through the well known adage ‘Divide and Rule’ as enforced through difference and fear (of crime and criminals). As discussed previously, “the [powerful] minority cannot permit itself the luxury of tolerating unity of the people, which would undoubtedly signify serious threat to their own hegemony” (Freire, 2000: 141). Consequently media that serves the interests of big capital/ (white) patriarchy, functions to (perhaps unconsciously) reinforce difference amongst the population to secure the power of the oppressors. Difference is established through the effective dehumanising of the oppressed – in this case female offenders, which feeds into what will now be discussed – the fear industry.

**The Fear Industry**

Let us organise around that which is uplifting, and essentially human about us. We can then relegate the fear industry to the dusty museum basement of history. Ona Move. Down with this New Age slavery! (Abu-Jamal 2001:23)

If the humanisation of the oppressed signifies subversion, so also does their freedom; hence the necessity for constant control. And the more the oppressors control the oppressed, the more they change them into apparently inanimate ‘things’ (Freire, 2000: 59).
This desire by the oppressors to dehumanise humans – which for Freire is the essence of sadism – demonstrates a fear within the oppressor to see ‘the other’ within ‘the same’. It demonstrates what Freire (2000: 46) terms a “fear of freedom.” This fear exists both within the oppressed and within the oppressor. Within the women offenders it was quite literally demonstrated:

Some of us have been here [in prison] a long time, so it made me think that when I go back home one day, people are going to back off from me because I come from Westville Prison – that’s how I felt…this fear, it is in you. (Rochelle)

Through the positive interaction with the students, who for the offenders represented ‘the outside’/freedom, the Prison Theatre programme enabled the offenders, to some extent to overcome this fear through praxis. Within the oppressor, a fear of freedom is based on recognition of his role as the one who oppresses and the inevitable relinquishing of power, necessary for his liberation. The fear industry operates to reinforce those binaries in every effort to ensure that oppressive structures remain in place for the profit of the few. For:

The fear of crime is the greatest fear of all, and no domestic segment of society is more demonised than the one consisting of criminals. The alleged offender is no longer part of ‘us’ but has suddenly become one of ‘them’ (the other upon whom evil can be justly visited) (Mead, 2000: 11).

This simplistic binary of ‘us’ and ‘them’, which polarises, divides and effectively paralyses the population, is perpetuated by this media hysteria, which whips up fear in the population by creating a perception of criminals as “psychopathic, deviant, sadistic madmen [and women] bent on ravishing a helpless prone citizenry” (Abu-Jamal, 2000: 22).

In the light of the crime increase in South African society, most do not need much convincing – many need to take the moral high ground and pronounce what is right and wrong, who is good and evil in black and white terms, where a growing desire to “Bring Back the Death Penalty” is being increasingly publicly expressed by South Africans of all class and ethnic backgrounds. Opportunistic politicians feed into this frenzy, hoping to benefit from what Abu-Jamal terms the Industry of fear: “Nail em and Jail em!” shout Democratic Alliance (DA) banners of the 2000 election. Newspapers flash sensationalist headlines and consumers put their mouth where their money is – another crime story to swap at the dinner table.
This climate of insecurity which financially benefits those “peddlers of real or fictional terror…the police, the justice system, industry and the weapons and security trade” (Duclos 1998 in Parenti 2000a: 23) as well as the capitalist press, who sell newspapers and politicians, who use it as a rallying point, actually serves as a means of social control (Parenti 2000a, 2000b; Foucault 1980). Crime and fear of crime as embodied in the myth of ‘the criminal’, as Parenti (2000) discusses, short-circuits the social cohesion necessary for political mobilisation since communities are afraid to knock on doors or go out after dark.

But this analysis is made more complex by the fact that these are female offenders who have committed violent acts against men. Thus under the guise of ‘protecting society’ from murderous criminals their continued incarceration is actually I would argue, due to the overt threat they pose to patriarchal authority. For the one in five men who admit to beating their wives (Sewpaul 2005), the countless others who have kept silent and the women who willingly collude – these women are where they should be. Writing this in 2007, they are still behind bars, they are still waiting to be heard.

**Still I rise**

The effects of this ‘reversal’ on the drama group were pronounced and the prison space quickly restructured relationships of disrespect and suspicion some of which I outlined in the section ‘women divided’. Hegemony had been re-established. After some discussion it was then that I decided to focus the next Theatre for a developing Nation intervention in Female Correctional Centre on *why do women undermine other women?* Activism in the public sense had backfired; there was a need to recreate a safe ‘private’ space to engage in quality dialogue.

As it was part of the first level course a group of women only students devised plays on the issue along with three groups of offenders. The solidarity felt in the room, right from the outset was palpable. No one wanted the event to end. The chief offender facilitator, Virginia said of the event: “I found it the most powerful experience. It was something we could just express…we were expressing our feelings from within” (Virginia 18 September 2002). Through the invocation of an imagined community of horizontal comradeship (Anderson 1991: 6 – 7) women across race, class, age and ethnic divides came together – as a ‘nation’ –

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171 This is an excerpt from the poem by Maya Angelou of the same name.
to openly discuss their experience of and complicity in the oppression of women. Not to be 
“willing die for such limited imaginings” (Anderson 1991: 7) as with nationalism, but in 
order to overcome. In this sense it imagined “unimaginable forms of association” (Kershaw 
1999: 18) and embraced radicalism.

According to the offenders’ plays the following was revealed around how and why women 
undermine each other. The first play dealt with newly married peri-urban women specifically 
who are often disrespected and maltreated by both the husband and the women of his family 
(mother, sisters etc). The second portrayed a work situation where women subordinates did 
not show support for a woman manager despite her deservedness. Third was a case of sexual 
rivalry. In a case of adultery women blame ‘the woman’ rather than their adulterous partners. 
In all instances it seems to be about access to (phallic) power which manifests in misdirected 
jealousy and petit rivalries.

Post-performance discussion and interviews revealed that conscientisation was raised around 
various issues including the issue of jealousy, which had been the problem earlier in the year. 
This was evidenced in Nokwanda’s statement regarding her most important realisation: “I 
learned as a person you don’t have to be jealous of another” (18 September 2002), she said. 
The intervention was thus able to build solidarity both amongst ‘the imagined community’ of 
women and amongst the offender community. Rose stated that “The day was very emotional 
– it was women speaking as one” (18 September 2002). Clearly the event had rebuilt 
solidarity in the most profound way as evidenced in Virginia’s observation:

The drama has created a sustainable bond between us – we are closer to each other now …in spite of the 
age difference we are now communicating like old friends – drama made us speak to people we would 
not have spoken to (18 September 2002).

In this instance she is referring to other offenders as well as students.

A conscientisation around the nature of patriarchal operations and a need to respect other 
women was also noted. For Ayanda the intervention (process and event) made her think 
“about men abusing women and playing with their feelings” (18 September 2002). 
Consequently Nokwanda’s comment indicted the desire for mutual respect: “As women we 
should uplift each other because you should treat other people the way you want to be
treated” (18 September 2002). However for me, one of the key outcomes was that it encouraged self-reflection as Rose incisively revealed: “[The intervention] pointed out to me that I was also one of them that looked down upon women. Without realising it women blame other women for things that are actually the fault of men.” (18 September 2002).

Equally significant however was the introduction of radical empathy which articulates a consciousness about oneself as being not simply ‘oppressed’ but ‘oppressor’. Rose expressed after the event “[before this intervention] I always looked on my side, never imagining I was hurting the next person” (Rose, 18 September 2002). Lourdes Torres explains this in terms of third world women writing identity: In this instance “all recognise that the most radical activist politics is when one comes to understand the dynamics of how one is oppressed and how one oppresses others in daily life” (1991: 275).

**Out and about**

Through the narrative of this chapter I have attempted to map a story about South African women behind bars and the stories they have mapped about themselves. This has necessitated both an understanding of these women as an analytical category and a political one – deeply embedded in the politics of location: Third world/ Sub-Saharan Africa/ prison.

Within this frame I have inserted radical popular performance. Angela Davis (1984: 199) articulately expresses why art and culture is seen as fundamental in invigorating any community who find themselves survivors of oppressive operations:

Art and culture are…special forms of consciousness that can potentially awaken an urge in those affected by it to creatively transform their oppressive environments. Art and culture can function as sensitises and catalysts propelling people towards involvement in organised movements seeking to effect radical change. Art and culture are special because of their ability to influence feelings [my emphasis due to the offenders emphasis] as well as knowledge.

Thus, while cultural production has been shown in this and the previous chapter to be the principle means to ensure hegemony (Gramsci, 1971) and thus patriarchy, it can also, as has been shown, function as the method to conscientise, mobilise and revitalise communities and individuals through the retelling of their own histories with the agency that affords. Consequently, the fact that media and other systemic forms of cultural endeavour can be
domestication does not, and must not, negate the positive achievements of the women of Westville in their struggle for liberation through the praxis of radical cultural action. This theatre cannot physically break through the prison bars, nor can it destroy the structures of oppression, but it can through the power of the imagination and political will, give those involved the experience of freedom that is I believe has been personally transformative. This proves its radicalism.

Numerous offenders spoke of how the interventions made them feel free (interviews 2001, 2002), but it is not only the women who were/are in prison. We are all of us in chains. This exercise then becomes a metaphor for society’s tendency to manacle and oppress to varying degrees and in varying ways (the oppressor is also not free) its members. PPT is therefore considered an excellent medium not simply because of its ability to mobilise and revolutionise but because it creates a ‘magic space’ for the rehearsal of alternative ways of being and ways of seeing (Berger 1972). As such the analysis based on the performative interventions – in and of themselves and as catalysts for broader activities in the Correctional Centre, does not attempt to define an identity of South African women in prison. Rather it attempts to map a complex description both revealing – and based in – a network of multiple contradictions indicative of heterogeneous signifying practices (Spivak 1998).

Nevertheless, within a fundamentally oppressive structure such as a prison (which in many respects is an allegory for the political operations of the world outside: colonialism and capitalism) the ‘truly’ transformative potential of cultural action, is limited. That is unless it becomes a sustained movement, which is able to negotiate at the institutional or governmental level. But theatre on the whole did not take place when I was not present. Although with each intervention offenders become increasingly equipped to manage and workshop their own plays requiring less and less input from me, offenders did not initiate theatre in the Correctional Centre. The Correctional Centre also did not facilitate or support the continuation of the initiative outside of my involvement (and often during my involvement\textsuperscript{172}). The safety of the Correctional Centre routine returned once I left. And yet,

\textsuperscript{172} The journal notes that I took during the projects are full of frustration. Prisons are short staffed and often an unwilling overworked member is tasked with the responsibility of facilitating the project. This means frequent cancellations or simply ‘forgetting’ arrangements, waiting and reluctant assistance to solve problems that inevitably occur during a project of this nature. Presently (2007 - ) there is a designated member in Female Correctional Centre who deals with cultural activities. Unfortunately, this was not the case from 2000 – 2004.
as will be explored in the following chapter, it is often the most restrictive circumstances that give rise to the most innovation and creativity – away from the gaze\textsuperscript{173}. This is popular culture emerging from ‘within and below’ at the level of the individual – at the level of identity.

During that time I worked with four different members assigned to recreation under three different heads of the Correctional Centre.

\textsuperscript{173} A prime example is the multiple informal economies – ostensibly survival techniques – that have developed in Zimbabwe since the economic collapse.
CHAPTER 6

Westville Female: Identity and power

It’s the 19th August 2003 and Westville Correctional Centre is celebrating Women’s Day. It is always a big occasion here. An opportunity for all women participating in Zulu popular performance taking place in the Correctional Centre a chance to strut their stuff: Zulu gospel choir, ngoma dancers and popular theatre. The event, which involves both offenders and members, takes place in the central core, surrounded with a barred spiral ramp going up three floors. It is a largely female, largely Zulu affair. Virginia, who embodies these, will be the Master of Ceremonies. Her presence and power revealing themselves through amongst other things the Drama projects made her the obvious choice.

I have arrived early and Stella and Karen (both involved members of the Drama Group) are hard at work putting up the final touches. They have made bill-boards to adorn the bars they read as follows:

- With a positive attitude and willpower we can achieve anything our heart desires.
- Because we are women behind bars we don’t stop being daughters, wives mothers or human beings.
- The secret of happy living is not to do what you like but to like what you do.
- If you have a confused or mixed sexual identity in prison, what are you going to say to your children?
- A future is not what you inherit but what you create.
- Skhondayi is one of the major means of spreading the HIV virus – wake-up sisters!
- We don’t have grandfathers, dads, husbands or boyfriends here. If you think and believe you are one, then shame on you, you’re a fake!
- As a woman don’t ever believe abuse is what you deserve.
- Jealousy is destructive and unattractive trait so if you have to lose it.
- There’s no men behind bars in Female Prison, so if you are lost – go to the male prison.
- Be proud to be a woman. Don’t compromise yourself by thinking you’d be better by being a man!

(19 August 2003)

174 Stella and Karen were the authors and scribes of the billboards.
175 Skhondayi refers to same sex female relationships/lesbianism. The term, although describing the sexual encounter also implies the broader power play of the relationship. This will be discussed in greater detail below.
As I read the handwritten signs, reminiscent of prison tattoos, I am bewildered: What are they saying? What are they not saying? Their aim, in the context of the Women’s Day event clearly intending to evoke female pride, yet the messages are incongruous vacillating between what initially appears to be a radical feminism and a conservatism that is essentialised to the point of being blatantly homophobic. Strangely however they seem to encapsulate precisely the contradiction that is ‘The Westville Woman’.

These slogans ‘written on the body’ of the prison – its heart – are a specific communication of the “identity politics of [this] place and the spacialised politics of identity” (Keith and Pile 1993: 2). In their invocation of gender identity specifically (although this cannot be separated from race), they are a mixture of inspirational messages to evoke female self-pride and conforming messages that are morally threatening.

The event gets underway: It has taken a while with offenders slowly filling up the ramps not wanting a day different, to be gone too fast. Members too begin to arrive with key personnel sitting at the trestle table that has been set up in the core. It is adorned with a tablecloth and a bouquet of plastic flowers to honour the seniority (superiority?) of the members. The energy begins to build. Virginia enters the space: ‘Sanibonani!’ She warmly greets all present. ‘Yebo!’ Is the resounding reply. After a brief introduction the event is underway. An isigubhu (cowhide drum) begins to beat. It is not far off and getting closer. Its echoes begin to fill the halls of the once ‘whites only’ Correctional Centre – a new heart beat – a summoning of the ancestors to this cold place where they were once denied entry.

The ngoma dancers appear in procession and enter the space. They are dressed in full traditional regalia: isidwaba (beaded skirt), imifece (ankle bracelets) and ubuhlala (beaded belt). Their bare feet stamp the ground in unison, the beat of the drum and the rustle of the imifece reverberating through the central core of the Correctional Centre. Hundreds of hands clap in time.

As is the custom, members of the ‘audience’ (for there is no real distinction) are ‘free’ to dance if and when they feel the spirit take them. However most are behind the bars of the central core preventing participation. Nevertheless members (dressed in full uniform some in brown heeled shoes), and those offenders closer to the action, take turns to enter the space.
When a member enters, the crowd goes wild, ululating as she dances. This is not a space for dissent but for consent.

Each performance that follows is a celebration of Zulu culture in the core of the Correctional Centre: An official claiming of the space by both offenders and members alike as a ‘new’ ‘Zulu’ space. The dominant postcolonial culture of KwaZulu-Natal. The messages adorning the walls provide the silent script for this cultural transition in their effort to create a new condition – a goal of popular culture (Fabian 1997:19). For this call to identity, to culture, is not a mere adoption of the old ways into the mainstream. Not entirely. There is a call for a new order. But what ‘new order’? How are these women choosing to identify themselves and why? What is this identity politics (Keith and Pile 1993:2)?

In ending, the following chapter will explore these questions tying together any loose ends raised in the thesis proper. It will use the thematics/identity vectors revealed in the billboards themselves as a navigational thread. Not surprisingly the elements that consistently emerged in the Prison Theatre as issues that the women wished to identify themselves around, and which are in line with the questions of this dissertation, revealed themselves here. They are motherhood, femininity, sexuality, HIV/AIDS and abuse. They essentially respond to the overarching question: What is a Zulu woman in post-apartheid South Africa? Which is comprised of various sub-questions:

- What is the most important role of a Zulu woman in post-apartheid South Africa?
- How should a Zulu woman show her pride of womanhood?
- What should a Zulu woman’s sexuality be?
- And how does our HIV status inform our identities as African women?
- How should a Zulu woman be treated?

It is also important to note that although the identity negotiated speaks to the prison context, and the women’s desire to re-imagine themselves within it, it also appeals to a broader post-liberation context and their desire to be part of it.176

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176 Some women involved in the project had either not experienced or experienced very little of a South Africa post-apartheid. Fourteen out of the initial 31 women who participated in 2001 being incarcerated 1998 or before – the average sentence being 18 years (where ‘life’ is 25 years).
Further, the understanding of power and identity formation communicated in these billboards supports the post-structural theoretical frame of the dissertation and the chapter. I shall therefore begin with an analysis of the billboards in the broader context of the Women’s Day event as popular cultural texts in relation to identity. This will provide a framing for the more detailed discussion of the findings and conclusions.

**Identity power culture**

Writing on the later works of playwright Jean Genet, Edward Said (1995:238) expressed:

> Identity is what we impose on ourselves through our lives as social historical, political, and even spiritual beings. The logic of culture and of families doubles the strength of identity, which for someone like Genet, who was a victim of the identity forced on him by his delinquency, his isolation, his transgressive talents and delights, is something to be resolutely opposed...identity is the process by which the stronger culture, and the more developed society, imposes itself violently upon those who, by the same identity process, are decreed to be a lesser people. Imperialism is the export of identity.

In the context of the billboard messaging, which must stand together as a single text where meaning is created intertextually and metatextually, there is clear intention around the renegotiation of identity of the women by the women themselves. My research confirmed that the women communally wrote the text (conversation with Karen and Stella 19/08/2003). The Correctional Centre authorities did not dictate it to them.

Like Genet these women are victims of the identity forced on them by their delinquency (Said 1995: 238) discussions in Chapter 5 have revealed this. Like Genet they oppose this identity. Post-performance interviews (2000 – 2004) consistently revealed that the theatre interventions creation of opportunities to challenge the criminal stereotype was a principal benefit for participants (discussed in Chapter 5 ‘social impacts’).

The primary concern of this dissertation has been uncovering the various ways in which the women have endeavoured to oppose this ‘violent imposition’ and the ways in which Prison Theatre has facilitated this process: through its participative form, which facilitates dialogue (discussed in Chapter 3 and 5); through the associative/symbolic power of the theatre itself.

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177 Genet is useful here for his thematic concern with both prisons and race. His play *The blacks* (1958/1960) being a key example.
which is popular power (Barber 1997; Byart 1993; Fiske 1989; Mbembe 1992) (discussed in Chapter 4) and through the content of the theatre itself which directly and indirectly allowed for certain identity vectors to emerge that the women wanted to renegotiate and subsequently rehearse in the day to day of the Correctional Centre itself (prison as theatre). These will be discussed below (Chapter 6).

First however it is imperative to point out that identity generally and gender identity specifically is clearly understood by the women to be a construct:

Be proud to be a woman. Don’t compromise yourself by thinking you’d be better by being a man! (19 August 2003)

The implication being that ones gender is a choice: ‘being’ a man in this context involves literally adopting a male persona. Gender therefore can be performed just as one would take a male part in a play performed at an all female institution, which the women promoting this identity have. My argument proposed in Chapter 4 theoretically underpins this claim regarding performativity as does evidence to be discussed later in the chapter.

Further, offenders, through experience with the criminal justice system, understand the relative nature of ‘the truth’: How one tells a story or interprets facts can be the difference between freedom or imprisonment, even life and death. And as Worrall (1991 see also Agozino 1997) contends how one ‘appears’ to the judge (on the spectrum of masculine and feminine) can directly influence sentencing.

Yet, equally the dominant women (Virginia, Nompumelelo, Philile being the main instigators) promote the idea that although some may choose to re-imagine themselves, there is a right/ ‘truthful’ way (for a Zulu woman) to be. This position was evident in the plays in which they were involved in creating (2000 – 2004) to be discussed below, in post-performance discussions (2000 – 2004), in conversations with other offenders in the Correctional Centre and encapsulated by the following billboards:

There’s no men behind bars in Female Prison, so if you are lost – go to the male prison.

We don’t have grandfathers, dads, husbands or boyfriends here. If you think and believe you are one, then shame on you, you’re a fake! (19 August 2003)
The counter-point between this post-modern/ post-structural understanding of ‘contructedness’ and ‘performativity’ vis-à-vis this seemingly essentialised notion of ‘the self’ is stark. It is my contention therefore that while the women in my study have a clear post-modern/ post-structural understanding (and experience) of identity as a construct, they have chosen to (re)‘construct’ an ‘essentialist’ traditional identity (feminine, heterosexual, maternal), but which demands renegotiation around the treatment of women with regards to abuse and therefore promotes the idea of ‘sisterhood’ in this regard.

Central to this apparent contradiction is culture: culture as a means to communicate, culture as a means to liberate and culture as a means to control and convince. Further, culture (in this case Zulu culture) cannot be considered outside of the historical and transitional moment. Its use here blurs the lines between resistance and conformity; hegemony and counter-hegemony.

In this example, culture buttresses this appeal to a return to ‘the true female self’ in particular through its expression in African popular performance. Cultural events such as Women’s Day and the Prison Theatre Interventions have been integral in providing the space for the firm establishment of Zulu culture as the dominant culture in the Correctional Centre as reflective of the broader South African society178.

The perception of culture however, which becomes conflated with tradition, is widely perceived amongst South Africans to be static and non-negotiable (http://www.mg.co.za/article/2009-12-04). In the battle against HIV/AIDS, for example the excuse of ‘my culture’ with regards to sexual practices has been one of the chief obstacles for educators (http://www.hst.org.za/news/20030401). Further Zulu cultural forms although popular and evolving, consolidate this feeling of cultural stasis since they speak of and to ‘tradition’.

Within this understanding the castigatory and almost threatening tone of these ‘conforming’ messages become justified in terms of the cultural ‘truth’ that the women are attempting to

178 Although the time period falls outside of the period of this research. Jacob Zuma’s victory at Polokwane can be considered part of this rise of a Zulu hegemony. Interestingly, Philile’s nickname for some time in the Correctional Centre was Mrs Zuma – the president’s wife – because of the way she busied herself around the Correctional Centre. An obvious reference to the amount of power she is perceived to have.
reinstate. Here, they appeal to the sensitive issue of reputation, social and cultural acceptance and most importantly the powerful role of motherhood: ‘If you have a confused or mixed sexual identity in prison, what are you going to say to your children?’

As Said states (1995:238): “the logic of culture and families doubles the strength of identities”. As discussed the women from the drama group (lead by Virginia, Nompumelelo and Philile and to a lesser extent Rose) use this to power to ‘persuade’ the women to return to/ adopt this renegotiated ‘Zulu’ female identity: A Zulu identity that is also in line with conservative Christian values.

Christian values and practices are openly encouraged by Correctional Services and practiced by members and offenders alike as part of their rehabilitation agenda. The Directorate of Spiritual Care of the DCS (2002:1) acknowledges every offender’s constitutional right to freedom of religion, belief and opinion, stating:

> It has been found that often an offender’s religion is the one value which remains constant in his life and it is thus critically important to ensure that offenders’ spiritual needs are provided for.

Religious volunteers of all faiths are a dominating presence in Westville Female Correctional Centre. This is reflective of the organisational ethos. A high-ranking official when negotiating the use of the Church Hall for a Prison Theatre event once asked me: “But where is God going to go?” She was serious.

Thus, to continue, these slogans, not only reveal much around how identity is understood and how the women wish to re-identify themselves; but the manner in which they are communicated, it could be argued, appears itself to be a ‘violent imposition’: An apparently stronger culture communicating a ‘new order’ through the use of popular cultural forms of signage and performance. Since as Said (1995:238) argues “imperialism is the export of identity” it follows that in any transitional moment, the new politically invigorated culture – itself once imposed upon – may use this exhortatory and propagandist approach in its desire to claim and dominate the cultural arena thereby establishing an hegemony.

Their successful use of more democratic approaches (Freire 1970) in the Prison Theatre, as outlined in the previous chapter (Chapter 5) seems not to have significantly influenced their
method of political manoeuvre in this instance. The prison environment, as with the imperialist/ apartheid system being the overwhelming model for how power operates. Thus although there are successful precedents for dialogic communication, this is not the only appropriation of popular culture. It is also used in a propagandist sense to communicate a non-negotiable message with the intention of manufacturing consent (further examples of this will be described below). The two models exist side-by-side in comfort and contradiction.

To reiterate Mbembe (for this was raised in Chapter 4): “The postcolony is a particularly revealing, and rather dramatic, stage on which are played out the wider problems of subjection and its corollary, discipline” (Mbembe 2001: 103). Discipline is the core business of the prison system; the prison system and its internal and external operations, a reflection of the emerging post-colony.

Within this frame there is little space for cultural relativism. It is a world of black and white: right and wrong. It is disciplinary. It is my argument that this essentialised reading of culture, which promotes the idea of ‘the true Zulu woman’ is of some use to the offenders in their promotion of the values depicted in the billboards. First, it assists them in their construction of the good woman. A ‘good’ ‘innocent’ woman would be a woman who knows the distinction between right and wrong, truth and falsehood and one who at least publically is ready to commit wholeheartedly to this understanding. Discussions and descriptions below will demonstrate how entirely many of these women ‘believe’ these new identities in a total suspension of disbelief and why. Second, the extensiveness of this essentialist understanding of culture/identity makes others’ belief in this ‘hail’ all the more possible and passable. The significant others being: The institution, the outside world represented by the students and the ‘wayward’ offenders.

A clear reading would therefore be that the offenders are first, reconstructing themselves in line with the hegemonic position of the prison and second they are doing this in order to further their own interests in terms of buying favour with those individuals (Correctional Centre authorities) who control the key to their freedom. This is powerful motivation indeed. There is no doubt in my mind that there is much truth in this interpretation.
Nevertheless, it is also important to point out here that although clearly the position of the dominant women is in many instances in line with the new hegemony and thus the Correctional Centre, I do not believe the women to be the mere mouthpieces of the establishment. It is also a way for them to find ‘liberation’ of a kind behind the walls. My detailed discussions of these identity vectors should help to elaborate on why. However it would be amiss not to point out in the context of power/power over that the women spearheading this re-negotiation are also older: Age being an important power dynamic within Zulu culture.

In returning to our focus on the billboards, the messages, which reflect the sentiments of ‘the new order’ of both offenders and members, function to establish the gender values (what women are and their role in post-apartheid South Africa) of this dominant postcolonial culture. The irony, for of course in the hall of mirrors that is post-coloniality there is always a bizarre twist, these messages, which call for a renegotiated Zulu female identity were penned – consensually and with commitment – by a white self-professed bisexual woman and an Indian woman. Performing ‘Zulu’. This would seem to prove not only the deep-rooted understanding of the constructedness of identity and of ‘performing the self’ in the acquisition of power, but that ‘the new order’ is indeed centred around a renegotiated Zuluness as the post-colonial dominant culture.

The following section will expand in more detail on the themes alluded to above drawing on evidence gained though the research process. I will then debate why I believe that the women chose to negotiate for this specific construction.

**Westville female**

It is a morning in May 2002. I have a group of about 10 women present for a session. I come in weekly now and am becoming a familiar face and part of the Correctional Centre routine. Today I will introduce them to image theatre (Boal 1979). After a warm up of a song, we talk about what it is to be a woman, I ask them each to independently think of what it is to be

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179 In the play on Lesbianism 2003, Stella came out very strongly in favour of the right to practice Lesbianism and to dispute it as a moral wrong.
a woman for them and to make an image expressing that, using the other women in the group as ‘statues’. These were the images they made:

Image 1
A prostitute is hooking. A ‘white’ guy approaches her.

Image 2
A woman is putting on make-up.

Image 3
A mother is lovingly holding a baby.

Image 4
A young woman is waiting by the phone for her boyfriend to call

Image 5
A woman is being hit by a man

Image 6
A woman is cooking supper, children complaining and waiting for food.

Image 7
A father is in the car in the driveway waiting to take the children to school on his way to work. The mother is running out with school lunch that she has prepared. He is impatient.

The images portrayed women of different classes, of different ages and at different stages of life. Some were race specific, most were not but one can assume that they were portraying images based to some extent on their own experience as Zulu women.

From their depictions a number of notable conclusions can be made. First, all the images except for one, display women in the domestic arena – the private sphere. The only image where she is in the public sphere she is prostituting herself.

The second important observation is that all the images, define ‘woman’ in terms of their relationship to ‘men’. Whether physically present in the image or not, each image involves a man or the absence of a man. Secondly, all the images depict that relationship in terms of a continuum of dominance/control in which the woman is consistently ‘the dominated’: Prostitution and physical abuse on the one extreme, impatient husband on the other. The only
image that manages to escape this to some degree is the image of the mother and child. Here ‘woman’ is seen in relation not to ‘man’ but to ‘child’. Here she is the one with power and control albeit informed by love and nurturing rather than pain and/or humiliation. Yet the man too is present through his absence: The absent father. Yet the image chose not to focus on this aspect.

In the views of the participants, ‘woman’ seems only to exist in terms of a symbol of masculinity or a symbol of maternity. She cannot exist independently outside of a binary. She cannot exist outside of the symbol of the male or the maternal. Further within the binary ‘woman’ seems only to have agency through the maternal.

Using the image theatre as a starting point I will now expand on the dominant intersecting themes concerning gender identity as they emerged through the research process. The image theatre being part of that process: Motherhood, femininity, sexuality, – as thematics consistent with the binary described above which also consistently revealed themselves as areas of contention and therefore importance; woman’s health (HIV/AIDS)\(^{180}\), as a central area of focus both in the plays and in daily conversations/ life of the Correctional Centre and finally abuse. Although these areas will be analysed in turn, they are not discrete.

The analysis will explore how these areas open up possibility for a renegotiated female identity and potential sisterhood around shared experience – or not; where they transgress conventional constructions of ‘black/Zulu woman’, where they seem to affirm these constructions and why.

It is also important to state here that the research has also positioned Prison Theatre in this context as popular culture, a form that has grown and celebrated Zulu culture in Westville Female Correctional Centre. Further, in line with a post-structural argument bell hooks emphasises the interconnectedness of race/class/gender (hooks 1989) within identity

\(^{180}\) HIV/AIDS is positioned as part of (gender) identity for those infected. This will be argued in the relevant section. In addition, although not directly articulated through the image theatre it remained a consistently important emphasis in many of the plays.
construction. The focus on the details of gender identity therefore cannot and do not stand outside of race (and class\textsuperscript{181}), which for these purposes is used interchangeably with culture.

With regards to the race/culture conflation in his article ‘Race into culture: A critical genealogy of cultural identity’, Walter Benn Michaels (1995) argues how “Our sense of culture is characteristically meant to displace race, but … culture has turned out to be a way of continuing rather than repudiating racial thought…our race identifies the culture to which we have a right, a right that may be violated or defended, repudiated or recovered” (1995:62).

In the context of the Correctional Centre therefore, ‘blackness’ identifies ‘Zulu’. Although other races and ‘black’ cultures (‘tribes’ as they are referred to by offenders (interviews 2001)) are present in the Correctional Centre they are the minority. All blacks and coloureds that I have encountered speak Zulu. While whites and Indians who lack confidence in Zulu speak English, the cultural hegemony is Zulu and this is accepted. These offenders typically understand Zulu although they may not speak it. In the drama group there was consistently a two-thirds majority Zulu to ‘other’\textsuperscript{182}. In comparison to the drama at Medium B however this is low. There the participants are all Zulu\textsuperscript{183}.

**Motherhood**

In the morning the sun beams through the bars onto peach linoleum floors. Stainless steel benches and tables fill the medium sized room. Moving them aside to practice is a noisy business. I am left alone there. One by one familiar faces drift in. Taking their time, using their time. I explain what we going to do throughout the year. We talk about the liberation of the mind. I am reminded of James Thompson’s question: are we content to liberate their minds if we cannot liberate their bodies? Philile is there. She is

\textsuperscript{181} In the interests of focus and brevity, this thesis will not delve into a detailed discussion on class although class is acknowledged throughout the thesis. Needless to say the plays on class conflict (2003) revealed a conflation of class with race, which support Hassim’s (2006) concern mentioned in Chapter 5. Middle-class blacks were played as whites blocking their noses to make a ‘white’ accent. Post-performance discussions also tended to support this conflation. Offenders were reluctant to dialogue meaningfully around issues of class. This is not to say it was not an issue to which some of the women could relate; but simply that they chose not to engage it. I concluded reasons for this were two-fold: the event involved University students majority being middle-class. A sincere engagement with the issues could have created conflict. Further within the offender group there is a cross-section of class backgrounds with the older more educated urban women tending to have more power in the group, guiding the conversation; nevertheless the common experience of incarceration is a leveller that relegates all to ‘the prisoner class’ hence their unified mobilisation to ‘re-claim’ the respect of their woman-hood.

\textsuperscript{182} ‘Other’ is comprised of: White English and Afrikaans, Indian, coloured, Basotho, Xhosa and Shangaan.

\textsuperscript{183} I have been involved in the drama at Medium B through Chris Hurst since 2000 and am aware of the racial / cultural demographics.
the mother of nine children – although she does not look much older than 40. Her viciously abusive husband was murdered. She got 25 years. Her baby girl keeps asking her when she is coming home. She worries about her oldest son and wants to know if I know anyone in the army. (Extract from notes 22 May 2002)

It is Saturday 14 September 2002 and the day of the Theatre for a Developing Nation intervention. Approximately 40 students and 34 offenders fill the church hall. We are ready to begin. Virginia is hosting. She steps forward and greets the students:

“Sanibonani!” They respond “Yebo!” She switches to English. “I am very happy and sad to see you all today, because as I am standing here I am reminded of my children. Today you are all our children…” The women nodded in sombre agreement, the students softened. From that day on, whenever students came into the Correctional Centre, Virginia would greet them in this way adding – “You are very welcome, but please don’t feel at home!”

The majority of women who participated in the theatre over the period of this research and beyond were mothers. Those younger women who were not, were considered ‘children’. In an already infantilising space such as a Correctional Centre they were deemed in need of mothering, calling the older woman – Virginia in particular – and female members ‘Mummy’. Not ‘ma’ which is the customary manner in which to call an older woman but the puerile ‘mummy’. Motherhood consequently revealed itself as a vitally important aspect in the (re)construction / negotiation of identity for the women involved.

As indicated in the image theatre (Boal 1979) examples above, motherhood proved to be the only positive role perceived by the women and in which some agency existed. This is commensurate with Catherine Obianuju Acholonu’s conception of ‘motherism’ which she introduces as an Afrocentric alternative to feminism centred on the representation of women as mothers – the last hope. Briefly, it proposes that African women are “the spiritual base of every family, community and nation” (2002: 3). However, this mother/child dynamic is perpetuated by infantilisation of the prison system and to some extent explains why it is so readily adopted. In Westville Female Correctional Facility184 you are either a mother or a

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184 My research is restricted to Westville Female Correctional Centre however prison culture tends to be national and I am confident to suggest that I suspect the practice of calling female Correctional Staff ‘mummy’ occurs in Female centres throughout the country. Whether other offenders are called ‘mummy’ I do not know.
child and although it tends to be drawn along age lines (older offenders earning the right of motherhood), I have seen older offenders (with children of their own) call members (of any age with or without children of their own) ‘mummy’. As if to say ‘you are my mummy’.

Interestingly therefore the title ‘mummy’ is simply an indicator of authority and respect – not necessarily of biological motherhood. All (female) members\textsuperscript{185} are ‘mummy’ and specific older offenders such as Virginia, Nonkululeko and Philile are ‘mummy’. The title ‘mummy’ also comes with it the expectation of ‘care’ on the part of the ‘child’. It is also a way for the child to ingratiate herself and to be rewarded for good behaviour – if she behaves well. In this all female society the acceptable binary through which power operated became ‘mother’ and ‘child’. For power must operate in relation to. The unacceptable binary being ‘man’/’woman’ as indicated in the billboards and to be discussed below in the section ‘sexuality’.

Mother/ child relationships – in their complexity – worked themselves into the narratives of many of the plays and in 2002 the offenders chose to engage the topic of ‘Children on the outside: motherhood and prison’ which articulated the concern that women in prison have about their children. They looked at how they could continue a mothering supportive role while behind bars, such as writing letters and phoning (post-performance discussions 25 July 2002). This same concern was expressed in the play for the Justice for women Campaign in 2001 whose final message was not ‘stop the abuse’ but ‘our children are suffering and will repeat the cycle of violence if we aren’t there to give them love’. Chapter 5 has described the narrative of this play. This sentiment is also well supported with anecdotal evidence throughout the period I have been working at Westville Female.

Women frequently lament the absence of their children and recount heart-wrenching stories of little ones in tears longing for their mother, tears that they cannot console. In the eyes of many of the women, there is no greater punishment than separation from children. Janice Govender summed it up best when she stated: “The fifteen years of abuse by my husband is nothing compared to the twenty years of having to live without my children” (Janice Govender 8 December 2001).

\textsuperscript{185} There are very few male DCS members in Westville Female Correctional Facility. Those that there are work in the front offices or are positioned at a gate. They are not in charge of sections of the population.
It is no surprise therefore that in the plays mothers were consistently portrayed as nurturing and supportive of children. While in one example a mother was portrayed as cruel to a daughter-in-law (2001) due to racism\(^\text{186}\), she was nevertheless supportive of her own children. In this example of a play by Rose, Nonkululeko, Virginia and Philile (2004) we see quite an idealistic portrayal of this relationship in spite of the challenges of 21\(^{st}\) century parenting:

**Mother and her daughter are talking at home**

**Mother:** (looking at her daughter admiringly) Hey my child, look at you, you have grown so much!

**Amanda:** Yes, mother, I am now dating.

**Mother:** Dating? What is dating? The only date I know is that of the days of the week.

**Amanda:** No! Not that kind of date. I am going out with guys. I am going out with Sipho … and I also have a secret lover, Bheki.

**Mother:** Oh! You also have a secret lover? I don’t approve of that, my child. You know these days there is this disease called HIV/AIDS.

**Amanda:** (not interested and bothered) Oh yeah right, HIV/AIDS that everybody tells us about.

**Mother:** You know what you should do, go and see a counsellor.

**Amanda:** Ok, I will go mother.\(^\text{187}\)

(Scene 1 AIDS play 1 11 September 2004)

Although the daughter is irritated with her mother for speaking to her about HIV/AIDS she still listens to her and goes to the clinic. She is respected. The daughter is shown to be

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\(^{186}\) This play devised by Nonkululeko was a direct portrayal of her own experience marrying into a Tswana family.

\(^{187}\) Translated from the Zulu by Ntokozo Ndlela (2004).
irresponsible and immature\textsuperscript{188}. Subsequent discussions however did reveal the importance of parents speaking to their children about sex and acknowledged that parents often don’t. This somewhat naïve depiction seems reflective more of their nostalgia. Although all have experienced the trials of motherhood in reality, once it is denied it becomes romanticised.

The symbol of mother and child is both ancient and contemporary; is expressed and represented in culturally specific terms (eg the \textit{Pieta}) and trans-culturally. This is (typically) a biological inevitability and points to the notion of ‘human nature’. However as Louise M. Antony (2000: 8) argues feminists today are suspicious of any appeal to ‘human nature’ since such appeals “have been used historically, and continue to be used, to rationalise and justify the perpetuation of oppressive gender roles.”

The role of ‘mother’ has lead to the relegation of ‘woman’ to the realm of the domestic and so the division of public and private sphere’s along gendered lines with associative levels of importance/value and thus power. As John Thompson states, “the exclusion of women was constitutive of the very notion of the public sphere” (Thompson 1994:93). The justification being that:

\begin{quote}
The public sphere was generally understood as a domain of reason and universality in which men were uniquely equipped to participate, while women, being inclined (supposedly) to particularity and to mannered, frivolous talk, were commonly thought to be better suited to domestic life. (1994:93)
\end{quote}

Interestingly Thompson avoids the most compelling justification for woman’s ‘natural’ domesticity, that being childbearing and rearing. Perhaps he wished to avoid the rather sticky issues ‘of ‘biology’ and ‘nature’ altogether. They are harder to argue against.

However, Chandra Mohanty (1991: 9) expanding the argument of Aida Hurtado (1989) posits that working-class or/and black women do not experience the distinction between public and private spheres in the same way as white middle-class women have. Working class women and women of colour have always been subject to state intervention in their domestic lives as such it is not so much a case of the personal being political, but the fact that the public is \textit{personally} political.

\textsuperscript{188} This portrayal of the ‘irresponsible and immature’ daughter is a common thread and appears again in the Lesbianism play to be discussed under ‘sexuality’.
To extend this argument I would add that working-class women (which in South Africa implies ‘black’) have typically not had the ‘privilege’ or choice to stay at home – a working-class mother at home is ‘unemployed’, while the middle-class equivalent is a ‘stay-at-home-mum’. Further working-class/ black women’s work has largely been domestic: A conflation of public and private. Drawing briefly on the images of ‘woman’ that the offenders made in terms of this public private distinction, the only portrayal of a woman in the public sphere is ‘prostitute’: A private act done for financial gain – mistress for hire. The other dominant area of public sphere involvement for in this case black working-class women is domestic work (wife for hire), which may include nannying (mother for hire).

I will now investigate this concept briefly in terms of the impact of the apartheid – and post-apartheid state on the personal lives of black South African women. Most profoundly, The Group Areas Act, Act No 41 of 1950 and the Natives (Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents) Act, Act No 67 of 1952 meant that women, who worked in the white areas as live in ‘maids’ (domestic workers), were forced to be separated from their families – literally denying them a private sphere. Yet their working world was the domestic arena of (mostly) the whites, integrated into a private sphere to which they had no claim and in which they had no power.

Post-apartheid this has changed very little (Hassim 2006). Many still have ‘live in maids’ who do not stay with their families. The influence of the migratory work system on black men and women has meant that the inevitable separation of the nuclear family has become normalised. Although it is becoming more common for black families (typically middle-class) to live together, it is not uncommon even amongst upwardly mobile black South Africans today, not to.

Further, governments have always promoted family planning and sterilisation amongst poor women globally (Hurtado 1989: 849 in Mohanty 1991: 9). This is an argument that Angela Davis (1982) presents in her article ‘Racism, birth control and reproductive rights’ (reproduced in Lewis and Mills 2003). Her contention is that the centrality of white western women’s movements around reproductive rights is not a concern shared by black feminists – or black women generally. From an American position, a history of slavery where women

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189 Even agriculture one could argue is an extension of the domestic. Tending crops is often ‘women’s work’.
were separated from babies means that the birth control and abortion lobby can never be separated from the colonial/ slave legacy (Davis 2003: 357). The legislated separation of mothers from children in South Africa, outlined above is equally applicable.

Further, the need to advocate for the control of births, Davis argues has been often connected to “[white] women’s new dreams of pursuing careers and other paths of self-development outside marriage and motherhood” (2003: 357). These are middle-class aspirations/values imposed, in a racist manner on black women.

More and more, states Davis, “it was assumed within birth control circles that poor women, Black women and immigrant alike, had a ‘moral’ obligation to restrict the size of their families” (2003: 358). I cannot recall how many conversations amongst white South African women I have been privy to on the subject of poor black women (their domestic workers) and their ‘irresponsibility’ for falling pregnant ‘yet again!’: The genuine concern for hungry infants perhaps masking the white guilt around class and race exploitation and inequality in South Africa.

I would argue that campaigning around HIV in South African which necessarily involves messaging around sexual behaviour should also not be seen outside of this debate. This messaging, aimed at young men and women specifically, is ever-present in black urban, peri-urban and rural communities (I recall a recent drive through the Eastern Cape where upon arrival at each town, populated or not, one is consistently met with two bill-boards: Washing powder and HIV awareness). Young black women remain the group with the highest infection rates in South Africa with roughly 29% of pregnant women being HIV+ (www.tac.org.za/community/keystatistics).

The final way in which the public is personally political for women who have not “benefited from the economic conditions that underlie the public/private distinction” (Hurtado 1989: 848 in Mohanty 1991: 9) is the issue of the criminal justice system. In the context of America, the politics of post-colonial feminists (Mohanty 1991; Hurtado 1989) Feminist criminologists (Worrall 1990, 2002; Carlen 1990, 2002) and sociologists (Agozino 1997; Partenti 2000a, 2000b) intersects in the acknowledgement that the criminal justice system is consistently used as an instrument of racist (and sexist) repression. This argument can of course be extended to
the South African situation, with the criminal justice system operating under the control of the army during apartheid in order to assist in the maintenance of the racist – and sexist – hegemony.

My argument is thus threefold. First is that while middle-class essentially white women have fought against the ‘confining’ aspect of biology, which has relegated women to the private sphere; for black women the fight is to be mothers. As such it is imperative to recognise that “the politics of ‘personal life’ may be differently defined for middle-class white and for people of color” (1991: 9). This is claimed in spite of the fact that ‘motherhood’ as a role is legitimised within the dominant patriarchal Zulu hegemony and that there are evidentially extremely limited options for black (and imprisoned) women to access any agency except through the maternal.

The Westville women, have largely experienced firsthand the mighty fist of abuse legitimised through a patriarchally centred culture. This behaviour (as will be discussed in more detail below) is not acceptable to them and they are not silent about it. Yet for these women it is not biology that is confining but the prison walls, which deny them the right to fulfil the role of mother. It is hardly surprising therefore that the three grand-dames’ raised profiles and new found power earned them the right to become surrogate ‘mothers’, which they took on and used in a way a mother would, to guide her ‘children’ to what they believed was the right path.

Thus the Westville women’s desire to position themselves as mothers I believe should not be seen as simply a desire to conform to patriarchal hegemonies – although it may suit the women to be viewed by men and the authorities in this way. Nor should it be seen as simply a way to acquire agency in an arena of limited options – although this is a legitimate experience for many of the women. Since beside the realities of the hegemonic operations of power in the Correctional Centre and broader society, there is also a legitimate political rationale behind ‘claiming’ motherhood for black (imprisoned) women in a post-apartheid context.
Inside/ outside femininity

I was standing in the corridor that connects C section to the chapel talking to Virginia and Pretty of all people rushes up to great her – not me. She was transformed! Make-up and a new ‘do’... I hardly recognised her from the butch trouble-maker I had known. She gushed to Virginia, “thank you mummy so much! Thank you so much!” I didn’t even realise that they associated. Pretty is hardly Virginia’s ‘type’. After she ran off gleefully I asked, “So what is she so happy about?” “I gave her a lipstick” was Virginia’s rather self-satisfied reply. Wow! That just gave a whole new meaning to the term lipstick lesbian! (Extract from notes 27 September 2004)

My first experience going into the Correctional Centre was one of sameness (see account in Chapter 2). Same blue tunics, same plain faces and same unisex hairstyles. Their exteriors seemed to speak of conformity and lifelessness reflective of their concrete surrounds. No one appeared to want to stand out, or to show care for oneself (or others for that matter). There did not seem to be any exterior expression of self-pride. None of this was surprising in light of the experience of Correctional Centre life. ‘Standing out’ can be dangerous (Hughes 1998: 232) and the monotony of life in prison is depressing. However one Saturday morning in early September 2000 on my third or fourth visit I was walking down the corridor towards the Section we were to rehearse in and I looked up. Chantel, a woman from the group was walking boldly towards me, head held high. She was transformed from head to toe. Full make-up (a little too full), high-heel shoes (a little too high), new hair do (a little too ‘done’) and painted nails. “Wow!” I exclaimed, “You look great.” “I am going to a visit!” she said with nervous excitement “I want them to see that I am okay!”

Femininity as a construct cannot be seen outside of two seemingly disparate debates: The notion of female ‘deviance’ on the one hand and that of ‘emotional states’ on the other. In the previous chapter I introduced the conception of women and violence and femininity as a counter-point to that. Violent women are considered ‘unnatural’ (Pistorius 2004:2). Since traditionally “[w]omen were regarded as innately non-criminal virtuous upholders of morality and from this pedestal they were supposed to inspire men to greater virtue” (Zedner 1991 in Pistorius 2004: 3). Thus the female becomes conflated with morality – the ‘true’ female being one who demonstrates outwardly and in her manner hegemonic femininity.

190 As mentioned in the methodology, when the theatre began in the Correctional Centre in 2000, Pretty was the dominant offender. As noted in 2001 she resisted the process and in 2002 almost brought the theatre to an end by spreading rumours that I was benefitting financially from the projects.
So powerful was the issue of femininity argues Zedner (1991) that “deviance from femininity alone was grounds for suspicion and condemnation” (in Pistorius 2004: 3). This phenomenon is extensively analysed in the classic feminist text *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) by Betty Friedan. Her argument essentially being that post-WWII patriarchal ideology deliberately functioned to brainwash women into believing that “success and happiness lay only in the traditional wife and mother roles and that … any woman who resisted the pressure to return to hearth and home was deviant, abnormal, sick” (Tobias 1997: 59).

Zedner (1991), like Friedan (1963) is writing within a Western Christian framework and although the majority of women incarcerated at Westville Correctional Centre are historically not Western, they are Christian, and Nguni culture has become indisputably fused with Christianity since the missionary imperative to ‘civilise’ the natives outlined in Chapter 3. Further, traditional Zulu culture also dictates specific chaste ‘feminine’ behaviours for its women exemplified by such activities as virginity testing and festivals like the Reed Dance where virgins dance bare-breasted at Enyokeni the Zulu Royal Palace each September for prospective suitors.

A (Zulu) woman who has committed crime therefore, and worse violent crime, then loses her status as woman. She loses her identity. She becomes the undesired ‘criminal’. This explains to a large extent the powerful drive towards the reconstruction of the female via femininity that became evident in the Correctional Centre as typified by the opening billboards. It became clear that Virginia in particular was spear-heading this campaign.

The active reclaiming of femaleness therefore becomes not simply a brainwashed woman’s desire for acceptance by the one, but also a bold act of self-actualisation albeit one that is operating within the confines of patriarchal norms.

Further, there is a broader more covert consequence of such behaviour. As I have argued, identity is performed, and in the stage that is the Correctional Centre more so. This is understood. The ‘feminine’ and by extension ‘the moral’ therefore must be re-constructed in what I call a ‘performance of morality’ if you want to use the system. Outside femininity, inside morality. As demonstrated this correlation is so powerful that it has not only convinced women of the world (Friedan 1963) but also the perpetuators of this ideology as
exemplified in the harsher sentencing of unfeminine (and thus immoral women) (Agozino 1997, Worrall 1990). The women are then able to use this correlation to their own benefit. 


Even those with life without parole can reap the benefits of feminine behaviour. When Mandisa decided to do drama in 2000 she was a dreadlocked dope smoker, known gangster and wore a T-Shirt that had embroidered ‘forget about me’. Sometime later she made the transition, denounced her deviant ways insisted on wearing skirts and feminine shoes (personal communication Veli Khumalo 2009). She now has the position of personal assistant to the head of prison and spends her days in the front office making tea. Far more appealing than stagnating in the Correctional Centre proper. Mandisa may well have had a change of heart and decided to give up drugs and anti-social behaviour, but in order to ‘prove’ it, she also had to make an external shift towards the feminine. She had to perform femininity.

I may sound cynical. I am not. This is survival. This is using the system. Do I believe it to be all an act? No. For the real consequence of how it makes you feel. The construction of ‘the feminine’ is strongly connected to the management of emotional states, which as discussed in Chapter 5 was the most important benefit of the theatre for the offenders. Further in such an infantilising society the reclaiming of ‘woman’ as opposed to child also represents a possible shift towards maturation perhaps preventing an internalisation of ‘child’.

It is clear from Chantel’s and Mandisa’s examples above that outward (feminine) appearance is read as an expression of an internal state. Chantel’s adornment of ‘extreme’ femininity could be read as a somewhat over-the-top performative effort to signify well-being to her relatives. Mandisa’s to signify ‘rehabilitation’. Yet, this role-play is often a self-fulfilling prophecy. Transforming our bodies, influences the way we feel about ourselves. As Boal articulates oppression is felt in the body, if we transform our bodies, we transform our minds – hence his emphasis on ‘knowing the body’ (2000: 126). Women often use ‘tools’ such as make-up and clothing to assist in this transformation. Heels make those wearing them carry
their bodies differently, make-up masks a tired face – and perhaps if it is covered up it is no longer there – we suspend our disbelief.

It was always a surprise to see how the women would dress up for the Event Days. The women would use these days to demonstrate their positive selves to the outside world in a seeming determination to prove both their normality (morality) and their well-being (non-victims). They would arrive in the Church hall completely altered – make-up, colourful hair extensions and other adornments. They would carry themselves differently. Looking to be noticed and when you did catch an eye it would twinkle back. As such, feminine appearance was clearly inextricably linked, for many of the women, to emotional states which had as much to do with demonstrating a feeling of self-pride and wellness from the inside / out as it did to about drawing on the reactions of those outside / in.

Of course, from a feminist standpoint again this is in some ways this is problematic: again concealing and conforming. Yet, these women are not champions for a feminist cause, they are real women with extremely limited options trying not to give up. These are women who resent being subordinated (Fiske 1989) and are working to gain more respect in their daily lives. In true popular form therefore they are using the tools of the establishment in which to challenge it (Fiske 1989:2).

Further, expressions of femininity in the Correctional Centre are communal efforts. Certain women are good at ‘doing hair’ and they will be called on. Someone else will lend a shade of lipstick, mascara, foundation. Female bonding is an important part of this process adding to the feel good factor.

A central reason for this lending and borrowing of cosmetics is the scarcity of them. As I discussed in Chapter 4, Female Correctional Centre has a ‘cosmetic economy’. ‘Feminine products’ – beside Correctional Centre issued ones – are hard to come by. They are desired commodities that hold value in the Correctional Centre. Offenders in my experience are more willing to take risks acquiring these goods than they are for anything else: That and lesbian sex.
This brings me to the final twist in the tale. Although ‘femininity’ as a construct afforded women a platform for the expression of popular culture in the Fiskean sense; femininity too, in its conflation with religion and ‘the moral’, becomes inextricably linked to resistance against lesbianism. The two aspects of (performed) femininity and (performed) (lesbian) sexuality became diametrically opposed.

Most ‘male’ lesbians are recognisable by their clothes and accessories: cloth male hats, typically short hair and ‘bling’. They will wear trousers exclusively and call each other ‘mfwethu!’ [brother]. I shall now attempt to explain what essentially comes down to a battle of the sexes and complexify it with a political reading.

Observing the women in the drama group, it became clear over the years that the women tend to fall into one of three categories: the butch women (who never construct themselves as feminine); the girly girls (who always do) and the majority, which fall somewhere on the spectrum between the two. The younger women are often the ones who fall on the extremes of the spectrum while the older population tends to be more ‘respectable’ resisting any outward expression of sexuality. As mentioned it became clear from 2002 onwards that Virginia in particular was spearheading a campaign to bring back ‘the feminine’. Why?

In the above discussion I have argued for ‘femininity’ being a vehicle for re-claiming woman-hood and thereby demonstrating morality, a highly prized value in the Correctional Centre, with tangible consequences. Further I have argued that femininity has the power to instil personal pride and facilitate female bonding. I believe this all to be true. And I believe this all to be part of the reason for Virginia’s ‘campaign’. Nevertheless as with all things in prison all is layered and multifaceted. Nothing is as it seems.

For Virginia it was clear that female pride was linked to femininity and that this was in opposition to ‘lesbianism’ as it is practiced and performed in the Correctional Centre, which she felt to be a moral wrong (pre-performance discussions 22 September 2004). The basic argument being since femininity is indicative of morality, that which is not feminine is therefore immoral. How deep her belief went with regards to this I was never sure. Certainly the battle was not simply moral but political. The lesbians were the only challenge to her authority from within the prison population. However as far as her ‘role’ was concerned she
could never be *seen* to condone such behaviour. In fact she needed to be seen to be actively countering it. The solution was simple – since sexuality is a construct one need simply transform the outside. As my opening revealed, Pretty, the die-hard lesbian was won over by ‘mummy’ Virginia with the lure of a lipstick.

Disapproval: Virginia and ‘mfwethu’

Was Virginia simply a foot soldier for the authorities; was she simply out for personal power? Or worse, an opportunist looking for privilege? No doubt as the intelligent woman she was she understood – and reaped – the benefits of her behaviour; yet as discussed above the whole situation of the Female offender which socially denies them *any* status as woman and which labels them worse than criminal – deviant, I believe inserts a political dynamic into the process of feminisation which complexifies the issue.

The issue of sexuality in the Correctional Centre will be discussed in detail below.

**Sexuality**

I was waiting in the section dining hall for the women to arrive for the session and I noticed some of the younger women from the section who I did not know standing on benches and doing what appeared to be excitedly waving out of the window. I was curious so asked one of the women from the group who had arrived. “They are signing – ‘talking’ to boyfriends from the youth centre.” It seems the women have a way of communicating to the guys in Youth Centre by spelling out words in the air. It’s impressive to
watch. They go so fast! Also considering that Youth is about 50 meters away (the back of the building fronts onto Female). Evidently it is against prison policy to continue such behaviour but the authorities turn a blind eye in order to encourage same sex relationships. (Extract from notes 10 April 2002)

Juliette Mitchell argues, “sexuality has traditionally been the most tabooed dimension of a women’s situation” (1971: 110). The manner in which sexuality is handled in Female Correctional Centre would certainly indicate that this still is so. Although it is common knowledge that sex occurs between offenders in male Correctional Centres, as part of largely gang related behaviour (Gear & Ngubeni 2002), there is very little discussion about sex in Female Correctional Centres. It seems the issue of women and their desire for intimacy and sexual activity is a far more awkward issue to broach.

The female Correctional Centre population – like the population beyond the prison walls are both heterosexual and homosexual; Rocky, a member of the group from 2000 – 2003 was a self-proclaimed lesbian, with a girlfriend on the outside – she was white\textsuperscript{191}. The other offenders accepted her with silent curiosity. However, the confines of the Correctional Centre environment also create the ‘homosexual heterosexual’. Women in prison who have children and a history of heterosexual activity but who choose, for the sake of companionship and affection (Rose 19 June 2003; Janice Govender 26 June 2003) to enter into such a relationship with another woman who constructs herself as a man.

For the first three years sexuality and sexual activity was simply not an area for discussion. For that reason it came as somewhat of a surprise when in September 2004 as part of the post-graduate course Virginia’s group chose to tackle the issue of ‘Lesbianism’. I had realised this was a growing issue from 2003 on observing the billboards cited in the beginning of this chapter, which in turn opened up doors for communication with offenders on the subject; but I did not think that they would want to open up a space for dialogue around the issue. I soon realised that that was because this was not their intention.

The group want to look at homosexuality as a general issue – outside of prison. One step removed! Initially the group wanted to look at prison life, but this idea was usurped by Virginia and Nonkululeko’s idea of ‘Lesbianism’. My students and I are concerned that this is becoming an anti-homosexuality

\textsuperscript{191} The only women who openly declared themselves lesbians to me were white or coloured. Although it was widely known that certain Zulu women were practicing homosexuals in prison, which one could gather from their ‘performance’ of themselves as ‘male’. 

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A propaganda play to promote the morality of the stronger and older women – Virginia, Nonkululeko, Margaret, Zanele, Philile… In one particularly offensive insult lesbians were called less than dogs because at least dogs know who to screw (not necessarily true!). They refused to believe that lesbians can have real sex. This was all voiced in a room with at least 5 practicing lesbians. (Extract from notes 22 September 2004)

After the debate got heated I refocused it around human rights and the constitution. We discussed how we should not judge others for being different and that this was now a ‘free country’. The discussion gave everyone pause for thought; but this was not a free country, this was prison.

Subsequently the older women seemed to relax their militant approach. Nonkululeko wanted to use simultaneous dramaturgy to involve the audience and the play evolved into more of a dilemma that potentially opened up a space for debate. The play followed Winnie, a young girl who meets another young girl and falls in love. She tells her family and they cast her out. She goes to the social worker who tries to reconcile the family but unsuccessfully. The play ends with Winnie in the middle of a semi-circle of women who represent ‘the thoughts in her head’: the priest, her mother, her lover, friends, the social worker and other members of society. They step forward and vocalise these thoughts in turn. At points in the play the audience must instruct actors to behave differently and the audience must debate Winnie’s dilemma.

The implication of this scene is that Winnie has a choice. She can either continue to practice as a lesbian and risk losing her family or she can relinquish the behaviour and lose her lover.

The idea that homosexuality is a choice was not contested by any of the women. Even Rose who was voicing her concerns about the treatment of lesbian women in the Correctional Centre complained, “she had to go straight just to allow her self-esteem to come back to normal” (personal communication 22 September 2004). Rose is also a mother and has had serious relationships with men; yet for most of the period of this research proclaimed herself a lesbian or bisexual.

The elements contained in Rose’s statement with regards to first the constructedness of identity including sexual orientation and the no holds barred battle against Lesbianism by
both the Correctional Centre and the Virginia’s women are echoed in a number of the billboard statements cited in the beginning of the chapter:

If you have a confused or mixed sexual identity in prison, what are you going to say to your children?

We don’t have grandfathers, dads, husbands or boyfriends here. If you think and believe you are one, then shame on you, you’re a fake!

There’s no men behind bars in Female Prison, so if you are lost – go to the male prison.

Be proud to be a woman. Don’t compromise yourself by thinking you’d be better by being a man!

(Billboards, 19 August 2003)

The first statement suggests a clear spit in identity ‘before’ and ‘during’ incarceration. Emphasising again the constructedness of identity (and the influence of space and circumstance) yet appealing for women to go back to their ‘true’ selves. It is socially threatening and draws on maternal expectation and possibly guilt. The second statement alludes to a Correctional Centre lesbian culture with a patriarchal familial structure. Again it suggests, as with the third statement that anyone who has constructed herself in terms of this formation is ‘a fake’ and is clearly ‘lost’. The last statement interestingly appeals to a ‘woman-power’ conception. Interestingly lesbian identity is seen as a betrayal of ‘the female’, which has specific designated traits of motherhood, femininity and heterosexuality. This is also because the dominant gay women, as mentioned, (re)construct themselves as ‘men’ who court ‘women’ or ‘girls’. This reconstruction is then a rejection of ‘the female’ and an affront to women. The fostering of pride of self (as woman) stems from the unity around abuse, which I will discuss shortly.

In a continuation of the argument, I will now recount the day of the performance of the ‘Lesbianism’ play:

The entire performance was delayed because a few key women who were mainly in the ‘lesbianism’ play had to take communion. They arrived looking very pious – holier than thou – to be honest. I was then cornered by Virginia and others and asked what my religion is? The question was not open but with an agenda. She was holding a bible. She was performing the moral.
The actual performance was co-opted by the agenda of Virginia and her team. The preacher (played by Zanele – openly anti-gay but is herself quite masculine although old) belted the whole bible thing in the final scene … it seemed like they used it as an opportunity to judge her in real life – she had to sit and take it. To her credit she was defiant and had a really cheeky grin on her face throughout. It was like they were speaking to her. (22 September 2004)

In the actual performance the simultaneous dramaturgy was brushed over as was the post-performance discussion. The final words were given to the elders, in a powerful display of maternal authority the mothers were demanding that they be obeyed. Within the mother/child binary, the preferred binary, the ‘men’ were being expelled and the ‘children’ (the young courted women) were being brought into line.

Clearly the offenders understood the power of the theatre – as a cultural form – to not only stimulate democratic debate and raise awareness but also to propagandise and disseminate dominant ideology. PPT as a form inspired by Freirean praxis has the intention of creating critical awareness about the operations of power through directed facilitation. However often, with less interrogated projects of which there were many examples in the Westville plays, what poses as PPT in fact has an agenda (beyond simply opening debate) and is facilitated towards a specific (often ‘positive’) understanding: get tested for HIV/AIDS; leave your abusive husband; don’t do drugs and don’t join gangs being some examples.
In the plays that the offenders were exposed to and created themselves there was a mixture of this form of PPT and the more open-ended debates to concrete problems, of which there were also many examples. Further the plays at this stage were strongly offender-facilitator lead. Yet the facilitators, having a vested interest in the outcome, were not impartial and often brought their agenda’s forward as in this example. This was also in many respects the model for PPT that I had demonstrated through ‘directive facilitation’ (McLaren 2000; Torres 1998) – although I like to think I was less judgemental. These factors then I believe, coupled with an innate understanding of the operations of culture, provided the offenders with a model: don’t practice lesbianism being the message.

I have previously suggested that the rationale behind this message was a religious/cultural belief that lesbianism is a moral wrong; however as with all analysis in this thesis simple answers are never simple. Lesbian activity in the Correctional Centre is known as ‘skhondayi’. Lesbian offenders (those who openly declare their orientation) and non-lesbians describe it as ‘a game’ (pre-performance dialogue 22 September 2004). The concern arises as those women who dominate this ‘game’ are reported to entice young feminine women into it with affection and gifts and then isolate them through aggression and jealousy. This is regarded as abusive (pre-performance dialogue 22 September 2004).

Making a point: ‘Mfwethu’ and Ayanda after the intervention in 2004 in which Lesbianism was discussed.
Other women will report that while this behaviour seems similar to that conducted in the Male Correctional Centre the difference lies in the fact that in the Female Correctional Centre there is a formal proposal that the woman may reject without fear. It is her right as a woman (personal communication Janice Govender 26 June 2003; personal communication Rose 19 June 2003; group discussion 22 September 2004). In the male Correctional Centre ‘wyfies’ [wives] are picked and “coerced into an initial sex act” (Gear and Ngubeni 2002:15). There is no right of refusal. Further, in Male facilities “to be a wife is associated with inferiority, stigma and a loss of status” (Gear and Ngubeni 2002:15). Not so in the Female Centre. Nevertheless the institutional pressure and the pressure coming from the ‘moral front’ are significant. As Rose stated her lesbian activity was affecting her self-esteem due to the way she was being treated (22 September 2004). Any lesbian activity is noted on your transcript and you are excluded from activities for a mandated period. The older women, and the Correctional Centre authority, do not distinguish between mutually consensual sexual activity and *skhonyayi*. Or rather they choose not to acknowledge lesbian activity that is not a behaviour limited to the Correctional Centre environment. In this way the behaviour, although a ‘moral wrong’ and abhorrent becomes a consequence of the unnatural context and not an innate orientation thus supporting the ultra-conservative belief that ‘real’ lesbians don’t exist and certainly not in Zulu culture.\(^\text{192}\)

The reality however is that *skhonyayi* is disruptive. One offender stated that she always finds lesbians to be “stressed” (Zanele pre-performance dialogue 22 September 2004) which I took to mean aggressive and volatile. Indeed my observations confirmed that. According to both offenders and Correctional staff (pre-performance dialogue 22 September 2004; personal conversation Veli Khumalo October 2009) it is the major cause of conflict and violence amongst female offenders. With security being the primary objective of the Correctional Centre *skhonyayi* is considered anti-social behaviour and therefore outlawed.

Thus although *skhonyayi* appears to be counter-hegemonic dissident practice that would imply some resistance of the status quo it in fact merely reproduces the patriarchal and hetero-normative practices of society outside. They do not go beyond, but merely reproduce

\(^{192}\) In a recent conversation with the member (September 2009) she remarked that one of the ‘male’ offenders had been released and had been seen pregnant! She mentioned this to prove the point that these women are not really lesbians. I subsequently saw the woman working as a car guard and asked her. She said she was not pregnant but had been raped.
the hierarchical binaries of male/female and as the billboard so eloquently states “there are no males at Female Prison”. Therefore although those offenders opposing *skhondayi* do so from a conservative moral high ground that is homophobic and intolerant, they also object on the grounds that it is not affirming to women. First as it is potentially abusive to the ‘woman’ in the relationship and to the whole Correctional Centre community whose lives become more difficult and stressful when *skhondayi* is rife. In September 2002 a ‘man’ in the group, Ernest, almost brought the whole post-graduate project to a halt through an internal conflict she was having with another ‘man’. And second that wanting to be a ‘man’ implies not wanting to be a ‘woman’. Virginia’s mandate, although confused and contradictory at times, was definitely focused on the upliftment of women in terms of how they felt about themselves. *Skhondayi* as a practice threatened her notion of a Zulu woman, her authority as a mother and her ambition of transforming the lives around her.

**Women’s Health/ HIV/ AIDS**

Today was our first session looking at the topic of HIV/AIDS. I gathered the women in a circle and after we had warmed up we began the dialogue. We were talking about the gendered aspect of the disease and I remembered a story a woman had told in 2001 at the Justice for Women Campaign: On discovering she was pregnant she went to the clinic only to find to her horror that she was HIV+. As she had been faithful to her husband so she knew he must have been unfaithful. A double blow. She later tracked him down and confronted him and the mistress with the news. They were arrogant, unapologetic and denied everything. Later she threw a black plastic bag over his head and set him alight. As I recounted the story the women began to giggle, I was confused until a woman I recognised stepped forward: that was me. (Extract from notes 10 August 2004)

**Lady who is asking people**

**Lady 1:** Who are you?
**Lady 2:** I am a counsellor.
**Lady 1:** What counsellor?
**Lady 2:** An HIV counsellor.
**Lady 1:** Who are you?
**Lady 3:** I am mother who is going through some difficulties.
**Lady 1:** What difficulties?
**Lady 3:** My child is HIV positive.
**Lady 1:** And who are you?
**Lady 4:** I am a friend who has an HIV positive person for a friend.
**Lady 1:** An HIV positive friend?
Lady 4: Yes, I am also HIV positive.
Lady 1: And who are you?
Lady 5: I am the HIV positive daughter.
Lady 1: I am a cruel nurse.  
(Scene 2 AIDS play 1, 11 September 2004)

In South Africa where an estimated 30% of the population are HIV+, we all have some relationship to AIDS: either we live with it, we have close friends or family with it, we have to manage it as employers or colleagues of people with the disease or we teach students who are infected. In prison, this relationship is even more acute with an estimated 45.3% of incarcerated women being infected (Goyer 2003:30), some 42% higher than the DCS estimated in their Annual Report in 2002 (Goyer 2003: 26). Most researchers agree “that HIV prevalence in South African Correctional Centres is expected to be twice that of the prevalence amongst the same age and gender in the general population” (Goyer 2003:30).

‘Someone came knocking and I tremble … alone’
AIDS play 1 11 September 2004. Nonkululeko, Virginia, Nora, Rose and Philile

It is therefore hardly surprising that HIV/AIDS was the theme that emerged most prolifically in 2000, 2002 and 2004. The plays tended to engage issues around stigma (play 1, 2, 4, 5 & 6 2004) the need for parents to speak openly with children about sex and HIV/AIDS (play 1 &

193 In two plays dealing with HIV/AIDS the offenders drew special attention to the insensitivity of health workers.
2 2004), the need for women and communities to support each other around the disease (play 2 & 5 2004) and cultural interpretations of the disease (such as being bewitched by an enemy) as misinformation (play 1 & 2 2000; play 4 2004). The 2002 play was different in that it was specifically looking at the treatment of HIV sufferers in Correctional Centre clinics and was focused on a specific outcome, which they achieved.

Although the plays did not deal specifically with HIV and gender, the dimension of gender was a dominant element in all of the plays as inevitably the protagonist, who was consistently a young girl, contracted the disease by being either raped (play 5 2004), through prostitution (play 1 2000) or by coerced into sex due to peer pressure or low self-esteem (play 1 and 3 2004). The one instance of an older woman contracting the disease was due to a philandering husband (play 1 2000). In every example of the plays the women created the infection of the girl/woman could have been avoided were the gender dynamics more equal and less abusive.

Yet despite this family and friends, particularly the women, were often not supportive of the HIV+ protagonist causing her more suffering. This revealed itself to be an important area of negotiation amongst HIV+ and HIV–women in the Correctional Centre who were given the opportunity to dialogue and speak openly about their feelings in relation to the disease. The drama more importantly provided a safe space for those HIV+ offenders, who were comfortable disclosing their status to speak freely, renegotiating the illness both with themselves (personally) and with others as Rose wrote:

Drama has given me the freedom of expressing my true feelings and emotions to people about HIV/AIDS. With drama I can tell and show people how I feel without offending anyone. Using drama as my tool to spread and pass the message through people about HIV/AIDS made it easy for people to understand and get more educated about this deadly virus.

As one of the people who is living with the HIV virus, it was not easy at first because of the stigma, and the discrimination about this virus. But it took a lot of courage and strength to stand firm on what I believe that I have a right just like any human being on this planet earth. (11 September 2004)

They also saw the potential of theatre to conscientise others about the illness. As one offender commented:
I learnt a lot from acting. I have a wish and I don’t know if it will happen but when I am released I go and get people together, we do plays, drama and inform them about HIV/AIDS because we are dying…get the little kids together and we can play and learn. (Female offender, 25 July 2002)

HIV status integrated itself as part of the Westville woman’s identity as many a conversation would involve as a matter of course a declaration of status, be it negative or positive. Further HIV status became an aspect of identity that created a sub-community of women in the Correctional Centre who had solidarity with one another around the disease. During a clash of opinions between Rose and another older offender during the dialogue session for the ‘Lesbianism play’ (2004), Rose stated “…no matter if we disagree, she is my sister because we are both HIV +” (22 September 2004). The other woman concurred.

This differentiation of status however did not create a visible or acknowledged rift amongst the women. They appeared to interact without prejudice.

Rose is an interesting case because of her very vocal relationship to – or rather with – her disease. She speaks openly about how she has befriended the virus. She says in a matter of fact way that she told it that if it wants to live then it has to let her live. Although Rose is in and out of hospital, she is healthy more than she is ill. She has been living with HIV, without antiretrovirals (ARVs) for 14 years. Her CD4 count is still too high for her to receive medication\textsuperscript{194}. She continues to survive.

HIV is profound indication of the body as a site of struggle with its war on one’s immune system. Incarcerated women battle with this affliction, as they do with so many trials more than other women. Embedded at a cellular level it becomes an unwelcome part of one’s identity whether closeted or disclosed. Yet the open rhetoric around HIV in Westville Female Correctional Facility is an encouraging model for how it should be in the wider South African society. And Virginia was one of the most vocal and tolerant voices in perpetuating a culture of compassion around the disease. She was an active member of the AIDS Committee. It was for that reason that the news of her death in April 2007 came as a complete shock.

\textsuperscript{194} In 2009 she contracted XDR tuberculosis but her CD4 count was around 300. It must drop to 250 to receive the medication. Recently President Jacob Zuma announced that HIV+ TB patients may receive ARVs with a CD4 count of below 350. There is hope for Rose.
Virginia died of AIDS related illness. It was a tremendous shock to all who knew her. She had been in denial around her illness. Not even her closest friends knew until it was too late. I had no conception. The pedestal that she had been placed on was too high. I was busy writing and had not been in for several months. When I found out it was simply unbelievable, her life force just seemed to shine too bright for it ever to be extinguished. It still does. She was released from Correctional Centre on compassionate grounds but her friends say she died alone. She never went onto ARVs. Her life was not her death; but her death demonstrates how deeply the stigma of the disease still runs, even in those who are open-minded, educated and knowledgeable about the disease and have the support of friends. I mourn her.

Abuse

Today a woman told me how her boyfriend held her over the balcony of their flat by her hair…
Today a woman told me how her husband used to push her face in the mirror and tell her that she was ugly…
Today a woman told me she had been raped three times…
In here there are as many stories as there are days in the year.

Gender based violence has been described in some detail already in the thesis as it is the most significant theme to emerge from my research. I shall not be repeating past discussion but this section in intended to build on previous debate.
Previous analysis in this thesis, particularly in Chapter 5 has outlined the global correlation between abuse (physical, sexual, emotional, financial) and female incarceration (Faith 2000; Hafferjee & Greyling 2005). This is also something that the women themselves believe to be true. In 2000, the very first intervention, women were asked to form groups to discuss abuse. In response to the question ‘How would women be living if men were not beating them up?’ All three groups (of approximately ten women) that chose to converse in Zulu (the groups with majority offenders as opposed to students) out of eight in total, came to the conclusion that they would not be in prison if they had not been abused. Here are their representatives’ responses.

Group 1 respondent: 90% of female prisoners are here because they were abused by men, so if men did not abuse them, prisons would not be filled with women so much.

Group 5 respondent: I think most of us are here in prison because of abuse that we received from our male partners, because if we were not abused we would be at our homes. A lot of women have been raped by men, and these men leave them and go on with their lives. So our future is being destroyed and we could be spending time with our children at home.

Group 6 respondent: I am here in prison because I was abused by men, maybe I wouldn’t be here, I would be a successful person.

(offender responses 16 September 2000)

The responses indicate that the women are very aware of the ripple of destruction that is cause by gender-based violence and have a vision of a society without it. They felt that without abuse: “Women would be more open, more honest and more caring. Relationships would be more lasting and caring. Women would have high self-esteem and they would contribute more creatively in solving financial problems and all the other problems” (offender respondent group 2 16 September 2000). Further, “women would be a lot more confident, family life would be a lot better and children [would] do better at school” (offender respondent group 3 16 September 2000).

These responses also point to two further important factors. First they support the centrality of motherhood as part of their identity – because they have witnessed the effect of abuse on their children and often felt powerless to stop it – until they took power and suffered the
consequences. At the Justice for women campaign 2001 (described in Chapter 5), billboards surrounding the central core emphasised the need to not only protect the women, but the children too. Second, it explains why, for the women raised self-esteem is so important and was the most valued outcome of the theatre according to the follow-up evaluations (Hurst, Nkala & Young-Jahangeer 2001, 2002; Young-Jahangeer 2002, 2003). Raised self-esteem is essentially about feeling and emotion, and that has a profound effect on the quality of daily life.

The women also had keen and consistent insight into why they thought men beat women and did not take responsibility for their actions. The desire ‘to be superior’ and the desire ‘to be in control at all times’ and the fact that men are innately ‘jealous’ [of women] came out consistently in the groups’ responses. This was because, as group 2 stated, “They don’t know how to compromise and they are raised to believe that they are always right.” This of course implicates not only society but the parents in propagating abusive behaviour to some degree through upholding patriarchal values. It was also felt that culture had a lot to do with it. Group 1 responded that “They must beat women especially in the African culture, men feel more powerful than women and they think if they don’t beat up women they are less of men.”

This of course points to issues of masculinity. Perceptions around the fact that “big boys don’t cry” the inability to “communicate” and the repression of “emotion and physical [affection]” (Group 3 response 16 September 2000) were strong points. This was seen as a consequence of a lack of love:

I think men do not have true love, a man cannot think for a woman because they don’t have enough love. If a man is wrong he doesn’t want to admit it and he doesn’t even want a woman to advise him, instead he thinks it’s a woman’s fault and so beat her up (Group 4 respondent 16 September 2000).

Ultimately it appears to come down to what can only be described as a gender war, as the respondent from group 5 noted:

My baby’s father is so jealous that when he sees me well-dressed more than him, he grabs me and tear my clothes up. They are so jealous that they don’t want to see us developing in life. If we did not suffer so much abuse from men maybe we would be so successful in life like Nkosazana Zuma in parliament. (offender response 16 September 2000)
Women in prison thus have in common the experience of abuse. As recounted they have a firsthand understanding of its operation and why it occurs. This has, I have also argued (in Chapter 5) been the most powerful element working against the isolating effects of the prison and proved a potent rallying point for the unification of the women. This enabled them in a number of examples – most specifically in the 2002 play on Illness in Prison (see Chapter 3) – to work together effectively to bring about change. In their renegotiation of their identity as Zulu women, the rejection of the normalisation of abuse within African culture was the single element that was unequivocally counter-hegemonic. The other values embraced tended to be more conservative, despite political undertones; yet right from the outset in 2000, the women came forward united and unwavering on the denunciation of the abuse of women and children. This essentially was concerned with the renegotiation of how women are treated in their communities and society at large.

This may not seem significant. It may seem obvious that an abused woman would reject the practice of abuse; yet if we consider that in South Africa, abuse has become so normalised that many young girls consider it a sign of love and devotion (post-performance discussions with pupils from Chesterville Secondary School 2003). Further, it requires a deliberate stance against a patriarchal order, which the women in many respects do not seem to be overtly challenging despite their transgressions.

This stance against abuse has been expressed primarily through popular culture: popular theatre (participatory and agitprop), and through the use of slogans on billboards (as described above). Further the play created for The Justice for Women Campaign 2001 introduced theatre for social change as part of prison culture. There have consistently been since that point more women wanting to participate than can be accommodated.

As mentioned above Women’s’ Day is a major event in the Female Correctional Centre. It is consistently used as an opportunity to generate solidarity against abuse and ultimately sisterhood. Thus sisterhood is negotiated around abuse and has been facilitated through the use of theatre, which is also unifying. As Virginia herself said “the drama has created a sustainable bond between us – we are closer to each other now” (focus group interview 18 September 2002). It is also no small coincidence that Virginia, Nonkululeko and Philile have
been powerful voices against abuse. They have been instrumental in conscientising Westville women on this issue and building momentum around it.

So how do the women see they way forward – the way out? In a dialogue with the women at a session on 16 October 2002 and we were discussing rape. I asked how it made a woman feel? She feels “unwanted” “ashamed” “suicidal” “depressed” “lonely” were the responses. Why not angry I asked? Why don’t we feel angry when we are disrespected? Slindile, who had been raped (she was picked out by a gangster) said because “we are afraid we will be killed!” It is this fear that binds women into abusive cycles and this fear that the women are working hard to eradicate through focusing on their self-esteem. In response to the question ‘How can a woman escape abuse?’ The respondent for group 7 stood up and said “…we’ve got a few answers…freedom. We have freedom. Second, no more fear, women must not fear. The third one, control her own life, we must always manage to be independent, [do] not depend on men because he will end up abusing you because you are not independent.” (16 September 2000). Freedom? Yes. Political freedom, waiting on the other side of the walls.

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195 Rape in this instance involves little physical violence and apparent ‘consent’ which is why it would have little legal basis; however this form of rape when a man of power in a community simply chooses a girl who goes with him I would argue demonstrates total lack of agency on the part of the woman. His power resides in his being, he need not display it. Resistance is futile.
Conclusions: The final act

The performing body “is often presented as a site of contestation between two opposing dynamics: as a passive recipient of inscription by social institutions, cultural discourses, ideologies and orders of power, and as an active agent through which identity and social relation may be tested, re-articulated and re-made” (Heathfield 2004: 12). Through a study of the prison body and the body in prison this tension, which reveals the imbalances of power that exist in wider society are both reflected and magnified. This thesis has followed the narrative of women housed at the Westville Female Correctional Centre engaged in this battle, not simply as a presentation but as lived experience: the performance of the self in Prison Theatre and in the prison as theatre.

Central of course to this debate, which I have emphasised throughout, is the notion of context: space/time. This locates the study very firmly in the third world (Durban, South Africa), but also at a very specific transitional moment between colonisation and post-colonisation, apartheid and post-apartheid. This moment has provided a unique window for investigating how culture is appropriated and used by ‘the oppressed’ for the negotiation of power and identity once control has been conceded; yet within a space that is defined by its oppressive structures that can and have been likened to an authoritarian (colonial) state.

Elizabeth Gainor (1995: xiv) argues, “Theatre (as the central manifestation of culture for this thesis) has always been a locus of political force both as disseminator of dominant ideology and resistance to it.” Colonialism, with its imbalance of power has typically used culture to manipulate although “the individual dynamics are distinctive and resist homogenising critical dicta” (1995: xv).

What the research revealed was multilayered. Popular participatory theatre was found overwhelmingly to have a positive effect on the lives of the offender participants. At a fundamental level it was found to alleviate boredom and provide a positive creative focus; yet it also encouraged positive behaviours, critical thinking and most significant for the women made them feel good about themselves. Through their contact with the outside world they
were able to generate positive experience and affirm themselves in a profound and lasting way. Theatre itself generates a feel good experience.

They were also able to appropriate the theatre on two specific occasions to directly speak to institutional structures to effect change; however theatre as political ‘intervention’ was not the primary appropriation for the offenders. First, this was not sustainable. Prison structures are too formidable; their operations of power too absolute. Second as Mohanty observes:

The idea that simply being a woman, or being poor or black [or in prison] is sufficient grounds to assume a politicised oppositional identity [is erroneous]. In other words, while questions of identity are crucially important, they can never be reduced to automatic self-referential, individualist ideas of the political (or feminist) subject. (1991:33).

Nevertheless, while the women did not all define themselves overtly in terms of the notion “I am therefore I resist!” they did employ popular methods of power acquisition, from within and below, often aligning themselves with the establishment, or appearing to, in order to negotiate (limited) power and privilege. As I have discussed, a political historical reading in this regard often complexified their renegotiation of identity. For the women of Westville political identity can never be divorced from their conditions. Thus although not consistently and unequivocally counter-hegemonic, the theatre can be regarded as radical in its consistent ability to “produce” freedoms (Kershaw 1999:19) – and a sense of freedom – from behind prison walls in the moments that the theatre unfolds.

Further although the form of the theatre was dialogic and aligned to democratic participation, it also created a space for the natural leaders to emerge. These women, whose stories I have documented, were given a profile through the projects, authority as facilitators and were consequently able to negotiate some privilege within the constraints of the Correctional Centre. These women then used their sphere of influence to propose a renegotiated Zulu identity for the female offenders, one that had at its core female pride of self but that which also enshrined to some extent conservative patriarchal values. Although as I have argued these identity constructions resist a simple either or alignment with the status quo.

The motivation behind this renegotiation I found also to be numerous and interconnected. Clearly there were material benefits to them in terms their serving their sentence; but what
was being offered was also, and I feel most importantly, a way to generate more humane and respectful treatment – across the board. The women were unequivocally unified on the issue of abuse and how the treatment of women within society generally and Zulu society specifically needs renegotiation. This is in alignment with raised self-esteem being the most important impact for the female offenders. The issue of emotional well-being, which these point to, is an essential first step before any individual can have agency over their lives; become independent and successful.

Thus rather than reduce ‘feeling’ and ‘emotion’ to the domicile of ‘the weaker sex’, it activates and politicises it into an act of defiance indicating a resilience and will to survive the most trying and oppressive histories and presents. As Rose commented in the most recent intervention in 2009, “short of dying…we need to live!”
Minstrel man

Because my mouth
Is wide with laughter
And my throat
Is deep with song,
You do not think
I suffer after
I have held my pain
So long?
Because my mouth
Is wide with laughter,
You do not hear
My inner cry?
Because my feet
Are gay with dancing,
You do not know
I die?

– Langston Hughes (1902 – 1967)
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Appendix A