



**UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL**

**INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI**

**CHOREOGRAPHIES OF IDENTITY, SELF AND THE 'AFRICAN' DANCING
BODY IN NEGOTIATING CONTEMPORARY DANCING HISTORIES AND
PRACTICES IN KWAZULU-NATAL POST 1994: A CASE STUDY OF
FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY.**

Liane Loots

STUDENT NUMBER: 851851360

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Supervised by Dr Kathryn Olsen

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PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

I declare that this is all my own work and that all reference to external sources has been duly cited and acknowledged.

I have used the HARVARD referencing style.

Liane Loots

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Liane Loots', with a large, stylized flourish on the left side.

SIGNATURE:

DATE: 12 March 2019

ABSTRACT

This thesis, through a series of case studies of my dance work with FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY (post 1994), offers an interrogation of both my internal and external processes of decolonising entrenched paradigms of training, writing/researching and making dance and attempting to re-imagine an inclusive dance practice in South Africa. I use the conceptual framework of 'decolonisation', in part, because it is the key political and pedagogical terminology being used in South African within current student protest movements such as '#Fees Must Fall' and within the 2016 (onwards) South African debates around re-orientation of higher learning institutions. I further, use the frame of decolonising as it offers me personally, pedagogically and politically an opportunity to look deeply at what this might mean **in action** and **in practice** for my own dance teaching and dance making in South Africa – post 1994. This is an autoethnographic study of a 24-year temporal space in my own engagement with dance and is set against the larger geo-political, social and cultural fights of South Africa. The personal narratives offer a microcosm of larger issues and focus a lens on how arts (and dance in particular) have been, are, and become, a tipping point in the enactment of lived – and significantly – embodied democracy (a term I go on to explain) in South Africa.

Section One of this thesis is an investigation – through my community-based dance education work with FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY – into a proposed methodology and praxis for a decolonised pedagogy. Section Two turns away from an explicit discussion around pedagogy and moves to an examination of my choreographic practices with FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY post 1994. In Section Two, I reflect on my own on-going work as a professional choreographer and attempt to bring together my own multiple identities as researcher, teacher and choreographer as I begin to interrogate, through this academic text and the writing and reflective process, my own artistic process as a dance maker, dance educator, and a choreographer in South Africa.

I do not isolate methodology in a chapter of its own in this thesis. Given the feminist and autoethnographic nature of this study, I have opted instead to allow the methodology to inform and be articulated in each chapter as it reveals process and practice.

This thesis is also made up significantly, though not exclusively, of collecting together, re-considering, re-writing and re-focusing a selection of my previously published articles that have spanned 23 years as an academic scholar interrogating my research within the paradigm of Praxis Led Research. This act of re-visiting dance practice, writing and pedagogy is also part of the autoethnographic nature of interrogating and re-interrogating identities of self and of the 'African' dancing body. This is all effected in a negotiation of contemporary dancing histories and practices in KwaZulu-Natal post 1994 through my case study of FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY.

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INTRODUCTION

I begin this thesis with a reflection on my own involvement in contemporary dance in South Africa. This involvement spans almost 24 years that includes firstly, an academic career as a dance lecturer at the University of KwaZulu-Natal with the desire to create alternate teaching praxis for dance and dancers in South Africa. This has included the need to continue to re-think and re-imagine the specificities of my own context in which, amongst other intersectional power plays (hooks, 1986), I evaluate the past and present legacies of race, gender and class politics around access to dance training, performing and dance spaces. I work in the idiom of contemporary dance; a form that defies closed definitions other than perhaps pinning down the intent which, simply put, is to create movements that open up the desire to understand dance as a medium of art making that engages the 'contemporary'. In South Africa this is a complex interplay between the confluence and influence of traditional African dance histories and forms, European and American modern dance methodologies, and the ever-evolving search for authentic (and multiple) African contemporary dance voices that speak to culture, politics, art and (most significantly) identity and self. While this thesis does not offer an historical journey into vast and very complex South African contemporary dance histories, it does intersect with key moments of this multifaceted history by offering reflections on my own work as a South African contemporary dance maker as I traverse the artistic and pedagogical landscape in which I am embedded.

I reflect also on my own on-going work as a professional choreographer that has attempted to bring together my multiple identities as researcher, teacher and choreographer as I begin to interrogate, through this academic text and the writing and reflective process, my own artistic process as a dance maker, dance educator, and a choreographer in South Africa. I engage discourse and tell stories in two mediums: the linguistic and the physical. The beginning point is the self, and more acutely since I am a dancer and choreographer (and feminist), the body. This thesis thus aims to be one text written *with* a body answering to another text written physically *on* and *through* a body – the corporeal acts of dance-making and dance teaching. I claim Randy Martin's (2004:59) notion of "dance as a continuing site of self-recognition" and take up the auto-ethnographic turn (see, for example, Holman Jones, 2005), of looking into the embodied self as a site of meaning-making and, indeed, authentic study.

In 1994 I graduated with a Master's degree in Gender Studies and took up permanent employment as the designated 'movement' (as it was then called) lecturer in the Drama and Performance Studies Programme at the then University of Natal – Durban campus (UND). I was 29 years old and had just witnessed my own troubled country transition into its first year of democracy. I had a history of civil disobedience and political exile. While in exile I took short courses in contemporary dance from various British based institutions. Alongside these were the memories of a girlhood of 12 years of very rigorous ballet training behind me. I entered the workplace not only at a time of transition in the country's geo-political frame (1994) but also at a time when the then UND Drama department, was under transition. Within two years of my appointment, 90% of the teaching staff complement had either retired or left. This process of attrition of older staff made space for a very welcome revision of the core teaching practice and syllabus. Most significantly we moved from being the Department of Speech and Drama to being the Drama and Performance Studies Programme. This name change signalled a significant paradigm shift in thinking about performance pedagogy. My mission was to move away from the thinking that the 'movement' training on offer would serve this historically strong, but quite Western focused theatre programme, and to turn dance into its own designated stream of study. I rejected the term 'movement' and started to recirculate (with support from my new colleagues) Dance Studies as UND transitioned into the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

I think of this initial post 1994 shedding of old paradigms and ways of thinking, teaching and researching around Performance Studies as the first tentative steps into decolonising (WaThiong'o, 1981) higher education. These were our first cautious forays into beginning to let the teaching and learning on offer reflect the post 1994 political and social climate of change, of hope and of opening the doors of learning for all. For me, this was the beginning of a long and on-going deeply personal and deeply political journey into re-imagining, re-thinking, re-evaluating and re-modelling my own praxis as teacher, researcher and dance maker. In many ways this also begins to set up the thematics of how I personally – as a South African, as an artist, teacher and dance maker – begin to navigate a more public and outwardly political sense of the impulses towards democratic praxis.

At the heart, this is what this thesis is: a reflection and interrogation of both my internal and external processes of decolonising entrenched paradigms of training, writing/researching and

making dance and trying to re-imagine an inclusive dance practice in South Africa, and, in Africa (pushed along by my own collaborative practice with various fellow African artists and dance makers). It is also a continuing feminist endeavour to break the long established paternalistic and economically driven divisions of public and private spaces (see Tong, 2014).

I use the conceptual framework of 'decolonisation', in part, because it is the key political and pedagogical terminology being used in South African within the context of current student protest movements such as '#Fees Must Fall' and within the 2016 (onwards) South African debates around re-education of higher learning institutions. More profoundly, however, I use the frame of decolonising as it offers me personally, pedagogically and politically an opportunity to look deeply at what this might mean in action and in practice for my own dance teaching and dance making in South Africa. This autoethnographic study of an almost 30-year transitional space in my own engagement with dance, is thus set against the larger geopolitical, social and cultural conflicts of South Africa. That these conflicts continue and are ever present is also a testimony to the fact that the act of decolonising, the act of interrogating racism, sexism and class discrimination, needs constant vigilance. This necessary vigilance is – and should be – an on-going struggle for post-colonial and post-apartheid artists, academics and teachers in South Africa.

This thesis of personally interrogated narratives offers a microcosm of larger issues. These narratives focus a lens on how arts (and dance in particular) have been, are, and become, a tipping point in the enactment of lived – and significantly – embodied democracy. This 'embodied democracy' is an act of decolonising by virtue of finding dance praxis that promotes the body choosing, self-defining, and moving in ways not externally defined. It is a search for ways to allow the South African/African body to speak its own narrative/s within in its own context of dance education and dance making. Decolonising, as a personal and political act, is also a move away from the claimed authority of grand truth and the construction of monolithic hegemonic ways of being often defined by those outside of who and what we are. As mentioned earlier, the work of the contemporary South African choreographer is – and continues to be – an evolving search for an open, multiple and personally authentic dance voice that speaks to the political present. I thus claim this chosen autoethnographic (and decolonised) methodology as "a way for me to couple inquiry into what is felt, fantasised, and

thought ... with questions concerning the embodied experiences of dancing, research, and curriculum in relation to sociocultural context” (Pinar, 1988:138-139).

Further, I am reminded by Sarah Wall (2008:139) fighting to remember the early second-wave feminist slogan and point of visceral theorising: ‘the personal is political’, that:

[...] those that complain that personal narratives emphasise a single, speaking subject fail to realise that no individual voice speaks apart from a societal framework of constructed meaning. There is a direct and inextricable link between the personal and the cultural. Thus, rich meaning, culturally relevant personal experience, and an intense motivation to know are what typify and strengthen autoethnography.

In this act of re-conceptualising and re-imaging dance (as researcher, teacher and choreographer) I set myself up to take on Ngugi WaThiong’o’s call to seek in all my praxis “relevance to our situation ... [and the] contribution towards understanding ourselves ... by establishing the centrality of Africa” (1981:94). I continue to understand this as the highest of imperatives as I aim self-criticism/self-reflections towards myself and to my historical ways of having been taught as a young white South African growing up with the privileges of white apartheid/colonial education (and those 12 years of rigorous [white] ballet education). Y.V. Mudimbe (1985) suggests that a counter narrative to the epistemic hegemony of colonial and white privilege in education and in learning, is to use “reflexivity and critical analysis” (1985:216) so that all within the learning environment (especially those historically excluded from knowledge making) begin to think about themselves as “subjects of their own destiny that are able to re-invent the past and envision their own future” (Mudimbe, 1985:216). Returning to Ngugi, this is perhaps what he might have called “a quest for relevance” (1981:87).

Being a subject of your own destiny (Mudimbe, 1985) in dance praxis also leaves me, (as will be discussed later in Section One), trying to imagine a way out of singular value systems in dance be these in preferred training systems or choreographic processes. Most dancers of my generation have encountered declarations that “ballet is a very good way to train any kind of dancer”, or even, “you cannot call yourself a dancer unless you have studied Graham, Horton, Limon, Cunningham [...]” – the list goes on. I begin to understand the rage that accompanies the recent student movements that have identified how systems of teaching and their attendant pedagogy, render localised, black, female, disabled (for example) dancing voices

silent. Or as Arundhati Roy (2004) has said, “There's really no such thing as the 'voiceless'. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard”¹.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1981) writes about what he called the biggest ‘cultural weapon’ wielded and unleashed by imperialism against an artistic collective defiance. This cultural weapon of the imperialist otherwise identified as those who seek to rule by creating dependency is what he called the ‘cultural bomb’ (1981:3). The after effect of this Imperialist ‘cultural bomb’ is to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their language, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities, and ultimately in themselves. This ‘cultural bomb’, once exploded, makes us see our past as a wasteland of non-achievement and it makes us want to distance ourselves from this history of what seems local and thus like nothing worthwhile – it makes us want to identify with that which is furthest removed from ourselves. This ‘cultural bomb’ is not a bomb that goes off loudly; it does not fall from the sky from a foreign plane; it is more a quiet, silent amorphous bomb that goes off in fits and starts from within until, one day we find that we no longer know who we are, we no longer know what to think or feel and so we allow the machinations of international corporate and globalised capital (amongst other hegemonic institutions of power) to tell us how to look, think, feel, love – and how to dance. We no longer have real memory and history because the endlessly re-written political and cultural version of who we are, are sold to us like truth. Our minds have been colonised.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’ presents a beautiful argument and it is a germane moment in history to be reminded of it. Postcolonial and independent Africa is, like all of us, still shedding and re-evaluating its past. I continue to search for new ways to think, move and dance my/our body/ies into the history I write and dance. It also needs to be said, however, that this call of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1981) to mitigate the effects of the ‘cultural bomb’ – profound and needed as it is – must, of necessity, have newer and more contemporary resonances as the landscape and the postmodern schisms of Africa in 2018 have changed. Almost 37 years ago, wa Thiong’o was writing at the tip end of Africa’s modern era and so his words fell astutely on a continent moving towards independence and self-governance, and with this and the exit of the colonial

¹ See Roy, A.2004. <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/772758-there-s-really-no-such-thing-as-the-voiceless-there-are>.

masters, a need to return to finding out what made us/makes us African. wa Thiong'o wrote at a time when Africans needed to go back into their own history and remind themselves of who they were – and I do not for one moment believe this need is over. But while I hold on deeply to this provocative 1981 call for decolonisation, I feel that there is also a need in 2018 not to fall into the trap of imagining that all cultural and traditional practices (that wa Thiong'o advocated returning to) are somehow pure, valuable and just. Simply put, for example, as a woman living on the African continent, I am mindful of the many ways in which various African patriarchies silence, harm and render women and the girl-child unheard. I use the word 'unheard' rather than silenced in light of the aforementioned quote by Arundhati Roy (2004) and also in the light of profound current feminist writings around gender and silence. For example, American feminist scholar Lauren Oyler (2017) has opened up the debates around the 'Breaking the Silence' campaigns long fought within feminist activism around gender-based violence. She argues that as powerful as these campaigns are that equate silence with oppression, what is not engaged is how speaking and engaging self-narrative, has mistakenly been seen as an end point in itself. Oyler (2017) argues that speaking out is a means and not an end. She goes on to document numerous contemporary cases in America in which, for example, speaking out has led to continued violence and oppression of women and marginalised people and asks contemporary feminist activism to engage more fully the idea of being 'heard' rather than simply speaking out. She concludes that, "Our voices are going out; the people in power just don't care to listen."² The African continent still abounds with girl-child abductions, arranged and forced marriages, female circumcision and gender divisions of labour. As a feminist, I cannot sanction returning to localised and traditional cultural practices and ways of being that, for example, harm and silence myself and my continent's sisters. I feel then that wa Thiong'o's call needs revision and re-thinking 37 years on. In essence, is not the very call for decolonising, a call to re-vise, re-think and re-imagine new and appropriate ways of learning, being and making? I am hoping that the impulse of this thesis to re-visiting, re-thinking and re-imagining is an on-going and shifting contemporary decolonising practice and not one bound by an almost 40-year gap.

² See: https://broadly.vice.com/en_us/article/xwqyxj/rebecca-solnit-break-the-silence-review

Thus, in constantly unfolding forms and spaces for dance, I consider the two approaches to the acts of contemporary decolonisation as identified by Harry Garuba (2015) in his writings around decolonising higher education in Kenya. The first identified approach is to “add new items to an existing curriculum” (2015:npn). Honesty prevails when I am left to consider that much of the 1994 curriculum changes effected by myself and my colleagues took this form. As I stepped away from the ‘movement’ syllabus and fought for an authentic and self-contained dance stream, I was guided (as we all are) by what I knew and what I had been taught. Antonin Artaud’s idea of “finally do(ing) away with the idea of the masterpieces reserved for the so-called elite but (which are) incomprehensible to the masses” (1958:53) was not possible at this time as I was still to personally undergo a whole process of decolonised re-learning and un-learning. I also became aware that while we, as university academics, were engaged in the process of transforming and reforming, there was little work effected on de-centering epistemic colonial, white, paternalistic and class bound adherence to what was argued as “epistemic violent normative ways of learning truth” (Heleta, 2016:npn). In many ways this has not changed as the 2015/16 *#feesmustfall* movements in South African higher learning environments have demonstrated. As Letsekha (2013:14) has said:

[...] the call for decolonisation of the curriculum is neither an advocacy to be anti-West, nor is it discouragement to learn from the West and the rest of the world. Rather, it is a call to make higher education relevant to the material, historical and social realities of the communities in which the universities operate.

So, while some 20 years of decolonising reform was attempted (and continues to be attempted) by myself and some like-minded academic colleagues within the formal university teaching arena, the systemic and paternalistic ownership of space and ‘truthful’ knowledge continues to make a transformation slow, difficult, and full of painful and exhausting staff room encounters. This work is on-going but as my own desire to re-think, re-frame and reconstruct dance praxis began to burn and open up with my own reading, writing and dance-making post 1994, I began to look outside of the formal teaching and learning environment of the university. Painfully (and still colonially) referred to as “community engagement” by UKZN work codes and employment evaluations, I was happy to begin working external to UKZN to take on Garuba’s (2015) second approach to decolonised learning and education.

Simply put, this second approach is to “rethink how the object of study itself is constituted and then to reconstruct it and bring about fundamental change” (Garuba, 2015:npn). In

response to the lack of qualified and trained black dancers in South Africa (and particularly KZN and Durban) in 1994, I started free adult dance training classes open to all that I called “FLATFOOT DANCE” – this was a slight tongue in cheek antithetical testament to the Western ballet notion that flat feet – often racially constructed as black people’s feet – cannot dance. I was seeking a space to encounter a different artistic and political dance reality and pedagogy. I operated with no funding but simply the good will and political and artistic impulse to offer contemporary dance training to those who had historically and economically been denied access to this training due to apartheid policies of race exclusion. This process allowed me to present small choreographic works at any and all free platforms in Durban until, in 2003, I made the decision to begin applying for funding to secure a more permanent base for some of the exceptional dancers who were coming through the programme. In 2003 FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY becoming a professional full registered contemporary dance company.

My work with FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY has opened up space for me to re-imagine a critical dance pedagogy and arts practice that tackles not just the silenced and silencing of poor, marginalised, primarily black and African bodies, but also the more profound need – within myself too – of having these numerous marginalised narratives heard; and heard in a manner that has personal and political agency. I set out, in both my scholarly work and in my artistic work, to engage postcolonial feminist writer Gayatri Spivak (1990:62) and her idea of developing “a certain degree of rage against the history that has written such an abject script for you that you are silenced?” Dance – in both pedagogy and in artistic practice – is one example (*my example*) of the visceral and lived experience that is used to write and create meaning; of exerting the “I” into a position of agency. This is one of the many connecting threads that runs through this thesis and is, I hope, a continued attempt to decolonise my own dance pedagogy and choreographic practice. It has also been, for over 20 years, the autoethnographic subject of much of my published academic research (some of which I will re-negotiate in this thesis). I have been afforded the space – within my UKZN “community engagement” – to effect intense self-scrutiny in my art making and teaching and this thesis is a negotiation and interrogation of this journey. This work with FLATFOOT has changed how I negotiate myself as a South African dance practitioner and as an African, and is the circular route that feeds back into my more formal dance educational work at UKZN.

This thesis is broken down into two major sections that are linked by the need (articulated above) to find new embodied ways of being and doing as an artist and educator. The impulse to decolonise, to “rethink how the object of study itself is constituted and then to reconstruct it and bring about fundamental change” (Garuba, 2015), is the thread that weaves its way between the sections and the chapters.

Section One journeys into an investigation and search through my work with FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY, for a methodology and praxis for a decolonised pedagogy. In Chapter One, I set up a post-colonial look at who I am (identity, subjectivity and embodiment) and where I am (the politics of location and space) as a dance practitioner, That leads to a fierce ownership of post-development theory and anti-globalisation politics that aims at re-articulating myself as a citizen of the global South, as an African, and in search of alternate and counter narratives to Western and paternalistic version of (dance) history. Chapter Two moves on to look specifically at FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY’s urban and rural township-based dance interventions and programmes as narrative case studies and focuses firstly on gender and child sexuality as a lens through which my own decolonising agenda is focused. Finally, in Chapter Three, within the sphere of disability dance practice, my ideas on a decolonised arts education pedagogy are most radically tested and so this becomes the second lens through which I navigate a more embodied attempt to challenge the “epistemic violence” (Heleta, 2016:npn) of thinking about/doing/making/teaching dance.

Section Two turns away from an explicit discussion around pedagogy and moves towards an examination of my choreographic practices with FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY post 1994. In the past 23 years I have created over 40 works for a professional stage. I will not attempt to define and interrogate this large body of work but what I have chosen to focus on instead, is a selected few of the choreographic works created, and those where I felt – in my own practice – I had (and have) begun to shift my methods of creating towards more inclusive choreographic methodologies that seek to honour democratic and decolonised processes. Section Two offers an autoethnographic opportunity to reflect on my own body’s history and memory as I contemplate the history and memory of the bodies I work/dance with and reflect on the history of a/my ‘body’ of dance work. I have selected six works to discuss – works created and crafted that range from 2005 to 2016 and thus offer a significant reflective history of my own growing choreographic praxis.

I do not isolate methodology in a chapter of its own in this thesis. Given the feminist and autoethnographic nature of this study, I have opted instead to allow the methodology to inform and be articulated in each and every chapter as it reveals process and practice. The unfolding methodologies for both the writing and the praxis reflection nature of this research, thus inform and gather momentum as the thesis progresses. In a conscious bid not to isolate theory, methodology and praxis into neatly bundled and isolated chapters, I recall and take on early French feminist H  l  ne Cixous and her appeal to write with the (female) body [*l'écriture feminine* (1975)] and its multiplicitous and open connections. This thesis is, thus, an attempt to bring together some of my differing selves as I begin to interrogate, through this academic text and the writing and reflecting process, on my own artistic process as dance maker, dance educator, and choreographer.

I further need to extend acknowledgment to colleagues working alongside me in the dance arena. As mentioned before, this thesis is not offering any attempt to write multiplicitous and complex South African contemporary dance histories but focuses on my own evolving pedagogy and dance making. None of my own work would have been possible but for other dance makers working before me or in tandem with me, on their own profound and beautiful 'embodied democracy' agendas and so reference will be made to some of these dance makers and pedagogues. I think particularly of Sylvia Glasser, Adrienne Sichel, Vincent Mantsoe, Gary Gordon, Jay Pather, Gregory Maqoma, Nelisiwe Xaba, Mamele Nyamza and Thadazile Sonia Radebe, and Musa Hlatshwayo (amongst many others).

Finally, this thesis is made up primarily, though not exclusively, of collecting together, re-considering, re-writing and re-focusing a selection of my previously published articles that have spanned 23 years as an academic scholar interrogating and writing about my own praxis. This writing re-vision is negotiated as part of the autoethnographic nature of this study that seeks to re-consider, re-write and re-focus not just a growing choreographic and teaching praxis, but also my academic research over the same period of time. The methodological nature of this study (as indicated above), woven throughout this thesis, takes an autoethnographic turn that allows for another, very personal layer of reflection and re-visioning around seeking a decolonised pedagogy and praxis that also engages the feminists struggles of breaking silence and further, about moving beyond speaking to being heard. I return to Pinar (quoted earlier) to claim this thesis as, "a way for me to couple inquiry into

what is felt, fantasized, and thought ... with questions concerning the embodied experiences of dancing, research, and curriculum in relation to sociocultural context” (1988:138–139).

The following overt research questions are addressed in this dissertation :

- What strategies are necessary in order to counteract a colonised pedagogical dance praxis in South African (and in my own work)?
- How does my own growing dance praxis generate a location of liberation for the marginalised – (disabled, women, the boy and girlchild and the those living in poverty.)

SECTION ONE

SEARCHING FOR, AND RE-IMAGINING, AN INCLUSIVE DECOLONISED PEDAGOGY FOR DANCE IN SOUTH AFRICA POST 1994

CHAPTER ONE: LOCATION AND IDENTITY AS MY AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC WRITING BODY RE VISITS THE POSSIBILITY OF SITUATING MYSELF AS AN AFRICAN/SOUTH AFRICAN DANCE-MAKER, EDUCATOR, RESEARCHER AND WRITER

Location and Identity

³Cultural identity, as Stuart Hall (1990) has argued, is not something which is innate, and which thus transcends time, history, location and context. It is, in fact, subject to a continuous interplay between culture and history and these, for Hall, are themselves always discourses that negotiate power relations. He states, “Identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by and position ourselves within the narratives of the past” (1990:225). In light of this, I begin the journey of this chapter by interrogating my own embodied sense of identity as a South African. For me to find my way (as the introduction promises) into the art of decolonising my own historically situated pedagogy and dance practice (to seek a re-visioned senses of contemporary dance in action and in practice), I begin with myself – with the geo-political, historical and cultural production of my own identity; identity not being a thing to be acquired, but understood as a living and experiential state of being that is constantly in flux. As Hall has said; “We all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific. What we say is always ‘in context,’ positioned” (1990:223).

I live on the east coast of South Africa in a city called Durban. This city has all the markings of the First World: McDonalds and shopping malls where you can buy anything from laptop computers to Calvin Klein fragrances. It is also an industrial city where the south basin area plays home to oil refineries and car manufacturing plants. I live in a small house with running water and ‘once a week waste removal’ graciously supplied by the city council – I pay rates and taxes for this service as would any global citizen in any modernised city. My ocean-facing harbour city of Durban is a modern city, a city on the journey to progress, a city that would make any northern tourist or visitor secure in the fact that, while they get a glimpse of Africa

³ An initial earlier version of some sections of this chapter has been published previously as follows: Loots, L. 2006. Postcolonial Visitations: A South African’s dance and choreographic journey that faces up to the spectres of ‘development’ and globalisation. *CRITICAL ARTS* 20[2]:2006.

and the big five (we are near enough to drive to game parks), they can also order Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) and say “it’s just like home.”

But in the forgotten spaces between colonial architecture and modernist skyscrapers, the city reveals another of its selves. This ‘self’ intersects with traditional ancestors of a nation of Zulu warriors where herbals medicine and the *muti* of *sangomas*⁴ can be bought in street markets next to counterfeit plastic Barbie dolls recently imported from China. Just opposite the university where I work, not more than two kilometres away, is one of Durban’s largest informal settlements or ‘squatter camps’ called Cato Manor (or Umkhumbane). In 1994, this area was mostly shack dwellings with no running water, sewerage or waste disposal. The city was (and is), of course, trying to modernise this informal settlement in its Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). Some of the shacks are in the process of being pulled down with the promise of replacement by small RDP square government regulated two room houses. Water has begun to be piped, electricity connected, and waste removal is becoming a regular feature in the lives of the Cato Manor residents. Cato Manor, like many other spaces in Durban, is a legacy of the colonial segregation and the apartheid system and its need to generate migrant labour for the city, of separate development policies that controlled the movement of black South Africans and their entry into white zoned areas. Of course, these policies are now all gone thanks to the democratic elections of 1994. But race has been superseded by class issues, where the rich (no longer just white) and the poor (still mostly black)⁵ try to mediate a world of shopping malls and the lure of global capital traditional customs and religious practices that pull like the echo of ancestral voices asking for the slaughter of a cow to give thanks in the way of the ancestors for the celebration of a daughter graduating (the first ever in her family) from university. She will sit quietly, a young black woman, while the patriarchs drink traditional beer in her honour. She will defer to their traditional paternal authority, as her tradition dictates, she must, with the writings of Andrea Dworkin (1981) and bell hooks (1986) ringing in her mind.

Into this complex debate, as bell hooks would call it, the “interconnecting web of race, class and gender” (1986:21), and, I add, ethnicity and nation, I begin to define my adult working self

⁴ *Muti* is a Zulu reference to traditional medicines and *sangoma* is the name given to a traditional herb medicine healer. These *sangoma*’s also fulfil the function of spiritual guides and teachers.

⁵ See, for example, Patrick Bond, 2002.

as choreographer, dancer, teacher and academic. For me it is this daily battle to journey across the bridge that connects the ghosts of South Africa's traditional ancestors and my own white historical roots as I mediate, not only personally but also politically, what it means to be African in an increasingly globalised world. Perhaps I am what Gayatri Spivak (1990) would call the "post-colonial critic" as I seek to "render the historical and institutional structures from which [I] speak visible" (1990:67). This is recognised as an act of radical cultural politics. This notion of 'radical cultural politics' will be discussed later in this chapter, especially in an age of globalisation where historical and cultural specificity are often forgotten in the bid of some "First World"⁶ artists and cultural theorists to claim the right to extort, translate and appropriate the cultural products of the Third World.⁷ Like Spivak (1990), who has sometimes claimed that her self-exiled diaspora position from her own land of birth (India), often gives her a clearer perspective from which to interrogate post-colonial cultural practice, but who also claims herself as Indian and thus as internal to the debates, I also find myself both internal and external to the country and continent I call home.

This internal/externality is a position of personal and theoretical multiplicity that belies any attempt to reduce identity to the complexities of race, class and gender only. Thus whiteness, for example, while not a homogenous identity position in and of itself, is often not synonymous with 'Africanness'. Whiteness, as the emerging South African democracy is teaching us, is like all categories of race, not a simplistic monolithic category of power. While whiteness continues to hold the hegemonic positions of economic power, it is not uniform in terms of class, gender and disability (to name a few categories of power). Similarly, discourse around blackness and the identities associated with race in South Africa continue to be fraught with intersections around state defined levels of blackness in terms of being African (read black), coloured (read mixed race) or even Indian (read diaspora). UKZN, for example, still asks you to tick a race box with the above definitions as you enter employment or sign up for study. Whiteness, for example, continues to be defined monolithically with allegiances to colonial

⁶ I use the terms 'First World' and 'Third World' not necessarily (or only) in the post-World War Two manner for which they were intended, but also as political 'naming' around the disparity of economic, social, cultural and political access as demarcated by being a 'person of the South' or a 'person of the North'. The use of First and Third World and North and South is, thus, also a claiming; a claiming as Chandra Mohanty has said "I am a Third World Feminist" (1991:5) and thus a re-imagining of the power dynamics between what has historically been called the 'developed world' and the 'developing world'.

⁷ See Rustam Bharucha, 2003 for a detailed description and critique of this practice.

power or the ‘oppressor’ such that ‘black and white’ become an all-encompassing, and rather reductionist, binary. As Rodrigo Benza, a contemporary ‘white’ Peruvian theatre maker and scholar has pointed out in his theatre work in the Amazon; “I learn that the noble savage doesn’t exist; that the indigenous is not good just for being indigenous, and white, my white, is not a coloniser just for being white” (Benza, 2015:npn).

Thus, this race binary opposition of white and black often has the effect of silencing the complex ways in which, for example, a large percentage of the middle-class consumer class in South Africa, are now black.⁸ Often, as I will detail later in this chapter, in past dance exchanges with European (and Northern based) funded projects, on meeting me and being confronted by my whiteness, the potential exchange partner or funding body have registered huge disappointment and have gone on to either never contact me again or to ask if they could rather set up work with “real South Africans.” This level of reduction and presumed ‘authenticity’ around race as *the* singular abiding category of power, is more about the voyeurism of Europe and its own colonial guilt around their history with Africa, than it is about my ‘being African’. While my economic experience of being African, and my race, may not be that of the residents two kilometres down the road from my university in Cato Manor, we share, what Chandra Mohanty has so eloquently called “common context of struggles” (1991:8), and this includes the fight within the nation state of South Africa; be this for democracy, better arts funding, access to food, water and housing, or global environmental legislation that assists in mitigating climate change in Africa.

Further, this European/Northern based model of the ‘authentic African’ often does not step back and ask who I am working with and indeed, what community might benefit from the exchange. If European/Northern based cultural exchange is so endlessly about ‘representational politics’ and how Europe and the north image themselves as ‘helping develop poor black Africans’, firstly they are re-inventing the worst possible level of colonial patronage that does not allow the black African dancer to be anything but the poor recipient of aid. Secondly, like our current South African government which boast of the 47% women⁹ who are parliamentarians (the highest in our history so far), the reality is that not one woman I know, rich, poor, white or black, feels they are safer to walk home alone at night. Thus

⁸ See Patrick Bond, 2002.

⁹ See: <https://www.brandsouthafrica.com/governance/developmentnews/south-africa-s-women-in-politics>.

reduction of complex political interplays into representational politics only, means very little in the need to address more integrated notions of identity.

Thus, apart from my race, my femaleness (or my gender) still places me in a subordinate position to a patriarchy that still sees an average of 109 rapes recorded each day in South Africa.¹⁰ As a woman, my access to speaking and, more importantly, to being heard (Spivak, 1990:62) in both economic and spiritual divides of my city, country and continent, is hampered by my gender and a history of male-owned traditional and modern laws and customs.

My nationality, which is fourth generation South African,¹¹ firmly roots me in Africa and thus firmly part of the 'developing' world (or global south). I am internal to my own city of Durban and its First and Third World divides – of pink flesh toned blonde haired Barbie dolls and African traditional medicines – but this 'internal' is also mediated by Europe and the North's need to over-determine the 'externality' of my whiteness, which begins to influence and inscribe my identity as a journey around a multiplicity of border crossings.¹²

I am not sure, thus, if I write, choreograph or speak as an African academic and choreographer or as an African 'informant'; someone who can report on and bring knowledge of 'the other'; the "real South African"? Thus, this self-reflexive and autoethnographic act of writing this thesis is an attempt to speak some, not all, of the text of the Third World answering the north back; this is a positionality between north and south and the gracious fact for all of us, that neither of these categories are singularities, nor are they homogeneous. Perhaps my own internal/externality of which I speak will echo within other dance practices that may seek to culturally transgress and cross many borders and identities.

And what I speak of, while personal, are navigation tools for my dance work. Each morning I am faced by a group of South African dancers who themselves have crossed borders to get to company dance class and rehearsals. Some have a car to drive to work, some catch two mini bus taxis, some walk; yet none share the same pathway. These divergent pathways are determined by race and a legacy of our own complex South African history of racial politics

¹⁰ Figures taken from 2016/7: <https://africacheck.org/factsheets/south-africas-crime-statistics-201617/>

¹¹ I can trace part of my paternal family ancestral tree to my great, great grandfather's arrival in South Africa as a Dutch immigrant.

¹² See Hamid Naficy, 2001 for an excellent account of the use of this term 'border crossings' and how it relates to diasporic film.

and social engineering. It is still, for example, primarily the black dancers who live in the eThekweni historically black township areas of KwaMashu, Newlands and Umlazi who use public transport, in the form of mini-bus taxis, to get to and from work. In part, our pathways also speak of the coming together of different class groupings – who can afford a car, what schools we come from, what financial opportunities have been open to us via (for example) education, ability, family life, and our personal histories. When we finally do meet face to face in the dance studio, it is like a confluence; a meeting place of many rivers journeying to a moment in time where we can look each other in the eye. Further, on a more cultural level, when we make dance we exchange; we speak languages both vocal and physical that often clash and often find synchronicity. We exchange bodily fluid; I catch, you throw or fall, and your sweat is left on my arms and t-shirt. We exchange stories and contexts as we workshop a new choreography; stories that are both our history/s and our imagination/s. This collaboration requires intellectual, emotional and physical levels of negotiation – of tradition, culture and beliefs and of a multitude of (often contradictory) selves. I embrace dance forms that are not my cultural practice. I question the validity of the attempts to try and do this; can I take on a traditional Zulu dance form like *ngoma*¹³ and then play with it in a contemporary choreographic process? Is this cultural appropriation? Is it still cultural appropriation even if I spend two years of my life learning the traditional (authentic?) form first? It is a male dance and what if the female dancers in my company perform it? I am beset by questions that speak to my race, my class, my gender, to questions of ethnicity (as I have Xhosa and Tsonga dancers in my company it is not only about Zulu identity) – can the Tsonga dancer dare to dance the traditional dance of the Zulu warrior? This question arises and will continue to do so – in a political environment where notions of ‘cultural authenticity’ have the dual role of, firstly and more positively, serving a powerful need to preserve the imaged authentic traditional art and dance and who owns its memory, history and legacy. Secondly, however, and perhaps more complexly nuanced, these questions of who has the right to own cultural production and to perform traditions, are often manipulations around inclusion and exclusion and are beset by ways to disempower and silence the validity of more complex contemporary manifestation of intersectional art making/dancing that can question values and ethics (often very paternal) embedded in the lighthouse that is politically held up as ‘tradition’. We do not, in the end,

¹³ *Ngoma* is the name given to the traditional Zulu line formation warrior dances historically performed before going into battle.

arrive in the dance studio each morning as these imagined artistic dancing bodily blank slates where our history, language, class, race and gender (for example) are wiped away as we all find unison dance language given to us unnegotiated and uncontested by the choreographer. Perhaps this recognition of difference – of divergence – is also part of the decolonising agenda that I am beginning to interrogate.

As such, in our internality as a group of South African dance makers and educators, we negotiate this confrontation of culture and its practice in contemporary and traditional dance forms. Our “common context of struggles” (Mohanty, 1991:8) which is a nationality, makes it possible to not simply smooth over these cultural and artistic meetings but to allow (and welcome) the clash, and to let this be the choreography. That our ‘nationality’ is about a multiplicity of divergent historical narratives, is the very fabric of the negotiation around generating new dance work. While our individual social, political and physical/bodily narratives that inform our lives and thus our dance texts, may not be compliant with one another and with the 1994 South African rhetoric of reconciliation of the “rainbow nation,”¹⁴ our overarching mode of art making takes on what Mohanty (1991) calls an “imagined community” (1991:11). In the moment of each day of facing each other in the dance studio, not despite difference but because of it, our internality as South Africans and our common context of dance and art making, allows us momentarily to imagine a community in service to our collective dance making and training. This should not be confused with the grand narratives that have beset liberal humanism and its desire for the ‘one truth’ (usually understood as the modernising impulse of capitalism, and now the modernising impulse of globalisation). This “imagined community” is both temporal and only viable in the moment of creation and performing.

Thus, questions of whether I can or cannot use South African cultural dance forms that are not of my race, gender and ethnicity, become less imperative than how I, via this daily intercession within a community of difference, internally as a South African, negotiate their reinvention and use in contemporary dance work. Cultural theorist Rustom Bharucha has articulated this as “intracultural” practice: “[Intracultural] is the term I was compelled to

¹⁴ “The Rainbow Nation was first used by Archbishop Desmond Tutu to describe post-apartheid South Africa after South Africa’s first fully democratic election held in 1994. Archbishop Desmond Tutu is a South African social rights activist and played a crucial part in the opposition of apartheid during the 1980s and even to today is considered a “voice for the voiceless” as declared by late President Nelson Mandela. Kellerman, 2014.

develop as a critical shorthand to ... explain the [cultural] dynamics between and across specific communities and regions within the boundaries of the nation-state” (2003:8-9).

This term thus becomes useful insofar as it also speaks against the politics of other forms of dance and cultural exchange. Be this multiculturalism, a buzz word in South Africa, specifically in 1994 at the time of our first democratic elections in South Africa. Endlessly paraded on stage was a “melting pot” where all cultural groups keep their “own distinct qualities” (Schechner, 1991:29) of cultural dance styles all embracing the adage of a ‘new’ South Africa and its “ONE NATION MANY CULTURES” philosophy of tolerance. We saw *Bharathanatyam* dancers stand next to traditional *ngoma* dancers, and ballerinas in tutu and pointe shoe all moving to the sound of the same African drum beat. We sighed collectively as we saw how possible it was to all live side by side in rhythmic harmony. No one questioned the ‘side by side’ and the fact that no real mixing or integration was taking place; the ballerina’s tutu remained white and the skins worn by the traditional *ngoma* dancer remained firmly cow-hide. This multiculturalism saw no mixing in its dance steps and styles; and we did not ask who *owned* this melting pot. Who *allowed* the *ngoma* dancer onto stage and who asked the *Bharathanatyam*¹⁵ dancers to join in? In many ways this echoes the concerns raised by Garuba (2015) [as mentioned in the Introduction of this thesis] in his writings around decolonising higher education in Kenya. It echoes the first identified approach to a more superficial act of trying to decolonise which he identifies simply as “add(ing) new items to an existing curriculum.” In this way entrenched ways of thinking, being and doing remain intact as a few African writers, philosophers, artists (etc.) are merely added to a curriculum (and added to the stage!)

Similarly, multiculturalism, while a contested concept, for all its posturing of cultural tolerance, proved to be an economic and political power game where tradition and popular performance forms were finally *allowed* to join the ‘adults’ at the bottom of the dinner table. No one really stopped to question whose dinner party it was and, indeed, who owned the dinner table. Black dancers were still only seen as banging limbs and feet in a display of some

¹⁵ *Bharathanatyam* is a traditional South Indian classical dance form often admired for the complex hand, face, eye and physical rhythms it creates.

nostalgic African dance form. Indian dancers were tied to their gold *bindis*¹⁶ and saris, and the white girl, no matter how much she wanted to bang limb and feet, or perhaps find Krishna and Radha¹⁷ in her dance, her 'role' was bound to the tulle and pointe shoe¹⁸. Cultural tolerance in the form of multiculturalism, for all its political correctness, can have the effect of further isolating dance styles and their practitioners in a remembered colonial image of the ideal racial and gendered stereotype of cultural practice. Which is, of course, very problematic if one seeks to make socially challenging contemporary dance work that speaks to your own country and continent; and which, more significantly aims to start a process of decolonising and of de-centering Northern based hegemonic 'truthful' learning and dance practice.

So perhaps we begin to fuse dance styles and steps in a bid to negotiate the unease of cultural meetings in a country like South Africa. This 'fusion' begins to give rise to some of the first early generation of great South African contemporary choreographers. As Schechner goes on to explain, "Fusion occurs when elements of two or more cultures mix together to such a degree that a new society, language or genre of art emerges" (1991:30).

A South African dancer like Vincent Mantsoe, for example, uses his training in the American based Graham Technique to renegotiate a spiritual performance style that uses his youthful roots as a traditional African dancer to generate choreography. The contractions and the weight flow of Graham begins to seamlessly fuse with the sacred ritual dance forms that Mantsoe learnt as a young boy at the side of his mother who was a *sangoma*. His dance and (especially his earlier) choreography play with and negotiate a meeting and fusing of cultural expressions which define a style and era of early contemporary South African dance that, in all its beauty, signalled a new generation of black male dance-makers in the early 1980s.

¹⁶ A *bindi* is the dot painted or stuck over the third eye of the central forehead of women. It has many connotations in Hindu practice, the first being for protection, and, if the dot is red (for example), it becomes an indication of marital status.

¹⁷ Krishna and Radha are two Hindu deities often acted out in classical *Bharathanatyam* dances.

¹⁸ This racial and cultural reductionism discussed here within the politics of multiculturalism is also deeply challenged by the fact that even as early as the 1940s in South Africa, white dancers and choreographers (for example) were making inroads into challenging the stereotype of who and what whiteness (for example) could access. See the work of Teda de Moor, Rhoda Orlin, Robyn Orlin and Sylvia Glasser. Glasser established Moving Into Dance in 1979 and worked across race and gender in her now seminal ritual Afrofusion dance works. See <http://www.midance.co.za/dance-company/management-administration/> for more information on Glasser.

Mantsoe's work has (and continues) to be considered the early ground work for many more recent postmodern¹⁹ South African choreographers.

But while Mantsoe found a flow and a personal ease with his fusion of styles and cultures, an ease which negotiated his own multiplicitous South African identity, this 'ease' of fusing styles has not been fluid for all South African choreographers and dance educators. If one journeys back, for example, to look at the early works of a South African choreographer like Jayesperi Moopen and her attempts to engage her own Indian Disapora identity and dance training as a classical Indian *Bharathanatyam* dancer living and working in South Africa, there is a performed cultural romance and nostalgia in her dance fusion. *Talas in Conversation* [1996] is perhaps her most famous dance work as it won the FNB Vita Award for choreography in 1997. The romance of this dance work lies in the extraordinarily harmonious music and choreographic meeting of black Xhosa and Zulu traditional dance and dancers, with Moopen's own classically trained Indian *Bharathanatyam* dancers from her Tribanghi Dance Company. The shared rhythms from live djembe drumming on stage sees both the Indian dancers and the Xhosa and Zulu dancers, meeting in a space of communal shared drum beats where these two cultural dance expressions face each other with an intense sense of rhythmic recognition. The stylistics of curved, fluid and gestural *Bharathanatyam*, a dance form that is also based on complex rhythmic foot work, meets the might of the stamping traditional Xhosa and Zulu dances. Interestingly enough, Moopen's classical Indian dancers were all female, and the guesting Xhosa and Zulu dancers were all male. Moopen, however, did journey deeper in her fusion and we eventually see in *Talas in Conversation*, both the Xhosa and Zulu dancers, and the Indian dancers share and exchange steps and styles of moving such that the fusion transcends simply sharing rhythm, to a very aesthetically pleasing and comfortable Indian/African classical/traditional blend. The work is undoubtedly beautiful to watch but the nostalgia is that the audience watches with a very keen sense of this being a performance of a wished-for history (and meeting) rather than the often much more disharmonious and violent histories of black and Indian South Africans (my own city's history of Cato Manor or Umkhumbane is one such historical trajectory). I do not, in any way imply or offer critique of

¹⁹ Modernism in dance has its roots in the work of, amongst others, American icon Martha Graham who responded to the context of her time (post Industrial Revolution) by creating work that expressed the grand narratives synonymous with Modernist discourse. Postmodernism in dance, especially in the latter 20th Century was a move away from grand narratives to far more localised and context driven dance work. See Banes, 1977 for more details.

choreographers wishing to present imagined worlds, but what remains deeply significant is that these types of Indian dance fusion encounters with black traditional dance forms in South Africa, continue to remain primarily at the behest of the Diaspora Indian dance makers.

Thus, like the implicit power play of high and low art finally meeting at the not quite round multicultural dinner table, fusion can have the ability of rendering invisible any notion of social, economic and political context. These contexts would include heteronormative notions of, for example, gender relations and of economic value systems that promote certain values around taste and style. While fusion seems, thus, to at least begin the negotiation of cultural meetings and exchanges (high art and popular culture, traditional, classical and contemporary dance), it does so in an unproblematised way that often allows political and economic context to disappear in the attempt to create a fused style of harmony. However, this is a harmony that is most often defined by the acceptance of a firstly, First World (and colonial) recognition of style and taste and a desire not to shift acceptable and recognisable dance paradigms for mainstream audiences, and, secondly that often renders invisible complex and painful histories that speak to notions of clash and conflict – histories where there are no shared rhythms and no shared for work.

Thus, returning to choreographers like Vincent Mantsoe, while not wanting in any way to belittle the historical and aesthetic value of Mantsoe's dance and choreography (as mentioned above, his contribution to South African emerging contemporary dance environment in the early 1980s places him at our very foundation), it is precisely the image of the half-naked black man gyrating in a semblance of imagined colonial traditional African dance – but with just enough 'technique' to make him a 'good dancer' – that has had Mantsoe accepted and praised (most especially in his earlier choreographic works) in Europe and the North. In many ways – within fusion – there is no real decentring of the accepted and "epistemic violent normative ways" (Heleta, 2016:npn) of deciphering 'real' dance practice.

A more investing approach is from American cultural theorist, Schechner, who calls for an "interculturalism". This, he argues is "cultural uneasiness and clash" (1991:30) in situations where "people are living difficult multiple cultural identities" (1991:30). Indeed, this becomes far more exciting as we artists in South Africa know all about 'clash' – an uneasy and sometimes violent conflict between cultures – and about making this the very fabric of our

chorography. But I still feel unhappy. This definition could be about any national or international 'clash of cultures' whereas I seek to negotiate the internality of my own South African and African cultural identity. Schechner, a First World artist who has engaged in some very ambivalent ethical 'borrowings' of cross-cultural performances (especially rituals) from Third World/Southern based artists and cultural practitioners, has created a definition and mode of operation, that does not acknowledge, at the very least, the economic disparity of the cultures with which he is "clashing". As Bharucha has so eloquently pointed out, "Schechner's 'use' [and cultural clash] amounts, in my view, to a naïve and unexamined ethnocentricity. Quite simply ... the borrowing, stealing, and exchanging from other cultures is not necessarily an 'enriching' experience for the cultures themselves" (1990:14).

And so, I journey back to my own city of Durban and the prevalence of First and Third economic reality. This is a city in Africa that is industrialised but which also manifests a profound link to ancestral African religion and cultural practice. It is a city which, since the late 1800s, has played home to one of the largest Diaspora Indian communities in the world. Indians arrived on our shores and worked as indentured labourers before finally finding freedom and a new home. As I walk through my city centre, not only do the smells of traditional Africa hit me, but the incense burns strong. The colonial and Art Deco architecture of many of the buildings remind me of a history of my own ancestors – some not really of my choosing! And between all of this I face the distinctive golden arch of McDonalds, I face Coca-Cola's red and white and "it's a can within the reach of everyone" ideology. I remain profoundly dis-embodied in my search for an elusive decentring and decolonised dance practice.

Development, South Africa, Africa and the global eye

So far much of this chapter has been concerned with my attempts to confront my own cultural hybridity as a South African, theorising myself and my work within the frame work of what Bharucha calls "intraculturalism" (2003) and what I have tried to call my internal/externality. I am internal in that I am African by virtue of firstly, being born on the continent (I carry a South African passport), and secondly, by virtue of living and being resident in South African for most of my entire life. I participate in the political and social life of my birth country by working, paying taxes and voting. My externality, however, is premised on the on-going

politics around who can call themselves 'African' in the light of my birth country's history around colonisation and the legacies of apartheid. My racial classification as a 'white' South Africa – and the history that this comes with – often politically disputes my desire/ability to call myself African. In this contested engagement around race and belonging, I operate in the liminal spaces between what I call my internal/externality. Both of these categories are further premised on the idea of a nation state, of the sovereignty of national borders to work within and from. I come, now, to the global picture of Africa, and of my city, of Durban. Both Africa and Durban often exist – as I have argued – insofar as they relate to, or are placed against, and confront or embrace the products and processes of the north. Evidence of globalisation is the rich 'perfume' that we are forced to smell as we walk and talk and dance.

Anti-globalisation theorists and writers (see De Rivero, 2001 & Khor, 2000 amongst many others) have argued that globalisation is not a new process and has its roots in the colonial impulses where economically privileged nations have extended their reach, through trade and production, to territories all over the world. Khor (2000:1) has argued that recent technological advances and First World liberalisation policies have simply pushed or accelerated this 'impulse' into what we call globalisation. Simply put contemporary globalisation operates in four areas:

- the breakdown of national (and economic) barriers
- international spread and intensification of trade
- liberalisation of financial and production activities
- growing power of transnational corporations and the linked international financial institutions.

The linked international financial institutions, often referred to as the "Bretton Woods triad" (Adam, 2002:10),²⁰ are the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). All three were originally established post-World War 11

²⁰ Out of this 1944 Bretton Woods meeting/agreement four institutions are created:

1. The United Nations (UN),
2. International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD),
3. The General Agreement of Trade and Tariffs (GATT),
4. The International Monetary Fund (IMF).

GATT eventually turns into the World Trade Organisation and IBRD becomes the World Bank. While the UN operates in fields of humanitarian rights, the last three organisations get to be known as the 'Bretton Woods triad'.

to establish a new stable framework for a post war global economy. The increased global power of this triad is linked to the 1982 crisis in Mexico when Mexico declared that it was unable to pay back its loans. These were loans that had been made available under the guise of 'development'; 'development' being this great modernising impulse to get all of the Third World (and the south) to embrace the means of production and its complicit lifestyle that exemplifies the consumer capitalism of the north. This is facilitated by the WTO, the IMF and the World Bank creating Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) where the need for loans and debt relief funding from a donor is linked to conditionalities as set out by the 'triad'. These conditionalities include enforced privatisation, deregulation and the withdrawal of the state from economic and social activities. In short, these factors are linked to (amongst others):

Trade conditionalities (FREE TRADE) where a country receiving the SAP's are tied into exporting their raw materials and cash crops and then importing goods from the industrialised north;

- Abolishing of import quotas and the reduction of import tariffs to a minimum;
- Lowering of recipient countries' currencies so that export becomes attractive to the lender country;
- Tightening up recipient countries internal spending and welfare services.

What becomes evident, as Adam (2002) puts it, is the way in which these globalised SAPs and the creation of a global market, "gives the lender the right to run the economies and social policies of sovereign states that are in receipt of their loans and aid packages and to stack the deck in their own favour" (2002:12).

Far from generating 'free trade' that will benefit the recipient country (a country of the south) the triad has thus created an economic world order that benefits 'free trade' for the north and a type of ownership of the raw materials and wealth of the recipient country. These SAPs require the recipient country to take on the liberalisation and modernisation of the north and as such the "jurisdiction of State and people within a country have increasingly come under the influence of international agencies and processes or of big private corporations and economic/financial players" (Khor, 2000:4). Much like the rhetoric of multiculturalism which images itself on equity of cultural practices meeting on one stage, the Bretton Woods triad renders invisible histories of Third World oppression and colonisation in terms of context,

place and poverty in offering what looks like a meeting place of equals but which, in fact clearly favours the north. Again, Third World countries are *invited* to join the dinner table but will never have an equitable share in ownership. National barriers of countries of the south no longer seem to exist and are eroding as the external trade liberalisation, tied to this myth of globalisation as development, begins to take hold. The ability of Third World governments and their people to make choices about their own internal economic, social and cultural policies is restricted.

As part of what the north defines as a 'developing country' (developing toward what ideal of what kind of social order?), I find myself as a South African academic, artist, dancer and choreographer in a particularly vulnerable position as I watch globalisation practices erode the sovereignty of my nation state. I watch my national borders begin to evaporate in the so called 'free flow' of culture and cultural practice. My fight to seek and understand the decentered and decolonised multiplicity of my own social, economic and political identity as a Third World African white woman, in all its internal/externality, seems to retreat into the background. In fact the very idea of a decentred and decolonised identity is very far removed when my city, country and continent and all its cultural hybridity becomes the rich new hunting ground for the globalised elite artists with enough funding and First World backing to come and make this, and us, their creative playground. A 'creative playground' which is further defined as 'developing' and thus in need of the economic aid that often buys these northern artists (and their cultural programmes) free passage into our lives, our art and our cultural practices.

While there are literally hundreds of examples of Northern based artists who have come – via their economic free passages and First world financial support – into our South Africa arts and dance environment, perhaps the most invidious of my own experiences was a Dutch Artist called Feri de Geus who came to work in Durban in 2004. His own European dance organisation, Le grand Cru,²¹ had a reputation within The Netherlands and Europe, for dance work that crossed cultural barriers. De Geus (whose education was originally in cultural anthropology) made his reputation as a choreographer on working cross culturally and primarily with artist who came from developing contexts. Post 1994, given the historical Dutch

²¹ Le Grand Cru company web-site for more information: <https://legrandcru-dance.nl/en/about-us/>

support of the anti-apartheid movement, and the establishment of a Royal Netherlands Embassy in South Africa, there was an explosion of Dutch artists who came to South Africa on various exchanges – de Geus was one of these funded artists. He ended up working with the Durban based Phenduka Dance Company run by Sbonkalisio Ndaba, Sifiso Kweyama and Ondine Bellow (all three having trained and danced professionally with the Cape Town based Jazzart Dance Company). Phenduka's own history is one of significant contemporary dance training and dance skills development. A South African National Arts Council funded programme, Phenduka ran (full-time) in Durban from 2001-2006. The company's first 3 years of training eventually allowed for the professional company to be formed in 2004. Phenduka still remains one of the most historically influential dance training programmes run in Durban (and in fact two of the current full-time dancers with FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY, began their dance training with Phenduka). Phenduka's aesthetics of a flow based African contemporary training and dance style that uses high energy and muscular strength, continues to be imitated and copied in the local dance arena. Sbonkalisio Ndaba, in particular, over the 5 years of the company's life won every major dance award for her creations with the company including the FNB Vita Award and the then very prestigious Daimler Chrysler award for choreography in 2003.

De Geus's entry into this South African company came as a privilege afforded him given the status he enjoyed as one of Holland's premiere dance makers. His work with both the Phenduka professional company and their trainees at the time was met with disdain as he frequently complained that the dancers 'lack training and skill' and that he was 'helping them to learn how to dance.'²² His initial arrogance in not researching the context of the dancers and the history of the company he was working with, allowed him to very publicly set himself up as a type of hero figure who was 'saving these poor black African dancers'. His own need to be validated as the European who was bringing 'real art' to Africa, was met by an increasingly stony silence from the Phenduka dancers with whom he was working. In South Africa we are aware, of course, due to the apartheid legacy, that silence is a very profound weapon of defiance. De Geus could not read this and continued to bludgeon the dancers with his working process which offered no 'exchange' but rather an imposition of ideas. There was no listening, and very profoundly there was no learning. De Gues, however, held the purse

²² These comments came out of various personal conversations held with Feri de Geus over his time in Durban.

strings and the European funding coming in to pay these dancers and support the longevity of Phenduka over the period of this project, left the company almost powerless to walk away from this 'exchange'.

The final work he created, "Double U" with Phenduka, premiered at the JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Festival in 2004. De Geus tackled what he referred to in an interview as "the sexy knowledge of the pandemic of HIV in Africa."²³ The cast remained silent. The dance work was not well received by JOMBA! and South African audiences; there was a real sense that this work was not created for us, but for de Geus's acolytes back in Holland and Europe. His choreographic treatment and understanding of HIV was superficial and lacked the deeply painful resonances of our own context. When de Geus did eventually travel the work to Holland in 2005, relationships between him and the cast were so deeply strained –issue around non-payment of dancers and travel/food allowances not being paid – saw the South African cast refuse to perform in the final two shows in Amsterdam. This momentary resistance offered, perhaps, a very vocal and felt confrontation to a process of systematic First World invisibility and silencing of African voices, bodies and struggles.²⁴

Very rarely do artists of the north and south/the First and Third world meet as equals. A globalised economic order that has SAPs and pursues the ideals of neo-liberalism, forces us to buy into First World economic structures and trade liberalisation, and thus pushes us into a position where foreign aid is necessary for survival. This situation is particularly evident in the sphere of arts and culture which is often a very small priority on a 'developing' country's economic agenda. The need for food, water and housing is often far more essential than a well-funded national arts council (for example). Many countries of the south are also recovering from, or living with, dictatorships and corrupt governments where abuse of power and economic mismanagement has undermined any internal growth and development within, for example, critical contemporary art forms. As mentioned before, contemporary art and dance falls in the schism between imagined traditional art and the politics of preserving 'real'

²³ This comment was made live in the after show "JOMBA! Talks Dance" hosted by Adrienne Sichel on 25 August 2004 at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre, post-show discussion.

²⁴ While the above case study refers, it is an extreme example of cultural appropriation and 'silencing' but it is also important to point out that there have been other Dutch artist who have (and continue) to work in South Africa in deeply negotiated partnerships and cultural exchanges. Example could be made of the Arnhem based INTRODANS whose work in South Africa over a good 15-year time frame has been resonant and deeply respectful. For more information on the company; <https://www.introdans.nl/>.

history and memory, and, popular culture. Contemporary art is often radical, often critical and most often questions positions of power, hegemony and ownership. Thus, when First World governments and artists make noises about helping Africa 'develop' its art and cultural sphere, and about investing aid through setting up cultural exchange programmes, my own decolonising search for my own embodied reality, remains vigilantly suspicious.

The problematic thinking around these 'free flow' globalised ideas of exchange between the north and south would be less painful, perhaps, if the First World began by recognising that the people of the south already have many existing cultural and artistic spheres of operation. Perhaps our historical and economic context has meant that these have been subverted or censored, but they do indeed exist. Sending northern artists and cultural practitioners, under this banner of free trade liberalisation, to 'liberate' us and 'develop' our art and culture reeks of an arrogance that assumes the First World standards are what we should ALL aspire to. Local cultures, for example, often suffer under the assumption that the standards of practice associated with historical First World forms like ballet are indeed central to ALL dance practice. Further there are deeply imbedded colonial imported assumptions around ballet as being the 'one true style and training system of dance' and that all dance practice springs from, or would benefit from, ballet training. The pointed foot is not a universal! In the end, as Bharucha points out, often what is done under the banner of humanitarian aid does not hide how First World nations often "legitimise their control of Third World economies by policing human rights" (Bharucha, 2003:27) – and, I would add, artistic expression.

As an artist and cultural practitioner of the South, as my journey to find ways to make contemporary dance practice relevant to my contemporary material and social realities persists, I continue to be challenged to not buy into these imported value systems that globally devalue my/our own practices. I return here to the example above of the work by Dutch choreographer Feri de Geus with my Durban sister dance company, Phenduka Dance Theatre. De Geus's dogged refusal to exchange, to see, to hear, and to listen to the dancers of Phenduka made him little more than a contemporary colonial who exoticised the blackness of the skin he was working with and who, in the end, was not able to acknowledge that those dancers have many existing cultural and artistic spheres of operation. His desire to 'develop' the Phenduka dancers is a very painful cautionary tale that speak to the assumption of his dance practice as being that which will eventually 'save us' poor Third World hopeful artists. And

while I am not European, while I claim my African identity, my own history and 'white' ballet training means that I need to begin on the evolving journey to decolonise the hold of Northern value systems and their thinly veiled 'correct' standards and ideas of 'universal' practices. In South Africa, for example, it is common practice for contemporary artists, dancers and choreographers to authenticate themselves as 'valuable' by quoting training, exchanges and work that they have done in Europe or the North. Time spent artistically in Europe is often used as a value leverage to assure quality, and, perhaps on a global (read First World) market, to say you trained at the London Contemporary Dance School, for example, indeed means more than the unsure quality control of saying you trained in Durban, South Africa. Globalisation, and its processes, thus continue to have the effect of "colonising the mind" (Wa Thiong'o, 1986:36) of the southern-based dancer.

Using these colonially imported – and Northward looking – value systems to authenticate the contemporary African (for example), opens Pandora's rich Third World box around globalisation and intellectual property rights. By denying the very belief and existence in the capacity of countries of the South to, firstly manifest cultural and artistic practice of merit, and secondly, to allow its art and culture to flourish in whatever way it can, First World nations retain the right to claim intellectual property rights around their 'collaborations'. We begin to see, again, the eroding of a country's authority and authorship around its own artistic (and intellectual) resources and practices.

Bharucha asks, "what do the home countries and communities, from which these cultural resources emanate, receive for their contribution to the creative process? Are they even acknowledged?" (2003:29). And, as has been argued, what lies at the heart of this debate is the globalised (read north defined) belief in the self-affirming notion of what constitutes a 'good' piece of art.

Further, world trade systems favour "exports of manufactured goods (from the north), while proving to be disadvantageous to many developing countries whose main participation in global trade has consisted of raw materials and commodities, and who then import the finished product back" (Khor, 2000:19). This impacts on the arts and culture of countries of the south in that our artistic 'raw' material is, more often than not, either the dancer him or herself, or the cultural and traditional ritual practices which are taken and then owned. South

Africa's contemporary dance history over the last 40 years is infested with hundreds of stories of dancers (almost always black) 'chosen' to participate in exchanges, training or work placement in Europe/the North where they are buffed, cleaned up and taught to 'point their foot'. I know of many artists who never return to South Africa as the disparity of their new-found global agency makes them feel minimised in a local context, or if they do return, they return as exiles often taking a very long time to find their own 'feet' again. When (and if they return) there is also often the terrifying notion that what they have learnt in the North has given them more value and agency here in South Africa.

This thesis is a reflection and interrogation of my internal and external processes of decolonising old paradigms of training, writing/researching and making dance post 1994 and trying to re-imagine an inclusive dance practice in South Africa, and in Africa. From the above structural discussions around my own geo-political context and the global paradigms of development discourses, I begin to reflect on the difficulty of the process; of even taking these tentative political and cultural steps into decolonising. That these fights continue and are ever present, is also a testimony to the fact that the act of decolonising, the act of interrogating racism, sexism and class discrimination, of owing blind allegiance to European and colonial systems of dance education training and research, needs constant vigilance and is an on-going struggle for post-colonial and post-apartheid artists, academics and teachers in South Africa. I am also reminded that Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1981) started his decolonising agenda with himself – with decolonising his own mind and belief systems.

I need, I suppose, like many critics of globalisation, to also be cautious in imaging the North hegemonically as the great exploitative evil. Like many white Africans, my historical links with colonisation (and in South Africa, the apartheid system), has made me the beneficiary of dance training at an early age (those 12 years of the rigours of ballet), access to theatre, access to education such that I arrive today the product of many First World benefits – and being on the receiving end of apartheid constructed white privilege. I do not deny the impact that these multiple (and often contradictory) discourses have had on forming my hybrid and shifting identity. My internal position, however, as a person of the South has made me critical of placing an overly identified value system on these discourses of colonial white privilege. I set out to mediate my (our) complex identity as an experiential state of being that is constantly

in flux and to remain deeply critical of any process that de-values my local South African contemporary context – its cultures and its arts.

One of the (small) solutions lies in the collective re-thinking of ‘development’ and indeed, questioning what the ‘progress’ is that globalisation offers us. Perhaps it will be in this ‘development free’ decolonised paradigm that it might be possible for alternate, embodied south based dance praxis to emerge? As de Rivero (2001:110) points out:

Development [is] one of the most persistent myths of the second half of the 20th century. Theoreticians, experts and politicians have been convinced that economic and social development is an inborn, one could say inevitable, process for all nation-states. They think it is only necessary to apply the correct theories and policies and poor countries will begin to create wealth and become societies with high living standards, like those enjoyed by the twenty-four capitalist, industrialised democracies. Over a period of half a century more than 130 countries have attempted to apply these different economic and social ideologies and systems as set out by these twenty-four capitalist, industrialised democracies, in search of development as though this was a journey to the land of gold, El Dorado. Development, however, has proved to be as elusive as the conquistadors’ dream.

Another small but significant solution to grapple with is, of course, re-thinking, re-framing and re-constructing how I (and we, as people of the South) pedagogically practise dance as both performance and in the learning, training and education framework. This task of trying to embody a re-imagined pedagogy is what started FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY.

Locating my dance practice: context

I have been employed by the University of KwaZulu-Natal in the Drama and Performance Studies programme since 1994, as the dance lecturer in a programme that offers a general performance degree for the first two years and then an opportunity to specialise in the third and graduate levels. Dance and choreography is one of these specialisations and, like most universities, requires both an academic and a practical component. Our dance programme is a contemporary programme and accepts all who gain the level required for entry into the university system (and who have the funds to pay for tertiary education). It is only from third year that any type of selection process is navigated. As mentioned in the Introduction of this thesis, since 1994, I have fought to get the dance stream (now one of 3 streams on offer: Theatre Studies, Applied Theatre and Dance Studies) to exist for and of itself and have moved away from thinking about ‘movement’ as an addendum to a theatre programme. The old

systems saw 'movement' training as essential to the actor and not as a discipline of study in its own right. This pedagogical relationship of movement training to theatre studies is an imported one that comes from syllabi of European schools of theatre training. Firstly, these pedagogic training systems are not the reality of performance practice in South Africa (and Africa) where the distinction between dance, performance and music do not exist. Traditional rituals and other traditional cultural practices saw no distinction, and this has evolved into contemporary traditions like the township musicals of Gibson Kente and Mbongeni Ngema where music, dance and performance co-exist. Secondly, and most significantly, I felt that dance should not take a backseat to theatre training or be present only in service of actor training. This is also partly about decentring the logos of the word and spoken language (something I pick up on in the Section Two of this thesis) but it was also about claiming dance as its own discipline and with its own pedagogy.

Part of my initial post 1994 stepping into a career in tertiary education in South Africa was a personal, social, cultural and political need to shed old paradigms and ways of thinking, teaching and researching around Performance Studies. These were my first tentative steps into decolonising my own personal engagement with higher education from the side of educator. I wanted to find ways to let the teaching and learning that could and should be on offer reflect the post 1994 political and social climate of change, of hope and of opening the doors of learning for all.

So while some 20 years of decolonising reform was attempted (and continues to be attempted) by myself and some like-minded academic colleagues within the formal university teaching situation of the Drama and Performance Studies Programme at UKZN, I am pained to acknowledge that the systemic and paternalistic ownership of space and 'truthful' knowledge continues to make a total transformation slow, demanding, and full of fraught staff meetings and curriculum evaluations. This work is on-going but as my own desire to re-frame and re-construct dance praxis began to burn and open up with my own reading, writing and dance making post 1994, I found that I was almost forced to begin looking outside the formal teaching and learning environment of the university. Painfully (and still colonially) referred to as "community engagement" by UKZN work codes and employment evaluations, I thus began to work external to UKZN. It remains a deep schism of pain that higher learning institutions like UKZN have (and continue) to place this work on the margins of 'real' academic activity.

As discussed in the introduction, the lack of qualified and contemporary dance trained black dancers in South African (and particularly KZN and Durban) had me, in 1994, start free adult dance training classes that I called “FLATFOOT DANCE”. I operated with no funding just the political and artistic impulse to offer dance training to those who had historically and economically been denied access due to the apartheid systems. In 2003, and after a long nine-year journey of seeing these classes (and my practice) grow, FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY became a professional full registered contemporary dance company.

I am the artistic director and resident choreographer of a now (2018) 15-year-old professional contemporary dance company that is housed (though not funded) at UKZN. This company is called *FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY*.

Our Mission Statement reads as follows:

1. To offer a professional dance theatre company (*FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY*) that creates contemporary dance work that engages with the context (both indigenous and modern) in which we live. We are a contemporary dance company that aims at making entertaining but socially aware dance theatre work. As a dance company based in KwaZulu-Natal, we access all the rich dance languages available in this province in an attempt to begin creating new dance work that speaks to our own context as South Africans. ***FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY* is committed to artistic innovation and the creation of dance theatre work that is relevant to the South African (and African) context. The sustained life of *FLATFOOT* is also a sustained commitment to offering real and significant employment to professional South African artists.**

2. To offer young adult training programmes

(a.) *FLATFOOT Training Company* and,

(b.) *FLATFOOT ADD Programme* – Advanced Dance Development which aims to offer technique and performance dance skills to young KZN based dancers (16 years and up).

- ***The FLATFOOT Training Company*** programme auditions for up to 30 dancers each year and classes are held in the late afternoons and early evening to allow for participants in the programme to continue to school, study or do part-time work.

- **The *FLATFOOT ADD*** programme (which began in 2013) offers additional weekly classes to 15 specially selected youth from our urban township programmes who are excelling in their dance training and offer them more guided career pathing as dancers. *FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY* is committed to both job creation in the dance/arts sector, and also growth and development in the arts in KZN and South Africa.

3. To offer quality dance education and dance development programmes in our province which;

- a. offers teacher training dance and choreography workshops in KZN,
- b. offers schools dance, choreography and dance (Arts and Culture learning area) syllabus related workshops for learners in both primary and high schools in KZN
- c. offers youth dance development programmes in Durban's surrounding areas, which uses dance (and arts education) as intervention methodology for life skills learning (with a specific emphasis on gender and health (HIV/AIDS) education and rights for the girl and boy child),
- d. offers dance development programmes in the rural areas of KZN which uses dance (and arts education) as intervention methodology for life skills learning (with a specific emphasis on gender, HIV and AIDS education and intervention, and environmental education).

***FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY* is deeply committed to making sure that dance and arts education is available to ALL, regardless of rural or urban living, and understands the need to redress the lack of cultural/arts education particularly in rural and poor communities where schools often do not offer arts and culture programmes.**

We work with, dance with and are engaged in education exchanges with about 1000 youth aged between 5 and 26 years of age annually in both urban and rural areas in KwaZulu-Natal. It is in this particular work that I have found my own dance pedagogy and theory challenged; challenges that have extended not only as to how I run dance education and development programmes and learning, but also the way in which our professional dance company is imagined.

Beginning to re-locate and re-construct my dance practice: pedagogy

The first half of this Chapter I set out to construct a careful and multiplicitous autoethnographic reflective and embodied journey into post-development theory/ies. These deliberations sit as the background for my own politically and artistically expressed need to decolonise, re-locate and re-construct dance training and dance ‘development’ programmes through my work with FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY. Given our locations on the East coast of South Africa and on the Southern tip of the African continent, my work has had to also address the economic particulars and realities of the context within which I work. This means an addressing of localised issues such as:

- Poverty
- High levels of HIV/AIDS
- Teenage pregnancy in a gendered landscape of traditional Zulu patriarchy and authority
- Severely rigid gender and social role expectations for the boy and girl child
- Environmental degradation (often one of the biggest global by-products of the post-World War II development agenda)

Many of the young people with whom FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY work, are rooted in 42%²⁵ of a South African population that faces severe poverty, and many do not eat every day. In this landscape you may question the value of setting up dance programmes when perhaps feeding schemes might be of more immediate use.

But, as post-development thinking sets out, I (and those I work with in FLATFOOT), need to begin to imagine a process which offers “alternatives to development rather than alternative development” (Matthews, 2004:373) knowing that feeding schemes help in the short term (making the developer feel warm and fuzzy at seeing small Third World African children – the ‘other’ – eat a meal) but do not mitigate large scale hunger. Food Aid is one of the most controversial post-World War II development agendas (see for example George, 1986).

As such I, a South African woman, am left constantly trying to find alternative meanings (decolonised meanings) to the concept of ‘development’ because the project of improving

²⁵ See: <http://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=10334>.

people's lives should never be abandoned. To this end I engage radical education theorist Paulo Freire (1970) as the first step to offering alternative ways of imaging a relevant, local learning framework that speaks to my own context and to the context of the youth with whom I work. This search for an alternate educational paradigm must, I believe, allow for the agenda of growing people rather than (in the context of this thesis and as has been discussed above), Northern hegemonic (and epistemically violent) based economic and social agendas; and indeed dance practices.

Just as development carries social and economic agendas, so too, education is never a neutral process. How we are taught and what we are taught often asserts political agendas around our perceived place in society. This was effected in the long apartheid years in South Africa with a racially segregated education system that created separate education processes for black and white children with the overt understanding that young black children were being educated to fill the ascribed role as the subservient working class. In post-apartheid South African education while there are still evident historically asserted racial divisions, further divisions continue to exist in terms of class and choice of school dependent on both accessibility and affordability. Often township and rural schools (for example) are still beleaguered by poorly trained teachers and the absence of cultural programmes due to funding cuts.

In Freire's seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), he began to outline an alternate system of learning and teaching that he called "liberation education" (1970:53). This education moved away from looking at learners as empty vessels that needed to be filled with the knowledge that a teacher would bestow on a pupil (what Freire called "the Banking System of Education" [1970:54]). He argues that, at best, this way of thinking about learning is deeply alienating to any learner and, much like the post-World War II development agenda for the South, turns the learner into a "welfare recipient" (1970:55).

To this end he proposes a problem-posing method of education which allows the learner/pupil to draw on their localised knowledge and understanding of the world. As such, the educator and pupil enter into a mutual learning process. He argues that education is liberation, and further that "liberation is a praxis" (1970:60).

Freire did not, of course talk about dance education but this profound understanding of the political, social and cultural imperative of education offers useful insight into re-thinking dance education and development practices that are based only on Western/Northern based models of what a dancer should learn, be and resemble.

In a post-development paradigm that seeks to look into dance education, training and development, I begin – in 1994 as I start these free FLATFOOT classes – to imagine a dance education programme located in South Africa that is not only about a well pointed foot and a well-executed contraction, but about this agenda of ‘growing people’; that education and pedagogy should be about “becoming more fully human” (Freire, 1970:55). Of necessity, this involves a deep understanding of an engagement with arts and culture as the very rubric of ‘development and education’, and a deep understanding that in the context of Africa and South Africa, dance education can become an activism for re-thinking who we are both locally and globally and how we are able to understand our own worth; and indeed what we give value to.

I thus began (in my evolving process) to abandon my thoughts, in our FLATFOOT based dance development youth work, around teaching ‘good technique’ (a strangely Westernised/universalised idea that all contemporary dance begins with Humphrey and Graham²⁶) in favour of beginning to use dance and dance education as a tool – or indeed a strategy – towards other kinds of learning that engages the list of issues I raised above. (For example; poverty, HIV/AIDS, gender inequality).

Our programme thus, in working with just under 1000 youth in KZN, is to use dance as an intervention methodology which begins to use the problem posing method of education. The idea here is not to set ourselves up as teachers who are all knowing. Rather we enter into the teaching and learning dance space as participants with the youth in a way that our processes allow the youth agency in begin to find solutions to their own identified problems. This may be finding joint and facilitated solutions to something as simple as not having dance clothes to wear to classes or needing to miss classes due to family commitments but might include issues of sexual violence and school/family bullying. As we jointly negotiate and find solutions

²⁶ Both Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey are considered two of the modern American dance pioneers in that both created two of the first modern codified dance training systems and offered a revolution in the conceptualisation of modern dance/choreography as an art form. See Kraus (1969) for more details.

(and help where needed) to issues raised or encountered, we are growing the ability of these youth to find agency. Inside of the dance work with these youth, we grow the ability to be quiet and listen (to teachers and to each other), we grow a sense of community by practising working in unison and knowing that we stand next to some body that needs care, love and respect. We grow a sense of wonder and joy that comes from the delight of dancing and being part of concerts and public performances. We consider these almost 1000 young people we encounter each year in our dance programmes as carriers of valuable self and social knowledge. Our programmes set out to offer assistance towards helping these youth interrogate themselves so that they can explore possible strategies of empowerment and rejuvenation outside the prescriptions of race, gender and health issues that dominate and often seem to determine their life paths. Through dance and its engagement with the body, FLATFOOT begins to interrogate these almost pre-determined above-mentioned issues of race, gender and health that ask the learner to put themselves (alongside us) in the positions to re-think their own social and cultural relationship to localised systems which they have identified as being oppressive in their lives.

We enter and set-up these programmes knowing that many of the young learners who participate will never seek to or become professional dancers or choreographers. They voluntarily join these programmes because, firstly, it gives them a cultural outlet for self-expression (something not often offered in impoverished Township education systems). Secondly, it teaches a sense of critical agency that values who they are and what they have to say. This is especially valuable with our girl-child gender interventions where the confluence of paternalistic traditional values and gender stereotyping, gendered education, religion and patriarchal social values often leave the black girl-child the most vulnerable and marginalised members of any community. Finally, something we never really talk about in critical pedagogy, these after school dance programmes are great fun and allows for social interaction between different races, cultures and genders that offers different ways of being in community.

A further interesting development, fifteen years into running these types of dance intervention programmes, has been the *secondary* achievement of actually training up some very fine young dancers many of whom are now looking into training further and choosing dance as a career option. This is an area that leaves me with a lot to think about as it unearths the commonly accepted dance training practice that asks for endless repetitions and hours

and hours of training and practice. While I do not want to undermine this method of training and teaching (we all know the innate value of repetition!), I am enlivened by the idea that embracing the use of dance in South Africa as an education methodology to do what Freire argues (to educate learners to “becoming more fully human” [1970:55]) has had the very welcomed side effect of developing young dancers with enormous technical ability. And perhaps this also begins to look at the ideas that Erick Hawkins spoke about years ago, of creating “thinking dancers” (see Celichowska, 2000). It speaks to the idea of creating artists and not technicians only. It begins to understand that technical dance training is a tool and not the end product in and of itself.

What I propose is an attempt to create a critical dance pedagogy that does not always look at Western/Northern based models as the only viable – often defined as universal training methods. I ask and question what it means to train or develop a dancer in the South (in Africa) and how our own context-specific scenarios (the more difficult challenges being poverty, hunger, disease and African patriarchy – not meaning at any point to indicate that this is the only picture of Africa and Western hegemony) mean we need to find a more decolonised critical pedagogy that is particular rather than universal.

Training, Education and Developing young professional dancers

The above discussion mediates and informs the youth dance programmes that *FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY* run in both urban township and rural areas in KZN, programmes which by their very nature are intervention/activist arts projects (they will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 2 and 3). What follows is a discussion around the *FLATFOOT Training Company* (or programme) whose main intention, apart from ‘growing people’ is more specifically about training contemporary dancers for a career in dance. Given the above debates raised around post-development and decolonised thinking and my expressed political position of finding a dance pedagogy that speaks to the specificity of the South (and South Africa), the search for a training methodology and practice that does not simply ape Western/Northern based models as a kind of ‘accepted universal good practice’, has become the prime motivational factor in the work that we do.

In identifying a practice for the use of dance to ‘grow people’, our dance training methodology focuses on three main deliverables. We construct dance classes and working curriculum around the following;

- mobility
- strength
- flexibility.

These ‘principles’ move away from ideals and imagined virtuosity to attend to a common context of moving/dancing that can be negotiated across age, ability/disability, health, gender, body shape and size, prior dance training, and even style or genre of dance. Warm-ups, sequences and where and how we move, are all prepared and negotiated around these three core principles and is (and has been) FLATFOOT’s search for a way of instructing, teaching and learning that goes to the basics of movement and dance training; a training in which we seek not to privilege certain perceptions around what dance should be like, or even what a dancer should look like.

The above is also negotiated as a consequence of the historical legacy of apartheid and issues around separate development and education, where many dancers come to our training programme with very little formal dance training. Our training company is an annually auditioned programme that takes dancers between the ages of 16 and 25. When it comes to the audition, we require the interested dancers to simply participate in a 2-hour technique class with the company. We look for young dancers whose bodies (and heads and hearts) look like they may be able to make sense of the disciplined work and who show a sense of fearlessness when trying whatever is thrown at them. What remains interesting for us is that most of the young hopeful dancers who audition annually come with little or no experience in contemporary dance, and we are thus left to audition around the very vague notions of “potential”, which is, of course, slippery when trying not to fall into globalised notions of what a dancer should look like, and how they should move.

A case in point of the above is FLATFOOT’s ADD Dance Programme. ADD is short for *Advanced Dance Development* and is a special programme FLATFOOT began in 2013 with funding from the South African National Arts Council. We identified 15 youth of 16 years and older who had demonstrated enormous ‘potential’ in the weekly township dance programmes. Young

dancers from KwaMashu, Newlands and Umlazi²⁷ townships were selected for various qualities that, interestingly enough, included not only physical fitness and proven ability to move and to learn steps quickly, but also (for example) things such as commitment, being at classes on time, and a sense of community within the programmes we run. These 15 youth were given transport funds to come to the FLATFOOT town studio every Saturday for 4 hours (10am-2pm) and to be part of advanced and very specifically focused contemporary dance training. The idea was to push the training of these young dancers towards a potentially professional career, hopefully to feed into FLATFOOT's professional company as their training and progress warranted. The rules of the programme are not about levels of technical training achieved but about conduct and self-expression. Issues including missing classes, being late, not behaving in a manner that protects community (for example) became the bench marks of continuation. Our hope was (is) not only to train dancers technically but also to prepare them for a more fulfilled sense of self and, finally, to be a dancer should this be the path chosen at the end. In this way, if a student drops off or chooses another career path (as some have), there is no sense of devastation at time and resources 'wasted' but rather the encouraging belief that this programme has allowed the student to make his or her own life choices. At the beginning of 2018, five of these ADD dancers entered into the professional FLATFOOT company as full company members.

This is where, perhaps, we can step into the contemporary post-structural (see Foucault 1977 for example) politics of the body and how it is both inscribed and is written by its social and economic history and its use and abuse by institutions of power. As Michel Foucault (1977:137) has argued, the human body, as a locus of power, has been trained and disciplined to conform. He writes:

The classical age discovered the body as object and target of power ... it was a question not of freeing the body, en masse, 'wholesale', as if it were an indissociable unity, but of working it 'retail', individually, of exercising upon it a subtle coercion, of obtaining holds upon it at the level of the mechanism itself – movements, gestures, attitudes, rapidity: an infinitesimal power over the active body.

In Foucault's theories, however, agency often seems to be completely taken away from the subject (and in our world – dancer). As Elizabeth Grosz points out, for Foucault "the body seems to be the passive raw data manipulated and utilized by various systems of social and

²⁷ More detailed geographic information on these Durban Townships are offered in Chapter Two.

self-construction, an object more or less at the mercy of non-intentional or self-directed conscious production” (1994:122).

As such, the Foucaultian understanding of the body could be seen to be rather one-sided. The body is most certainly a site of discipline, but it can also be celebrated as a site of resistance where dancers, and the wild untamed African dancing body – the other – may become empowered, (re)creating its social identity by manipulating and reworking the oppressive body images produced by dominant and globalised ideologies. Sites of oppressions almost always have the potential to be profound sites of resistance.

Western dance forms such as classical ballet and some canonical contemporary techniques (the Humphrey and the Graham) continue to conceal their Northern based elitism, protecting their power against a number of “dangerous intruders: black bodies, dark bodies, disabled bodies, sexual bodies, leaking bodies, fat bodies, wrong bodies” (Claid, 2006:103).

Our training company thus actively seeks to welcome into its dance training and education space these “dangerous intruders”, understanding that aesthetics and the body beautiful are all potent power relations that speak to a growing dangerous homogenised sense of what the body of our global citizen should look like and how this dancing body in our ‘global village’ should move.

Concluding remarks and the way forward

What I have raised in this first Chapter, are not necessarily answers but more of a searching dance pedagogy that aims to work in a post-development decolonised African continuum that no longer believes that certain types of ballet and contemporary dance training (for example) are universal methodologies, that banking systems of education and dance training where ‘teacher knows best’ cannot solve the real education crises in arts and dance education in South Africa (and Africa). My work with *FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY* is an attempt to find more localised solutions to the way of thinking about dance education in South Africa. Chapter Two moves on to look specifically at *FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY*’s Township based dance interventions and programmes as narrative case studies and focuses firstly on gender and child sexuality as a lens through which my own decolonising agenda is concentrated. The link between dance, gender, and child sexuality, will be explored more fully in the following

chapter but is made in the wake of a South African society reeling in very high contemporary statistics around child sexual abuse²⁸ that sees the dominant discourses like education and religion, refusing to engage any discussions around childhood and healthy sexuality with the prevailing social and educational interventions based on ideas of abstinence and the assumption that children should remain ignorant/uninformed. Secondly, (and in Chapter Three) it is within the sphere of disability dance practice that “liberatory pedagogy” (Freire, 1970:60) and praxis are most radically tested and so this becomes the second lens through which I navigate a more liminal and embodied attempt to challenge the “epistemic violence” (Heleta, 2016:npn) of thinking about/doing/making/teaching dance.

²⁸ See Green, 2016.

CHAPTER TWO: DECOLONISING ‘BODY POLITICS’: NEGOTIATING GENDER VIOLENCE AND CHILD SEXUALITY THROUGH FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY’S YOUTH ARTS INTERVENTIONS PROGRAMMES IN KZN – A NARRATIVE CASE STUDY (2003–2018)

This Chapter Two offers a feminist decolonising engagement with the politics of the ‘dancing body’ and the movement/dance languages which it both articulates and inscribes, in order to examine how social, cultural and political discourse and ideology permeate the use and the reading of this body. This is realised through the lens of FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY’S dance education and youth dance development programmes in KwaZulu-Natal, and their focus on challenging (amongst other things) the construction of sexual subjectivity of both the male and female youth and children who dance in their various programmes. This Chapter is concerned with childhood sexuality and the manner in which it is constructed, normalised, challenged, gendered and expressed. This is a difficult and anxious terrain which needs to acknowledge and be aware of the arena of cultural practice as a location that teaches, negotiates and enacts sexuality. FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY works from the critical understanding that children’s sexuality and its expression, should not be assumed to be non-existent. Chapter Two thus looks specifically at FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY’S township-based dance interventions and programmes as narrative case studies and focuses on gender and child sexuality as one of many sites of oppression and silencing. FLATFOOT’S dance programmes set out to consciously not only offer a voice to young participants but a space for them to be heard. Dance, as an embodied practice, becomes our medium through which the youth can interrogate their own social and cultural experiences and come to terms with the gendered power dynamics that they face as both victims and survivors. It is also a very concentrated focus space for me to address my own decolonising pedagogical agendas.

Feminisms and Dance

²⁹Carol Brown has said that, “both feminisms, as a politics, and dance, as a cultural practice, share a concern for the body” (1983:198). Further, Ann Daly (1991:2) contends that:

²⁹ An initial version of some sections of this chapter has been published previously as follows: Loots, L. 2013. ‘Body Politics’ and negotiating gender violence and child sexuality through FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY’S youth arts interventions programmes in KwaZulu-Natal-a case study (2003-2013).

Amongst all the arts ... dance may have the most to gain from feminist analysis. Certainly the two are highly compatible. Dance is an art form of the body, and the body is where gender distinctions are generally understood to originate.

While historically, feminist concerns around 'the body' have mainly been about the gendered social and historical construction and reception of femininity and female-ness (and increasingly masculinity and male-ness) as potentially profound areas of inequality and power relations, dance is an art form which locates its practice and language in the moving body. As such, form and content (around the body) have often merged to the point where the visceral, body as flesh, in dance training, practice and performance become key loci for interrogating and decolonising gendered politics. The body (as feminists have argued in varying ways), is not a neutral site onto which dance can be placed through training and choreography; 'the body' comes to dance already inscribed by discourses and ideology whether these be gendered, racial, or cultural. The visceral body (the flesh) is often encoded by cultural practices, social and racial constructions and gendered conditions of use and reception (Loots, 1995:53).

Thus, while the dancer's body is always marked with the physicality of race and gender, there remains the need to decode, decolonise and deconstruct the dancing body, and the languages which it articulates and which it inscribes, in order to examine how discourse and ideology permeate the use and reading of this body. The contemporary body is nothing less than a battlefield where, as Sally Banes, appropriating a Foucaultian perspective, has pointed out that, "culture wreaks utter tyranny on individual bodies ... where bodies are disciplined, molded, re-arranged by dominant powers, which simultaneously promote the illusion that people are 'free' to construct their own bodies" (1994:45/46).

In *The History of Sexuality, Vol 1* (1976), Foucault interrogated the body as a site of struggle in the discourse of sexuality. His aim was to "show how deployments of power are directly connected to the body – to bodies, functions, physiological process, sensations, and pleasures" (1976:151). He writes of the way in which power as a relational concept not only operates on the body, but through it as well. He argues, for example, that within contemporary society, discourses around sexuality have become prime areas of struggle in which power is exercised through the constitution of the body. These discourses around the body do not carry neutral constructions, but have, operating through them, ideological imperatives which, in turn, become naturalised through being privileged by dominant

institutions. Foucault goes on to argue that in our society power has not been operating by denying or allowing sexual expression, but rather by constructing and validating particular forms of modern sexuality. In effect, therefore, Foucault, claims that subjects have been repressed through such constructions of sexuality that categorise 'correct' or 'deviant' sexual practice. This is also seen in the way in which certain (gendered) expressions of sexuality are normalised and, as such, the transmission of implicit value systems and modes of behaviour needs to be interrogated as gendered and never neutral.

Gender and Child Sexuality

Often in engaging the social field of sexuality and the child, there is an overwhelming need to take on discourses which seek to protect the child from any kind of expression of sexuality. The debates often are located in that which damages and violates a child's right with a focus on safeguarding the child who is often constructed as victim and in need of adult interventions. Early sexuality (and its cognate gendering) amongst young South African children often remains largely unquestioned and unproblematised under the presumption of childhood sexual innocence. Here, I argue against such representations that associate young children with sexual 'innocence' (that is to say no knowledge of sex), and take up Devia Bhana's (2013) argument that "sexuality is an important resource through which boys and girls construct and police their masculinities and femininities". Bhana, 2013:58 further argues:

[that] young children, whether adults approve or not, are already inserting a sexual sense of self within heterosexual and heteronormative cultures and desires. They do so through the construction of boyfriend and girlfriend cultures, through sexualizing practices which include kissing, games and love letters. Secondly, the insertion within heterosexual cultures does not only provide evidence of their pleasures, their agency and desires, as they debunk the myth of sexual innocence, but their sexualities are already caught up in normative constructions of gender through which power inequalities are manifest and underpinned by femininity as subordinate.

Thus, in stepping into the difficult terrain of childhood sexuality and how it is constructed, normalised, challenged, gendered and expressed, there is the need to include the arena of cultural practice as a terrain that teaches, negotiates and enacts sexuality. Any construction of sexuality draws on the understanding of the above articulation of the gendered politics of the body, and the enacted culturally fraught social norms around the body. FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY has, in the context of Durban and South Africa, set out in our dance education practice to use dance as both a weapon to challenge normative and gendered understandings

around childhood sexuality, and also as a transgressive space to re-think childhood gendered and sexual norms. This too, I believe, is part of the agenda to decolonise pedagogy and practice. Our location within Durban, KwaZulu-Natal (and South Africa) is important as it sets up a geographical, political and social context where our province has some of the highest HIV+ figures³⁰ in the world and where, large contexts of rurality and poverty are linked to the continuation of paternal/patriarchal authority, and where (for example) child headed households are on the rise in the province and South Africa.³¹ Recent rape statistics³² suggest that KwaZulu-Natal continues to be a province with some of the highest gender-based violence figures in South Africa. Thus, while this Chapter Two will offer some ethnographic and narrative insight into our dance education and dance development work, what has become overwhelmingly clear in the past 15 years of cultural/dance intervention work, is the deeply problematic emergence and enactment of childhood sexuality in a social/political/economic paradigm of normalised gender-based violence in South Africa.

Perhaps what FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY's arts intervention work is attempting and has attempted to do, is to recognise that the expression of childhood sexuality is an important arena through which gender power inequalities (and abuse) are played out. Furthermore, this intervention work may be seen as a way of challenging and decolonising the way this area is addressed and, importantly, also potentially a space to allow the breaking of silence where these young voices can be heard. Issues around sexuality and gender become very real terrain that these children and youth are allowed/encouraged to negotiate – and decolonise – through dance practice which brings them back to their physical and embodied selves.

Some cursory examples of this are, for example, the dance training practice that asks both boy and girl-child to participate equally such that the young girls are absolutely discouraged from displaying a learnt femininity that allows them to get away with not doing the very physical jumps and fitness work. Similarly, the boys are expected to not only use brute force and learnt masculinity as they, too, are expected to find flow and engage 'softer' movement patterns. We encourage the breaking of gendered dance partnering conventions and require both boys and girls to do lifts outside of heteronormative dance expectations. And while these are not

³⁰ For recent statistics see: <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0302/P03022011.pdf>.

³¹ For some recent statistics, see <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report-03-19-00/Report-03-19-002012.pdf>.

³² See <https://africacheck.org/factsheets/south-africas-crime-statistics-201617/>.

newly imagined gender sensitive dance interventions, what they do achieve is a deeply felt sense of an embodied self that can be (for example) strong, soft, powerful, slow, big, small that is not defined by an external biological marker and the social conventions that force this body into a role.

We also find that working with local popular dance styles like *isbhujwa* affords us a space to negotiate the gendered performance of sexuality. *Isbhujwa* is a newly evolving street dance form that has grown in the Township clubs and shebeens and is an angular, jerky rhythmic popular dance style that literally asks the dancer to contort and vibrate the body – it is rhythmically complex and works with very difficult body isolations and oppositions. The dance form is gendered with the acceptable female version of *isbhujwa* seen as a type of seduction with a lot of head, hips and breasts, while the male version is about speed, versatility and creating ‘impossible’ contortions. To an outsider, this dance form looks distinctly sexualised with a focus on overt hip and pelvis gyrations and with imbedded seduction (certainly in the female version of the dance form). What is extraordinary is that ALL of the youth we work with, from age 5 to 24 years have a version of this dance that they know and do. Far from turning away from this extraordinary physical shared dance phenomena, FLATFOOT uses this popular style to begin to ask different physicalities from the young male and female dancers. Rather than censure what ALL of these youth are dancing when they are not at school or at home, we have taken this dance form and begun to generate ‘communal’ versions of the form (mostly during our warm-ups) where the boys and girls share their steps with each other and we (as teachers and facilitators) start to have open conversations about the hips, the pelvis, the groin, the breasts, so that these are no longer unmentionable and taboo sexual body parts, but they are ‘casually’ incorporated into discussion of working healthy fit (dancing) bodies.

We thus work with the understanding that our dance practice, classes, workshops, rehearsals and performances are in fact interventions that offer cultural, artistic, political and personal spaces for the youth and children we work with to non-didactically begin to renegotiate their sense of sexual/gendered subjectivity. We are also aware that the youth come with an already heightened and learnt sense of sexuality that is not possible to ignore or negate – be this through engaging popular media, or through high levels of sexual abuse and violence. We are also aware that many of the youth discover their sexuality as they journey through our programmes.

Given the above, ethically, my choice is to negotiate the writing about these community arts intervention programmes via a narrative methodology and via my own autoethnographic insights. It is mediated by an ethical consideration for me as feminist researcher/choreographer/teacher to be mindful of writing about process rather than offer any in-depth personalised life analysis of the youth and children with whom we work. In working with ideas of breaking silence around (for example) gendered taboos and offering spaces for these young voices to be heard, I am eager that I do not 'speak for' them and do not appropriate their voices. I have held fast to the notion that my dance development and education work, these past 15 years, would not turn these children's lives into 'research'. This said, what has emerged in our danced encounters and an attempt to engage Paulo Freire's 'critical pedagogy' (introduced in Chapter One and further discussed below), has been an overwhelming need to discuss process and experiential learning as we have, in a dance dialogue, encountered the lives and realities of the youth and children we have worked with. In writing this I have thus kept the identities of these children safe and I have consciously written in a chosen methodological style that favours narrative and storytelling in an attempt to honour the confidences given to us as teachers and educators. In many ways I feel that this too is a potential space for decolonising my own research methods by being mindful not to endlessly 'other' those being written about. Thus while I am reflecting on our encounters with the children and youth, I am primarily cognisant that mostly, I am interrogating, re-framing and re-evaluating my own pedagogy and praxis

Who are the Learners we work with?

Given the above choice of methodological analysis I feel, none-the-less, it is germane to offer a short discussion of the context of the youth and children so that there is a contextual framework for the discussions that evolve in both this and the following Chapter Three. Of importance to note is that these learners do not constitute a homogeneous group. While all of them share a lived context of race (all the youth are black), there are distinct variables around gender, age, class, and rural/urban identities.

When FLATFOOT began these community engagement dance programmes, the company dancers and teachers expressed the desire to initiate programmes in the areas in which they live. This is a vital pedagogical navigational tool for me as the programmes did not set out to

work in spaces and places unknown to our compositions as a dance company, but as a will to effect change in the areas that are most personal to us. This linking of personal self and personal home spaces, to the effecting of dance teaching and practice meant that when company members leave 'work' and go home, the youth in the respective areas know them and see them – sometimes on a daily basis. Personal ethics and life styles are thus under community scrutiny and this continues to be part of our engaged daily responsibility to each other and the communities in which we work.

Geographically the urban learners come from the eThekweni Municipality area within the city of Durban and the province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. This too is not homogenous, and we work in programmes that traverse a wide area of the city and its geography. Most of our urban programmes are run in historically defined township areas and include the following:

- **KwaMashu: (*FLATFOOT SIYAKHULA DANCE PROGRAMME*)** – North of the city centre, where we work in the KwaMashu Sports Hall that is centrally located and thus a number of surrounding areas in KwaMashu feed the programme. KwaMashu is one of Durban's biggest townships³³ that has a huge class demographic that ranges from sections that have informal settlements, to areas with double story houses and a shopping mall.

³³ See; 1. <https://www.citypopulation.de/php/southafrica-ethekweni.php?cid=599055> for statistics. Accessed 20 September 2018.
2. <https://www.sahistory.org.za/place/kwamashu> .



Image 1: KwaMashu senior youth in action from the FLATFOOT Siyakhula Dance Programme (2012)



Image 2: KwaMashu junior youth in actions (2017). Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. PIC: Val Adamson.

- **Newlands: (*FLATFOOT NEWLANDS YOUTH DANCE PROGRAMME*)** North of the city centre where we work in partnership with a school in Newlands East. The main body of learners come from the school, but the programme is also fed by surrounding schools.



Image 3: Newlands youth (juniors) in action from *FLATFOOT*'s Newlands Dance Programme (2015). Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. PIC: Val Adamson.

- **Umlazi: a. (*FLATFOOT PROJECT DUDLU NTOMBI*) and b. (*FLATFOOT PROJECT HHESHE NSIZWA*)** South of the city centre where we work in M Section and alternate between the use of the municipal M Section Hall and the premises of a nearby school when the M-hall is booked for functions. Umlazi is the second largest historically black township in the Durban area and like KwaMashu has huge class demographic that ranges from sections that have informal settlements, to areas with double story houses.



Image 4: Umlazi boys in action from FLATFOOT's Project HSHESHE NSIZWA Dance Programme in Umlazi (2013). Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. PIC: Val Adamson



Image 5: Umlazi girls in action from FLATFOOT's Project DUDLU NTOMBI in Umlazi (2017)Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. PIC: Val Adamson.

- **Waterloo: *FLATFOOT WATERLOO DANCE PROGRAMME***) far North of the city centre and bordering on the next municipality district outside of eThekweni. We work at the Waterloo Community Hall and are fed by both the primary and senior primary schools in the area. Historically a very politically troubled area, most of this community remain working class.



Image 6: Waterloo youth in action from *FLATFOOT's Waterloo Dance Programme (2013)*. Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. PIC: Val Adamson.

- **Sherwood: (*WILLIAM CLARK GARDENS DANCE PROGRAMME*)** situated just West of the city center, this programme is run in conjunction with the state's Child Welfare. The learners live on the premises as many of them are in the care of the system due to orphan status or abusive/absent family backgrounds.



Image 7: Sherwood youth in action from FLATFOOT's William Clark Gardens Dance Programme (2016). Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. PIC: Val Adamson.



Image 8: Sherwood youth in action from FLATFOOT's William Clark Gardens Dance Programme (2016). Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. PIC: Val Adamson.

Our KZN rural programmes are:

- **Mboza and Ndumu** both areas are in the far North of KZN (almost on the South African border of Mozambique). Ndumu is a small but developing rural town while Mboza is still very much a village. We work in partnership with the primary and senior primary schools in both are.



Image 9: FLATFOOT's Magesh Ngcobo (left in purple) rehearsing with Mboza youth inside the community hall. Mboza. PIC: Lliane Loots.



Image 10: Rehearsing outside the school in preparation for the annual concert (November 2008). Mboza. PIC: Lliane Loots.



Image 11: FLATFOOT's Ndumo Youth in action at the 2008 end of year November 2008 concert (Ndumo Hall). PIC: Lliane Loots.

- **Tugela: (TUGELA RIVER MOUTH DANCE PROGRAMME).** Situated about a 70-minute drive North outside of Durban in a peri-urban/rural village on the North Coast of KZN. We work at the local church hall (Salvation Army) and work in partnership with the church leadership.



Image 12: FLATFOOT’s Julia Wilson teaching and working with the Tugela Mouth youth in the local Salvation Army church hall (2015) PIC: Lliane Loots

The youth we work with range in ages between 5 and 27 years with the majority sitting in the 10–18 age group. There is a wide variable around economic access and class with the majority of urban township youth (86%) situated in households that collectively earn on the border of, or just above the identified South African poverty bracket.³⁴ The minority of our urban learners (14%)³⁵ come from informal settlements and are economically living well below the identified poverty bracket.

³⁴ See: <http://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=10334>

³⁵ These statistics are not definitive but offer a loose sense of the economic realities of the youth we work with. The statistics have been gleaned by interrogating the registration forms the youth fill in when they register annually for our programmes. By assessing the home addresses, they offer, we are able to determine, via areas and sub-sections of townships, the basic economic status of their family life.

The contexts of family life for all of these youth, is also an important variable. While we have not undertaken a statistical analysis of this (fearing the invasive nature of these kinds of enquiries), we are aware that the majority of the youth come from single parent (usually mother) households. The majority of the youth live in situations where extended family (aunts, uncles and elders) share living spaces and often carry the task of rearing them. Over and above the orphans we work with in Sherwood, we are aware that there is a small sector of the youth we work with who are being raised by siblings in circumstances where no parent is present.

All of the youth speak isiZulu (which is their home language). The urban youth are all competent in English as a second language. Similarly the rural youth all speak isiZulu with the older youth having some measure of competency in English. The rural/urban language competency in English (as second language) is a direct result of formal schooling and the lack of competency in English on the part of their educators. This is noted not as a problem but rather as a consideration that we address when we teach, particularly in relation to the language we use to instruct and engage the youth. Given that all of FLATFOOT's teachers and educators speak both English and isiZulu (as either first or second language), we are able to maintain a sensitivity towards a medium of instruct

While we have made important partnerships with schools in the chosen areas, our programmes are not school specific but rather area specific. One of the intentions behind not working in this arguably easier delivery strategy of working in schools, is that our programmes continue to foster a sense of community beyond boundaries of space and place and recognise the value of asking the youth to navigate the meeting and working alongside other learners whose class (and school access) may differ from their own.

Both despite and in-spite-of all the myriad social and class differences, these learners are also all constructed as 'global citizens' who have easy access to TV, social media and the constant barrage of imaged hopes and desires that are endlessly sold to them via modern media and technology. These youth are the rich feeding ground of global capital and the endless imaged promises of access to the middle class. They are bombarded, as we all are, with images of lifestyles, products, and value systems (including heteronormative sexuality) that they consume as part of their own evolving value systems and identity. The disparity is that many of these youth – due to severe poverty, due to unimaginative and historically weakened

Township education, due to being black and African – will not grow up into a world of the promised and media endorsed capitalist access and economic privilege. This schism between what is subtly promised via media and technology, and what is reality, becomes part of the painful navigations around their contemporary identity. This is difficult pedagogical terrain to negotiate with South African township youth and so, knowing that we are up against the powerful globally constructed hegemonic discourses of value linked primarily to financial worth, FLATFOOT has had to find smaller alternate and counter pedagogical strategies that raise critical conscience in each dancer.

Dance as Intervention: the practice of liberation pedagogy

As discussed earlier in Chapter One, in Freire's seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), he began to outline an alternate system of learning and teaching that he called "liberation education" (1970:53). His understanding of education moved away from looking at learners as empty vessels that needed to be filled with knowledge that a teacher would bestow on a pupil (what Freire called "the Banking System of Education" [1970:54]). He argues that, at best, this way of thinking about learning is deeply alienating to any learner and turns the learner into a "welfare recipient" (1970:55). To this end, as discussed in Chapter One, he proposes a problem-posing method of education which allows the learner to draw on their own localised knowledge and understanding of the world. As such the educator and the learner enter into a mutual learning process. He argues that education is liberation, and further that "liberation is a praxis" (1970:60).

Freire did not write about dance (nor indeed sexuality!) but his profound understanding of the political, social and cultural imperative of education became the paradigm at the foundation of my own and FLATFOOT's approach to re-thinking dance education and development practices. Amongst the various strategies we have employed over a 15-year period has been Freire's insight that education and pedagogy should (and could) be about "becoming more fully human" (Freire, 1970:55). Needless to say this involves a deep engagement with arts/dance and culture as the very rubric of 'development and education', and my deepening understanding that in the context of South Africa, decolonised dance education can become – amongst many other strategies – a tool towards allowing the learner (or dancer in our case) the opportunity to articulate self (and the body) in environments where being severely

economically disadvantaged, black (primarily) female, and young, offers very little space to voice self. Our dance programmes offer a compensatory strategy that creates alternative experiences of the self to those that dominate in everyday life.

We enter and set-up these dance programmes knowing that many of the young learners who participate will never seek to or become professional dancers or choreographers. They voluntarily join these programmes because, firstly, it gives them a cultural outlet for self-expression (something not often offered in impoverished South African township education systems where arts and culture learning is usually the first area to be abandoned in times of economic hardship). Secondly, it teaches a sense of critical agency that values who these young learners are and what they have to say; especially valuable with our girl and boy-child gender and sexuality interventions.

FLATFOOT also works from the critical understanding that children's sexuality and the expression of sexuality, should not be assumed to be non-existent or 'innocent' and that this social/political assumption around children's assumed sexual innocence/lack of knowledge functions as a deeply painful and tactical tool where adults continue to hold power over children. This power provides adults with the ubiquitous role of protecting children from corrupting sexual knowledge (Renold, 2005); deeply problematic as a large contingent of the sexual danger and violence faced by our young FLATFOOT learners comes from the adults who are constructed as being adult carers and parental figures.

This is, of course, also a potentially fraught argument as many children are indeed subject to heinous social and sexually violent gendered play when learning about/experiencing their own sexuality, and in turn enacting it. The argument above around not assuming 'sexual innocence/knowledge' should not in any way detract from the very real and very high figures of (for example) girl-children and sexually based gender crimes. FLATFOOT's arts intervention work, as discussed in some of the previous examples and the up-coming narratives below, tries to open up a space to enact and challenge ideas and expression of sexuality and gender however socially, politically and culturally this has been constructed, a space in which the learners re-negotiate (and begin to decolonise) their learnt sense of self; and importantly also allows these children a way back to owning their lived embodied selves.

Performing self or embodying self?

Through a liberatory pedagogy (Freire, 1970) of considering the child a true participant in their education, our arts/dance programmes focus attention on changing embedded and embodied learnt patterns of masculinity and femininity, and we continue to attempt to address what we have seen to emerge as the very real link between children learning and embodying sexual understanding through socially normalised patterns of gendered violence. These are played out in the dance training, the dance practice and the questions we are often faced with in the numerous 'talk-back' sessions we host with the youth and children.

Judith Butler's (1990) work is helpful in opening up the ways in which I and FLATFOOT have (and continue to) understand how learnt sexuality begins to permeate performed gendered relations. Renold (2005), working with Butler's notion of performativity (1990) argues that children, much like all of us, are subject to everyday and repeated rituals and practices that produce the effect of being a 'real' boy and 'real' girl; both of which are invested with a learnt social power play. Renold (2005) argues that being seen as a 'real' boy or 'real' girl often involves a projecting and a desiring of the opposite sex, and the performance of being sexually 'authentic'. This is firstly, the very early normalisation of heterosexuality, but also, germane to our work in dance, is the need to construct/perform a sense of the body that conforms to the stereotyped ideal and 'authentic' normalised idea that boys and men are strong and dominate and that girls and women are physically weaker and more compliant.

FLATFOOT's programme and teachers have made a point of offering the same physical dance training to both boys and girls. We do not take it as a given that the boys are more physically capable of (for example) holding their own body weight and doing all the lifting. In the same way the girls are not allowed to succumb to the construction of themselves as those who are lifted and moved around the dance floor. By asking of both the girl and boy-child to experience being lifted and lifting, we have begun to redress the idea of men and strong and women as weak. The gendered partnering of many styles of dance (and the embodied sexual assumptions in the learning of these dance forms) from ballet to ballroom, are hugely deconstructed and decolonised in our contemporary dance training in an attempt to get these young dancers to experience their bodies as both strong and light, and to do this without the gendered performativity and embodied normalised sexual role-play that often goes with this.

In essence we are attempting to break or transgress the subtle coercion (Blaise, 2010) of children through what is socially normalised early development physical gender play. Thus, within the parameters of their after-school classes with FLATFOOT, the boys and girls are given the opportunity, through play and dance, to physically embody a reality that does not police or give credence to heterosexual (learnt) sexual/physical norms.

What becomes important to note is thus the possibility for resistance. Power is never absolute and controlled by one central site (Loots, 1995). The possibility to resist these heterosexual and often violent constructions of self and the sexual body, is always open to contestation, as Foucault (1976:102) says:

There is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field force relations; there can run different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy.

In her article 'Ballerinas and ball passing', Marianne Goldberg (1987/88) picks up on these ideas of counter discourse and resistance, and reiterates how the "body is constructed through discourse" (1987/88:8) yet has the ability to "become subversive" (1987/88:27). Goldberg claims some of the following (dance language) strategies as disruption (1987/88:13):

to challenge the accepted range of motion for the female dancer

to challenge partnering conventions

to challenge narrative structures

to challenge visual gaze and display mechanisms

to challenge spectator-performer relationships

to challenge gendered aspects of costuming.

While Goldberg is, of course, talking about the adult dancing body, these ideas are equally pertinent to the child dancer whose training and dance education at an early stage is often fraught with gendered stereotypes that begin to dominate, whether girl or boy-child, a sense of sexual identity.

So too, do the FLATFOOT dance teachers (both male and female) and I, strive to challenge and subvert the enacted/performed gender roles in our own teaching praxis. Male and female

teachers are paired together, and very careful attention is given to who instructs and how instruction is given to children. Understanding that learning is done through observation of the role play of adults in positions of authority, the FLATFOOT educators make sure that it is not, for example, the task of the female teacher to instruct warm-up and technique classes, while the male teacher steps in and takes over the choreography, arguably the 'real' part of the dance programmes. We also work with the very real attention to making sure that male FLATFOOT teachers are seen to listen and follow teaching instructions given by their female colleagues creating an environment of respect for women's voices. In the same vein it is not the domain of the male FLATFOOT instructors (for example) to be seen to carry teaching equipment like sound systems and to operate all the technical aspects needed. As these shared roles in teaching praxis are unhinged from expected gender stereotypes and subtly re-enacted daily, weekly, monthly and yearly in front of the children, so too is embodied awareness of other gendered realities made available for these young children and youth to choose from.

Let's talk about sex?

In confronting the childhood sexual subjectivity of these children (both rural and urban) we dance and work with, many of the most fraught encounters have left us aware of how linked the discourse around the pandemically high levels of gender-based violence³⁶ in South Africa is in affecting and effecting the construction of sexuality and gendered identity. That these issues are raised within the paradigm of dance education and development programmes is, as argued earlier in this chapter, germane to the link between the dancing body and the lived social/political and economic body.

The following few selected ethnographic/narrative stories and observations detail a KwaZulu-Natal youth and childhood culture locked into an increasing violent sense of sexual identity; and these encounters remind me and the FLATFOOT team of the value of the work we do in offering the possibility to negotiate other (decolonised) embodied subjectivities. Although mentioned at the beginning, it bears re-articulation that all the comments raised below in this ethnographic encounter with these children in our FLATFOOT dance programmes, serve to

³⁶ See, <http://www.csvr.org.za/pdf/Gender%20Based%20Violence%20in%20South%20Africa%20-%20A%20Brief%20Review.pdf>.

keep the identities of these children safe and I have written in a chosen methodological style that favours narrative in an attempt to honour the confidences given to us as teachers and educators.

Urban children speak about sex

Our programmes are run mostly in community halls in the historical township areas of Umlazi, KwaMashu, Newlands, Waterloo and Sherwood, all of which are about a 40 minute to one-hour taxi ride outside the city centre of Durban. All the programmes are mixed gender programmes, except for Umlazi where we have separated the boys and girls. Early on in the history of this 15-year programme, the boys and girls were separated in order to firstly, give the girls a chance to step up outside of a social environment that allowed the boys to push forward and dominate the learning process. We found that the girls lacked any physical drive to really sweat and work hard as young training dancers when the boys were around, safe in their articulated understanding that they needed to 'look good'. Secondly, with the boys working on their own (and, in this context, with a male teacher), the complex play around the social linking of contemporary dance with gay sexuality and not being 'real' boys, is given space to breathe. In this boys programme in Umlazi, we have found that the boys respond to their male teacher as a mentor (calling him "coach" – perhaps also a device to render a dance/art space safe for boys who might otherwise be out playing a sport?) and the dance work has allowed the boys a safe male figure to speak to. One of the questions asked by boys at regular intervals in the programme's history of overtly opening up discussion around gender-based violence, has been the rather telling request to "want to know the difference between rape and sex." The slippage of a lack of understanding around the meanings between sexual violence and consensual sex is pertinent to a deeper social culture that legitimises and conflates sex with the fact that women and girls do not actually have a say in what is done to them, or indeed, demanded and taken from them. Arguably this is one of the places where a rape culture starts.

Subsequently, in our KwaMashu programme, many of the younger girls (aged 5-13 years) have started to wear lycra cycling-type shorts instead of girl's underwear. In the beginning we thought this was simply a fashion statement or a trend, but on careful discussion and comment from us (we used to say how clever they were to wear these cycle shorts as it made

changing into dance clothes so much easier in certain halls where there are very basic ablution facilities), we were met by the throw away remarks that “this underwear makes it harder for the boys to rape us at school.”

The ease with which these comments are tossed off by our young girls speaks of a rape culture that is being normalised. Nowhere in our talking and working and dancing, has it even been expressed by these KwaMashu girls that rape is not inevitable or that it is not the norm for them. That fact that these young girls wake up each day to decide what best to wear so as not to get raped is a shocking confrontation with how their own sense of self is being mediated by a perceived and lived violent sexual reality.

In one of our gender interventions in Umlazi we began a whole programme around the growing phenomenon of ‘sugar daddies’. This programme started as a result of some of our older girls (between 13 and 18 years) being sexually harassed and sexually propositioned by a taxi driver on one of the trips they made into Durban to come and watch the FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY perform. Far from being outraged, the girls articulate feeling “singled out” and “special” that an older and wealthy man was interested in them. Apart from the discussion around statutory rape that we felt was necessary to have with them, our best pedagogical space was to turn the discussion around and ask the girls why this made them feel “special”. Their answers had little to do with a desire for sexual experience/knowledge or even that this being “singled out” was in fact sexually understood. What they did explain is, of course, a class related answer. These older men buy them food and clothes, take them to the beach, and in exchange for sex, these girls are then able to go home with better clothes and food that sets them apart from other girls in their neighbourhoods. It is (underage) transactional sex at its most basic where older men are (possibly) still buying into the cultural myths around sex with young virgins to cure them of HIV, or that young virgin girls (often referred to as “untasted”) make them ‘real’ men.

One of our pedagogical strategies was, in turn, to ask these young girls what they thought they were worth. This question threw them and became the basis of a long-term programme of dance work as the girls and young women found a way to imagine what ‘worth’ meant for them. I challenged them by saying that they had just told me that they felt “their lives were worth a pair of Sissy Boy jeans and a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken”. Put so crudely, the

girls took the challenge and began to find ways, in dance, to imagine their bodies being valued for something other than a crude sexual transaction. These strategies included, amongst others, co-creating and choreographing issue-based dance work that openly dealt with themes of self-worth and identity, and in one case with the older girls in KwaMashu, the creation of a narrative dance work, that used both text and dance to tell the story of a young girl who is transactionally forced into sex with a taxi driver. Other, and perhaps deeper strategies used to ask these young girls and women to find value in their bodies, is to constantly create a dance environment of open learning that moves away from discipline and regulation of the body in only technical training, to a more fluid and open way of getting dancers to experience themselves as bodies in action – moving and being. This means we create spaces for dance processes that include improvisation, discussion and choices. And indeed, often not spoken but key to the work we do, is the sheer joy of being in a safe community space that allows the body to feel open to moving and being moved – this too is liberatory pedagogy. Interesting to note as well, that none of these girls have ever pretended to not know about sex; but what they have understood (and often experienced) is, and has been, violent, transactional and forced.

In the Umlazi based programme we have also begun to notice that as the girls hit the age of about 16 years, they start putting on – very rapidly – large amounts of weight. While it has been the policy of our programme to never make distinctions around what a dancing body can and should look like (especially for the girls), this rather rapid weight gain and the lack of good health associated with it, was not something we could ignore. Opening up the discussion around well-being and food, the FLATFOOT team was once again thrown a curved ball when these girls told us, again as throw away comments, that “boys like bigger girls because it means that they were healthy and not HIV positive.” Once again, these girls were constructing their sexual identity around their perceived attraction to the heterosexual (and violent) ‘norm’ that asked them to fly in the face of healthy eating in order to be deemed sexually available – and not HIV positive. We have addressed this with some measure of positive HIV and Aids education (which is always on-going) and a programme that also concurrently looks at good eating and nutrition. With rising obesity levels in South Africa and the concurrent increase in

diabetes,³⁷ perhaps what these girls have begun to articulate offers a profound cultural landscape for interrogating how race, girlhood sexual subjectivity, HIV and food are intrinsically linked? I include the category of race as these issues around food and girlhood sexual subjectivity as they emerged in Umalzi, are the general reverse of what white middle class heteronormative ideals and standards might/would demand in a formal ballet/dance environment where eating disorders like anorexia and bulimia are often silently encouraged.³⁸

Rural children do not speak about sex

FLATFOOT have (and continue to run) dance and arts education programmes in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. While many of the issues we face with the urban youth arise in great similarity in the rural areas, we have found the navigation of sexuality, gender and identity to be less open and less up for overt negotiation. Many of these rural areas still work with the traditional authority and often this authority is paternalistic. Our dance intervention work is most often negotiated through school and church structures, and both often enforce strict traditional and culturally defined ethics and gendered social codes around 'right' behaviour for the girl and boy child. As such, we were/are never able to directly address issues around sex and sexuality but instead circumvent these issues with a focus on health and well-being.

In our programmes run in Ndumo and the village of Mboza, for example, the girls are not permitted to wear trousers, shorts or pants and as such their freedom to dance unhindered by skirts and dresses and the constructed female modesty required by these items of clothing, has meant that certain types of physical dance work and training is simply not available to them. Our mechanisms to address this were to consult with the traditional authorities for them to give us permission to supply the girls with 'dance pants' which they were given to wear at each session. They were not allowed to wear the pants outside of this dance/learning environment and we had to take them away with us after sessions. What is, of course interesting, was that even for this short space, we were able to negotiate this 'transgressive'

³⁷ See mg.co.za/article/2012-01-20-identifying-south-africas-silent-killers.

³⁸ See for example, Buckroyd, 1988.

strategy around clothing and the effect was huge in terms of participation and engagement from the girls.

Most relevant to our work in FLATFOOT's rural programmes has been the need to negotiate the physical contact between boys and girls that often emerges in dance. In communities where safe physical contact is only allowed within the family, any other type of touching across gender is understood to be potentially sexual and as such taboo. We have reflected on the need to create physical spaces in our dance teaching where touch can be something that is safe and not sexually violating, that it can be support in a dance move or support from a friend or dancing partner. This is an on-going struggle for our work and speaks to an insidious construction of the body as 'only' sexual and again, the need for us as the adults and teachers in these communities, as Bhana argues (2013) to save the construction of these children's 'sexual innocence'. This is a paternalistic power dynamic that is hard to negotiate given that the children are blatantly sexually aware (often expressed as nervous laughing when touching is part of the dance class). Fifteen years down the line, this kind of intervention has begun to allow another way of working for these children and again, as the male/female dynamic is re-enacted and challenged by the FLATFOOT dancers and teachers where touching is seen and negotiated in a dance space, the children have begun to find it easier. The end point, for both FLATFOOT and me, is to create an environment where the body – and in this instance the child's body – is not disciplined and punished by social and culturally learnt gender constructions, but is allowed a space to experience the embodied joy of moving and dancing that is unfettered by what is expected of a 'real' boy and a 'real' girl.

Intergenerational dance as strategy for change

In both urban and rural teaching environs, we also became aware of the youth power and gender hierarchies that often beset age delineations. Formal schooling education in South Africa is mostly premised on age appropriate learning where classes/grades are made up of similar aged learners working to an 'age-standard' syllabus. While the merit of this is not in contention, what is often overlooked is that not all learners work at the same speed nor do all learners engage all equally or at what is deemed to be an age appropriate level. The notion of self-directed speed of study in a formal school learning environment is almost non-existent in a great majority of South African schools (understandably also in poorer township and rural

schools where up to 50 learners sit in one class room). We started to notice how the younger boys, for example in Umlazi, would mimic the social and culturally learnt behaviours present in the older boys, while the older boys would completely ignore or bully the younger boys. Due to numbers, we had kept the younger boys separate with the understanding that we could push the older boys further. Township hall space availability forced us to put the younger and older boys together in 2015 and we found an impressively high level of social transformation happening. The younger boys worked harder to keep up, while the older boys worked even harder not to be shown up by the younger boys. We began to pair the younger and older boys in some of the more physically dangerous lifts and choreography to find that not only was the uneven weight and height a factor in heightening the spellbinding danger of some of the dance work being created, but (for us) the real work of moving away from a bullying, age-related paradigm of understanding young masculinity, started to give way to a sense of camaraderie and community. The younger boys were no longer physically pushed away or ignored but intergenerational groups had started to walk to and from classes together, there was much more laughter in the teaching and learning environment and (for us) the magnificent by-product of a group of over 38 young boys and youth fully committed to our dance programme.

In our Newlands based township programme, lack of availability of space has meant – regardless of age – that all project participants work in one room and all together. What has emerged, particularly in this programme, is a hugely increased sense of communal learning where older youth start taking responsibility for the younger learners/dancers, and the performance-based dance work that has been emerging has seen a fluid breaking down of one more socially and culturally encoded normative rule around learning; that age is a delineated code of appropriate learning.

Concluding comments

It remains to be noted, as Foucault (1980) has reminded us, that alternates to dominant modes of being and doing, are always possible. In essence, the fact that these children seek our FLATFOOT dance programmes and are never coerced into joining (some of the Umlazi and KwaMashu children have been dancing with us for 12 to 15 years) means that there are indeed alternate possibilities and choices being made. Even though the dance work we do competes

against more dominant, institutionalised and heteronormative discourses within gendered family life (for example, the gendering of household chores), school education systems (for example, the gendered subject choices for girls and boys), sport (for example, the devaluing of the girl-child's sports access and choices as compared to the boy-child), and media (for example the endless gender stereotyping in popular culture where roles are socially and culturally defined and often solidified), we remain firm in our belief that a liberatory pedagogy is possible and that in offering this we are offering the potential for a transgressive children's dance education practice. While the dance programmes we offer form a small moment of overt resistance to childhood bodies carrying the weight of gender stereotyping and the violence of patriarchy and heteronormativity, they do offer space where choices are encouraged rather than disciplined; where joy and freedom of expression become the mode of being and doing. By focusing less on a final product (the final dance showcase or the technically proficient dancer) and more on the process of *being* a dancer and learning dance, we open up space for exploration of self and of an art form. Childhood sexuality is then experienced in the body and in the process of becoming (moving, dancing and embodied) rather than through institutionalised and normative beliefs and social practices.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, our arts intervention work seeks to recognise that the expression of childhood sexuality is an important arena through which social, cultural and personal gender power inequalities are often played out and, importantly to our work, potentially challenged. We work from the assumption that sexual innocence should not be assumed when working with youth and children in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal (and South Africa), but rather that issues around sexuality and gender become the very real landscape that these children are allowed and encouraged to negotiate through dance practice which constantly seeks to bring them back to their physically present and embodied selves. For us as the educators, it is an on-going journey into working with and finding a decolonising pedagogy that seeks to emancipate and liberate rather than to control and define.

CHAPTER THREE: INTERROGATING AND RE-FRAMING GENDER AND DISABILITY POLITICS IN THE ARENA OF DANCE AS A TOOL FOR DECOLONISED LEARNING IN SOUTH AFRICA – A NARRATIVE CASE STUDY OF FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY’S LEFTFEETFIRST! DISABILITY/MIXED ABILITY DANCE PROGRAMME

Introduction

It is within the sphere of disability dance practice that “liberatory pedagogy” (Freire, 1970:60) and praxis are most radically tested and so this chapter offers an interrogation of my and FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY’s continuing attempts to find more localised and hopefully decolonised, solutions to the way of thinking about and embodying dance education practice in South Africa. Disability, and its link with gender politics, is – in this chapter – the lens through which I navigate a more liminal and embodied attempt to challenge the “epistemic violence” (Heleta, 2016:npn) of thinking about/doing/making/ teaching dance. This chapter interrogates disability and its activist and artistic engagement with (contemporary) dance by looking at the legacies of current integrated/disabled dance programmes and companies (CANDOCO in the UK and REMIX in South Africa). The chapter then offers a specific focus that links the feminist engagement with critical dance studies to break male codes of reception and the assumed hegemonic ‘correct’ dancing bodies, with disability studies and the politics around representations of ‘wellness’. The chapter concludes with a gendered examination/case study into the politics and process of working in a dance educational environment with young disabled dancers whose ages range from 12 to 20 years.

Gender and Disability: fighting embodied social and cultural violence

³⁹Walking into a first dance class with a yen to move, jump, leap and twirl is a heady thing for a young girl-child ... the approaching freedom of movement and lack of constraints; no more of the sternly spoken “control yourself young lady” coming from the adults. At best dance is exactly this, an abandonment of propriety and an engagement with the visceral lived-in body. However, for many of us (particularly women) who have spent a lifetime attending classes,

³⁹ An initial version of some sections of this chapter has been published previously as follows: Loots, L. 2015. ‘You don’t look like a dancer!’: Gender and disability in the arena of dance as performance and as a tool for learning in South Africa. *AGENDA*. 29(2):122–132.

accessing technical training and becoming that illusive thing called ‘a dancer’, our time has been spent learning to hate our bodies – to literally fight against them – to eat less and less, to work through pain and to fulfil an unreal (Westernised) image of that illusive, waif-like body – preferably white – slowly teetering in a gravity defying image of physical beauty. We are told to take up as little space as possible as we move (most gender specific dance forms encode this), and our bodies are artistically and culturally **generally** encouraged not to sweat, leak or become out of control.

While these socially constructed ‘encouragings’ of the female body to remain in control and keep its narrow boundaries are not only the domain of dance, it is in and through dance specifically (be this social, performative or cultural dance⁴⁰) that the lived body begins to manifest both acquiescence and the potential for disruption. Feminisms and contemporary dance studies; see for example Goldberg (1987), Hanna (1988), and Lepecki (2004), have achieved much in the way of deconstruction and analysis of the gendered representation of the female body. As quoted in Chapter Two, Carol Brown has said, “both feminisms, as a politics, and dance, as a cultural practice, share a concern for the body” (1983:198).

Early 1960s feminist engagement with the dancing body, for instance, saw American choreographers like Yvonne Rainer and Trisha Brown attempt to disrupt the hegemonic male gaze: see Mulvey (1975), and Kaplan (1983), by creating dance works that either utilised low levels of energy and offered no virtuosity so that an audience was not seduced (in the case of Rainer), or, that stepped away from the proscenium arch platform of most conventional theatre to dance in public spaces (in the case of Brown) so that the display of the female body was mediated by the idea of an unsettled moving female body in and through real space. Though by no means definitive, Rainer and Brown offer an early 20th century dance and choreography engagement with feminist ideas around the body as a site of gendered struggle and as a medium that can potentially disrupt.

Similarly, the feminist challenge of the paternally contained and defined normalcy of ‘correct’ female bodies has been echoed by the challenge to racialised, white ownership, control and

⁴⁰ While it might be argued that these three divisions are artificial classifications reproducing false and often colonial boundaries within dance study (for example, the racialised notion that all black dance forms are cultural) the intention here is to offer a full ambit of all ways in which we construct human engagement in dance. While all dance is a cultural engagement, not all dance, for example, is social and not all dance is meant for performance platforms.

definitions of dancing bodies; see for example Dixon (1990). Dance companies such as The Alvin Ailey Dance Company, Deeply Rooted Dance Theatre and the Dance Theatre of Harlem in America have powerfully broken down and attacked narrow racially defined ideas of who can dance and whose stories can be told.

Similarly, and quite recently, artists and academics within the African continent have entered the debates around dance and representivity by beginning to address (and decolonise) violent colonial legacies and how these have shaped the dancing African body; see, for example, Maqoma (2006) and Glaser (2000) with particular emphasis on finding ways to dance and choreograph in a way that disrupts the expectation around racialised and gendered contemporary African dancing bodies.

What becomes clear is that in all its various manifestations, in dance the primary means of communication is the body and with this comes the attention to body politics be this race, gender and nation. But what also becomes clear is that dance favours the able working body, a body in control no matter if that body is wretchedly female, black or from the South. And so despite almost 100 years of various feminist, race and anti-globalisation/post-colonial challenges to the hegemonic control of what a dancer should look like, there has been little engagement with an even bigger physical/intellectual and artistic source of disruption – the disabled dancing body.

A body out of control.

Constructed discourses of normalcy and ‘correct’ bodies are fundamental to the hegemonic (and usually ‘First World’) control of what dance should look like. These idealised, sexualised and athletic super-bodies of the imagined dancer, often leave little space to engage disability. In fact, the disabled body does not belong here at all and its very existence (real and imagined) is a violence on the heteronormative.

Disability is the antithesis of the fit and perceived healthy body; so what happens when a visibly disabled person moves into the role of dancer – a role that history and culture has written for the political and economic glorification and manufacture of this (usually white) super-body? Does the inclusion of the disabled body into dance result in a disruption of perceptions around who can dance, or is the disabled body asked to ‘transcend’ disability to

take on the hallowed title of 'dancer'? What is at stake in these questions is not merely the definition of what constitutes a correct dancing body, but the very nature of dance as a form of social, sexual, political and cultural representation. As Ann Cooper Albright (1997:63) says:

Dance, unlike any other forms of cultural production such as books and paintings, makes the body visible in the representation itself. Thus when we look at dance with disabled dancers, we are looking at the choreography and the disability. This insertion of bodies with real physical challenges can be extremely disconcerting to ... those who are committed to an aesthetic of ideal beauty.

Over and above this, in many African traditional cultures (for example) disability is often thought of as ancestral punishment and at best should be covered up or hidden from view. Here being 'disabled' is something to be overcome or compensated for. When disabled bodies do dance, it is often met with – at best – pity, shame and a patronising critical inability to look at the creation of art/performance. If that disabled body is female, it often bears the burden of being seen as deeply undesirable and deeply flawed to the point of disgust and loathing. Heteronormative constructs of 'desirability' see women viewed as the erotic object of the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975) where the value of women is placed in their conformity to these narrowly defined norms of male desirability. Feminists such as Naomi Wolf (1991) have written extensively on this and have also pushed further to discuss how women have been taught to conspire and collude with this "beauty myth" (Wolf, 1991:9). She argues that (for example) media, culture, work, and religion all situate our value in the conduction of "being feminine" (1991:11) and that this is part of patriarchy's endless coercion of women's power by making us feel worthless should we not conform to the 'beauty myth'. As early as 1991, Wolf also begins to discuss the notion that part of the myth of beauty is a trillion-dollar global industry that survives on keeping women feeling insecure and feeling out of control (1991:142). Being 'out of control' and having a body that does not display the signs of constant attention is, by definition an ugly body. We are constantly expected to control what we smell like, control how we dress, control how much hair is on our bodies, control our weight, control our aging, control how we move. If we can control ourselves, we become desirable (Wolf, 1991:142). A disabled female body is the ultimate body out of control. As Ynestra King has noted, "It is no longer enough to be thin ... there is the importance of control. Control over aging, bodily process, weight, fertility, muscle tone, skin quality, and movement. Disabled women, regardless of how thin, are without full bodily control" (1993:74).

A body in control is, in many ways, the key to understanding the resonance dance sets up as a marker of 'correct' cultural representation. When we watch dance, we are overtly and covertly involved in the creation of illusive ideals and intimate identities around race, gender and nation. With the insertion, however, of the disabled dancing female body, we disrupt the symbolic and are forced to engage the real and visceral body. The disabled body cannot – no matter how much personal, cultural, medical and social work is invested – ever confirm to the heronormative legacies of what Woolf (1991:9) calls "The Beauty Myth". This disabled dancing female body visibly breaks the gendered narratives around 'control' and offers a very profound moment for visibly gender activism and for a need to push a decolonising and gender sensitive agenda in both dance education and performance.

Disability by any other name.

Key to addressing the confluence of disability and gender studies (see for example Garland-Thomson, 2002) with dance scholarship, is a need to deal with labelling and the manner in which we name what we do. Inherent in 'name-calling' is often racist and gender stereotyping that feeds patriarchal and racially fraught experiences of our daily lives. This is true too, of disability where historically the naming of disability has been about focusing on what is 'wrong' and what makes someone different from a hegemonically imagined, defined and constructed normal/ideal body. Words like 'cripple', 'deformed' and 'retard', set out to exclude people living with disabilities in a way that separates them as the "other"; as that which is deficient and less than. People living with disability come to be defined – almost in totality – by their difference and their perceived lack; in a similar way in which women are often still seen as "the second sex" (to quote Simone de Beauvoir, 1949), as that which deviates from the norm – which is male.

As various 20th and 21st century feminist schools of thought (see Tong, 2014) have reclaimed the naming of that which is female and hence challenge the construction of the norm as male, so have disability studies begun to re-name and re-imagine their social labelling (for example Garland-Thomson, 2002). In challenging the naming of how we perceive both gender and disability, there is a decided move to claiming alternate (and decolonised) ways of constructing identity that fall outside of 'lack'. In essence this naming transformation is an engagement with the politics of difference.

Pioneers in disability dance, Celeste Dandeker and Adam Benjamin, the founders (in 1991) of one of Europe's first integrated dance company's called CANDOCO, for example, go as far as calling the dancers they work with, "disabled" and "non-disabled", thus pointedly reversing the "non" epithet to those who, historically in dance, would be perceived of as normal bodied. Benjamin and Dandeker became two of the first choreographers to boldly enter the mainstream theatre and performance dance arena with able bodied and 'dis'able bodied dancers working in what is now referred to as integrated (or mixed ability) dance. Their agenda was to create visually and aesthetically profound performance dance work that challenged the clichés around what differently abled dancing body can and cannot do and in a manner that asked audiences to move away from patronising sympathy and pity. Their artistic intention was and continues to aim to bring about a "change in thinking about dance, about ability, about who is allowed 'in'."41

In South Africa, the Cape Town based dance company REMIX DANCE PROJECT (Artistic Director Malcolm Black, founded in 2000) works in a similar way with their vision simply stated as "Level Playground"⁴² and their key mission being "to strive to create innovative dance theatre performance and education programmes that bring together people with different body histories, body types and abilities."⁴³

In the South African context, with a long history of social, political and racial categorisation and legislation based on a system of the colour of skin as a way of constructing 'difference', it becomes vital – in the construction of democracy and the current political/social/cultural/educational agenda to decolonise – to begin the process of re-thinking ways in which our society excludes people living with disability. REMIX's mission above, places a profound understanding on "different body history" as its impulse towards a type of visceral democracy that honours difference; be this racial, gendered or disabled.

Further, Gerard Samuel's artistic and academic work in South Africa in the arena of disability dance (2009; 2012) has purposefully argued that disability in South Africa can be seen as another form of racism that makes up its own "cultural exclusion" (2009:2). This argument can

⁴¹ <http://www.candoco.co.uk/>.

⁴² http://www.remixdancecompany.co.za/?page_id=2.

⁴³ http://www.remixdancecompany.co.za/?page_id=2.

be applied to the culture of disability in South Africa, where people living with disability have restricted access to resources due to the nature of their disabilities. Samuel makes the important point that for disabled people, barriers to the arts are not limited to physical restrictions, but barriers also include “education and training in the arts, funding for such exploration, adequate peer and media review, and the inclusion of the disabled community’s contribution of artistic product or work” (2009:2).

Dance as a tool for education.

Critical contemporary dance has globally begun to heed the feminist agenda of destabilising the notion of the super-body and construction of normative (usually damaged) ideals for a perfect dancing female body. This on-going feminist agenda has been supported by disability studies and the bold attention to how the constructions of normative perfect moving bodies, has been about excluding a body living with disability; how critical contemporary dance has had to heed the agenda of truly democratising who can dance and what a dancer should look like. The intersections of disability studies and dance studies with a feminist agenda has thus added to the debates a concern with the re-thinking of disability and its place in dance training and dance performance.

Beyond the contemporary performative and theatrical challenge, however, is the need (as is the directive of this dissertation), to also heed these gender debates around disability within the very important domain of dance education and training such that the violence of inclusion and exclusion, right and wrong bodies, is addressed way before a dancer is afforded the privilege of stepping onto a stage. And indeed – given FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY’s mandate to include and not exclude – the understanding that not all dance education is about creating theatre dancers but rather, too, that the ability to dance and move can become one of the fundamental rights of freedom of expression that all learners should access regardless of their proclivity towards a theatre career. Brazilian applied theatre practitioner Augusto Boal writes, that the arts are “an effective tool for the comprehension of social and personal problems, and the search for their solutions” (1979:14).

Boal, of course, bases his understanding of arts education on Paulo Freire’s ideal of “liberation education” (1970:53). And once again, FLATFOOT and I turn to Freire’s seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), where he began (as has been outlined in both Chapter

One and Two), to frame this alternate system of learning and teaching. Freire did not write about the arts or dance (or, indeed, put too much focused attention on gender), but this weighty understanding of the political, social and cultural imperative of education has become, for me and FLATFOOT, a very useful insight into also re-thinking the domain of dance education processes that are based only on narrow gendered and able-bodied models of what a dancer should learn, be and look like.

FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY – still searching for a liberatory/decolonised pedagogy

In an African context that seeks to look into alternate processes of dance education, training and development that challenge race and gender stereotypes and which set out to truly decolonise formal and often violent modes of learning, FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY continues to imagine a dance education programme located in South Africa that is not only about a perfectly pointed foot and a well-executed contraction, but about this agenda of ‘growing people’; that education and pedagogy should be about “becoming more fully human” (Freire, 1970:55). Needless to say, as has been argued in Chapter One and Two, this involves a deep understanding of an engagement with arts and culture as the very rubric of democracy and freedom of expression, and a deep understanding that in the context of Africa and South Africa, dance education can become an activism for re-thinking who we are both locally and globally and how we begin to represent ourselves outside of hegemonic white abled-bodied and violently gendered visions of what a dancer (and human being) should be.

As such, FLATFOOT dancers and dance educators and I abandon any notions around dance teaching systems based on perfect line and perfect form, of including and excluding young bodies due to size, weight and ability – those bodies may seemingly be out ‘of control’ but it does not matter as we work rather in favour of inclusively beginning to use dance and dance education as a tool – or indeed a strategy – towards other kinds of learning that engage the issues that plague our own lived reality. In the context of disability, this means a focus on integrating differently abled bodies into our dance practice and pedagogy, to challenge the othering that is socially constructed around disability, and to work for an inclusive dance practice. Our starting point is that no learner is, due to issues of race, gender, poverty or

disability, excluded from attending dance classes and workshops.⁴⁴ In fact, we choose to run our programmes in areas where arts education is often absent in any formal education arena.

FLATFOOT dance educators and teachers do not, for example, become 'experts' that discipline and correct the young dancer's body into narrow perceptions of form and line, but rather we begin to work with a sense of freeing the body by starting with what the learners know and feel (or embody) when they come to class. We are happy to begin with popular performance dance styles (as discussed earlier around the use of *isbhujwa* as a warm-up strategy) and then move outward from there.

We have set-up these programmes as voluntary after school programmes where if the youth choose to join, they are afforded the opportunity for social and cultural interface between different races, cultures, physical abilities and genders that offers different ways of being in (and experiencing) community and the body. This becomes – and is – the articulated feminist and decolonising agenda of our work.

⁴⁴ The only time dancers working with disabilities are excluded from our youth dance programmes have been as a result of non-accessible architectural teaching spaces where issues around disabled access has been ignored in design. This would include spaces/halls and dance studios that have stair access with no lifts, that do not have toilets accessible to dancer living with disabilities, and performance stage platforms that require use of ramps (usually non-existent) or stairs.



Image 13: two LeftFeetFIRST! dancers in action (2013) Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. PIC: Val Adamson

Despite FLATFOOT's vast amount of work within the domain of spearheading a critical pedagogy since our formation in 2003 in dance training and education, it was only in 2008 that we entered the arena of integrated/disability dance. It was a heady challenge to me and to the FLATFOOT dance educators to really test and put into practice our own need to democratise and decolonise our strategies for teaching and our need to make dance training and education available to all.

Dancer and dance educator, Gerard Samuel had set up a partnership in 2002 with the Open Air School in Durban, South Africa and used this as a base to set up one of South Africa's first youth disability dance programmes and dance companies. Samuel's work (detailed in "LeftFeetFIRST!: Dancing Disability, 2012) broke dance ground for the innovative youth performance work that had the support of the school base from which he operated. The Open Air School in Glenwood, Durban, is a school that is focused on offering highly motivated and academically rigorous space for learners with disability. The School has a well-earned reputation for excellence in and out of the classroom and some inspired leadership that

recognised the value of arts as a learning methodology towards self-realisation and expression. The learners in the school are all differently-abled such that any class might have learners living with disability that may be physical and/or mental. The challenge for creating an inclusive dance teaching strategy that allowed every child to be productive and heard, along the lines of Freire’s “liberatory education” (1970:53), was, and is, enormous.

In 2008 Samuel was appointed as the Director of the University of Cape Town School of Dance and his move to the Cape meant that he had the bitter-sweet job of graciously handing his work with LeftFeetFIRST! over. Our synergy of thinking around dance education praxis and prior work together, meant that Samuel approached me and FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY.

Despite careful hand-over and FLATFOOT’s long history of dance education that worked against gender and race stereotyping, and despite our working methodology around the politics of inclusion, stepping into the arena of disability dance was a steep learning curve for me and the company.



Image 14: LeftFeetFIRST! Dancers in action (2013). Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. PIC: Val Adamson

a. Re-Learning to Teach

Firstly, how does one even begin to teach a dance class when you are faced with (for example) some dancers in wheelchairs, some on support crutches, and yet other dancers with visual impairments? The first error always made is to expect the dancers to simply find their own way around your non-disabled instructions such that we expect each dancer to make their own 'version' of a dance exercise or routine. While this might seem democratic in the impulse to accept a wheelchair dancer's version of a turn that uses wheels and not legs, in the end this process always makes the dancer aware of what is lacking as the non-disabled instructor twirls and turns and moves in ways that the wheelchair dancer cannot.



Image 15: LeftFeetFIRST! dancers in action – JOMBA! 2017 – Open Air Theatre. PIC: Val Adamson

We were forced to look deeper into how we gave instruction. If our agenda was (and is) to allow each dancer to self-realise and raise the awareness of “becoming more fully human” (Freire 1970:55) through the dance practise, then any process that made a dancer aware of lack could not and would not work. As teachers and dance instructors who are non-disabled,

we found ourselves stepping away from too overt attention to dance teaching systems where the dance work is demonstrated over and over again with the expectation that the dancer would learn from watching and trying. Instead we began to develop a system of instruction that did not specify a leg, arm or torso movement but started to ask the dancers to find an action or effort such that a dance phrase or piece of choreography could be made from, for instance, the following instruction; “rise, move forward, turn, move backwards, go left, drop.” Any body and any dancer, no matter ability, can resolve this choreographic phrase and so we began to work from a place of what is possible rather than what has to be left off or what is impossible. The LeftFeetFIRST! dancers began to blossom as they began to take agency around how they constructed their own dance movements and their ownership around their final choreography for performance.



Image 16: LeftFeetFIRST! dancers in action – (2016) Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. PIC: Val Adamson

Classes happen only once a week at the Open Air School – and we work to the constraints of the school term calendar. We are given the use of the school hall for these classes and sessions usually can only begin after a good 15 minutes have been spent moving school chairs and various wheelchairs out the space. The programme is run after school and happens in the

short gap between end of school and the last school bus leaving to take learners home at 4pm. At best we are able to work for a full hour. Time is tight. Given the mixed ability nature of the programme, there is also careful attention given to making sure learners – especially those with severe diabetes and related conditions – eat a small snack before the sessions. A school teacher is annually assigned to be the school guardian of our programme so that should any medical emergencies arise, there is help at hand. The youth range in age from 12 to 18 years and given this is a voluntary programme, the youth who do come are willing participants.

b. Gendered Differences Between Male/Female Dancers

We are also noticing that a more or less equal number of boys and girls are attending the classes and much like all dance education practice that FLATFOOT engages, the gendered aspect remains true to the context of a continued patriarchy in South Africa. It is often the young male dancers who are more vocal and who are physically willing to take more risk in their dance work. True to any construction of hegemonic masculinity, these LeftFeetFIRST! male dancers push harder, risk more and often do so in a manner that can overpower the participation of the female dancers. While disability dance practice wishes to encourage this bold assertion of body in space, and of self in the world, the moment it is realised in a way that silences another (the female dancers), as teachers we have to be vigilant. In some of FLATFOOT's other dance education work this has led us to separate the young male and female dancers and while this has merit, it is not always the most appropriate strategy for teaching the boy-child to allow another voice, and to teach the girl-child to step up and be heard.

In the LeftFeetFIRST! programme, over the last 8 years, we have noticed that of the dancers in wheelchairs, for example, it is always the young male dancer who will push forward and assert movement in space often taking excessive/daring risks to his own balance, while the young female dancers remain far more hesitant to push into space and almost never choose movements that appear 'risky'. These same boys in wheelchairs often react very strongly against partner work where another dancer might use the wheelchair for balance and for supported locomotion. The young girls in wheelchairs, however, tend to become far more open to partner dance work seemingly not to mind the manipulating of being pushed and pulled in a duet. On reflection this can often lead to the boys getting more solo work and the

girls doing more group or partner work. Much like gendering in classical ballet for example, we are actively trying to work against the notion that it is the male dancer who asserts himself with the seduction of big daring dance moves that often leave the female dancers having to work twice as hard just to be noticed. A liberatory and decolonised pedagogy for working through dance and the arena of disability, must keep you – the educator – attentive around gendered use of space and the gendered use of energy.

c. Caring for Bodies That Are Differently Abled

Further, honouring Samuel's own working philosophy, we deliberately do not ask the LeftFeetFIRST! dancer what is 'wrong' with them but rather engage them in what they purposefully choose to do and contribute. We are mindful that we always have a teacher from the Open Air School present at each session so that if any dancer needs any specific medical attention it is always close on hand. We are also noticing that the young dancers are able to voice their needs far more clearly as time goes on so that if a dancer needs to step out for a short rest or medication, this is effected through the dancer voicing this need.

We have noticed over the nine years, however, within the LeftFeetFIRST! programme, that the young male dancers in the programmes very rarely ask for help and very rarely call "time out" when they might need rest or assistance. Conceivably buying into the normative social stereotypes around constructions of masculinity (Connell, 2005), perhaps these young men feel "less" when asking for help? These young boys and young men are subject – as are all men – to the constant pressures of heteronormative masculinities, and being disabled, they are carrying the added burden of not measuring up to physical and socially constructed ideals of 'manliness'. The constant pressure of the disabled male learners to fit in and be more, often manifests (in our experience) in certain levels of aggression and, as mentioned above, a wariness about ever asking for help. In our years of working with these learners, we have found that the aggression that can result usually manifests as deep frustration and is often turned inward. As educators, this requires us to be especially vigilant with the young male dancers in our care – this means taking more time to ask if help is needed and to open space in non-gendered frames that allows these young men to ask for help. This could mean, for instance, a regulated 'time-out' water break for the whole class and, an attention to address personal (and gendered?) frustrations around being able to do the dance work.

d. Teaching Audiences to Appreciate Integrated Dance

Germane too, to the politics of inclusion is that all our FLATFOOT youth concerts and performance days include a performance by the LeftFeetFIRST! dance group alongside all our other dance education and development youth programmes from the KZN area. While originally their participation in these dance concerts was met by silence and sometimes strongly expressed (perhaps culturally biased?) horror of public appearances of people living with disability, 8 years along, their participation has been so normalised that their work is greeted with the same generosity of applause that any other participating group receives. And given that these learners attend a school designated for 'disabled learners only' (which raises the subject of discussion around the need to mainstream learners living with disability?) their attendance at these performance concerts has allowed these youth to experience a sense of community with dancers from other areas and other schools, with the common experience being one of joy and freedom of expression.

Concluding remarks

Working in this way, searching to find a pedagogy and politics around historic, political and social constructions of disability, gender and race division that allows for a sense of inclusion that sees all bodies as dancing bodies, that sees all bodies in need of the experience of freedom of expression, FLATFOOT and I continue to fight to find a dance practice that is liberatory and decolonised in both the learning and the execution. This educative and performance-based pedagogy continues to fight the invidious nature of inclusion and exclusion, be this based on race, class, gender or disability. We continue to appraise the value of dance as a learning methodology towards self-realisation and expression. We are beginning to find that within the ambit of working to open up social and political engagement with disability and other categories of difference that dance as a liberatory pedagogy allows every child to be productive and – very significantly – to be heard. This fight, and the dance work, continues.

SECTION TWO

SEARCHING FOR AND RE-IMAGINING AN INCLUSIVE DECOLONISED CHOREOGRAPHIC AND PERFORMANCE PRACTICE FOR DANCE IN SOUTH AFRICA POST 1994

CHAPTER FOUR: THE BODY AS HISTORY AND MEMORY: A GENDERED REFLECTION ON MY CHOREOGRAPHIC 'EMBODIMENT' OF WRITING WITH AND ON THE SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED TEXT OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEMPORARY DANCING BODY

Introduction

Section Two which consists of the following two chapters, turns away from an overt discussion around pedagogy and moves towards an interrogation of my artistic and choreographic practices with FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY post 1994. In the past 23 years I have created over 40 works for a professional stage. I will not attempt to circumnavigate this body of work but what I have chosen to focus on instead, is a selected few of the choreographic works created, and ones where I felt – in my own practice – I had (and have) begun to shift my methods of creating towards more inclusive and open choreographic methodologies that seek to honour democratic and decolonised processes. This is a life-time artistic journey and I need to state that it is an on-going one. The lessons learnt in 23 years of creating dance are perhaps only now beginning to firmly take root and grow and so I consider Section Two an autoethnographic opportunity to reflect on my own body's history and memory as I contemplate the history and memory of the bodies with which I work/dance and reflect on the history of a 'body' of dance work.

In this Chapter Four, I take on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1962) notion of the body as the prime means of knowing the world to argue for the linguistic value of dance and contemporary choreography as text – text written on and with the body. This chapter argues for dance and the act of choreography to be viewed as language and, as such, communication. The physical body is understood to be a text written by race, class and gender and is, of itself, a very powerful tool for challenging social and political discourses around repression especially in the context of South Africa. Arguing for the notion of the embodied "I", this chapter finally offers an analysis of two of my earlier dance works, *TRANSMISSION: Mother to Child* (2005) and *BLOODLINES* (2009). These two dance works will be analysed and decoded for their meaning and performance intent, but more profoundly, around the process of creating and choreographing the dance work. This includes what I – as dance maker – like to see as my role as choreographer. For me, this role is an evolving process to create shared space in which to

collect physical danced histories that allow the communal evolution – between myself and the dancers – of these dance works. Finally, this chapter challenges the notion of critical distance in authorship, and argues that all writing and linguistic meaning is written from a body and with a body, and that for feminism (and me as a self-articulated South African feminist dance maker), this is a profoundly gendered understanding of the world.

Dance as Language and the body as inscribed discourse

TRANSMISSION: *To transmit, transmitting and being transmitted.*

Pass or hand on, transfer

Communicate (ideas, emotions, etc.)

Allow (heat, light, sound, electricity, etc.)

*To pass through, be a medium for (ideas, emotions, etc.)*⁴⁵

⁴⁶Language has long been a contested terrain for feminists. As early as 1980, radical feminist Dale Spender, set the linguistic world on its paternal head with her seminal *Man Made Language* (1980). Arguing against the notion of language as a neutral means to explain a pre-given **fixed** ‘real’ world outside of us, language, as Spender claimed, was a weapon appropriated by patriarchy which diminished the range of women’s thoughts and being in the world. She argued that “the liberation of women is rooted in the liberation of language” (1980:29). She claimed the linguistic terrain for feminism as a need to study possible sex difference in the language of men and women, the sexism embedded in the language of men and women, and the mechanisms of women’s oppressions through language. While Spender’s position has been critiqued within feminism itself (see Assiter (1985) as one such example) as being, perhaps, a little too simplistic, what Spender did do was begin the feminist postmodern

⁴⁵ Thompson, D. 1992. *The Pocket Oxford Dictionary of Current English*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

⁴⁶ Large Sections of this Chapter Four have been taken from have been taken and re-worked from two separate articles written by me: a. Loots, L. 2006. “TRANSMISSION: a South African choreographer uses language to reflect on the gendered ‘embodiment’ of writing with and on the body”. *South African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*. 24(4). b. Loots, L. 2010. The body as history and memory: a gendered reflection on the choreographic ‘embodiment’ of creating on the socially constructed text of the South African Body. *South African Theatre Journal*. 24:105–124.

concern with language and how we 'speak the world we inhabit', and its very profound link to representivity, knowledge and power.

As such, language becomes a vehicle for *transmission*; it is one of the ways in which we actively construct shared assumptions and transmit implicit value systems and modes of behaviour. Language thus becomes one of the prime means through which we, as subjects of discourse, give consent to the world around us. It is, as post-structural philosopher Michel Foucault would call it, "a form of power" (2003:130).

But language is not just the spoken or written word as it has increasingly come to mean "any method of communication" (Thompson, 1992:496). Laura Mulvey (1975) and E. Anne Kaplan (1983) travelled a long feminist mile for their visual media and implicit and explicit gender constructions to be recognised as another form of language needing gender revision and analysis. While their writings dealt primarily with the male-gaze and the power of looking, they also began an analysis of issues around the construction and representation of the female body through media, film and television discourses.

So important were Kaplan's and Mulvey's writings on the way in which media constructs the female body, that many early American feminist dancers and choreographers took up their ideas and attempted to find ways of choreographing and moving the female body that displace the hegemonic 'male gaze'. Primary amongst these (as briefly discussed in Chapter Two) was the Judson Dance Theatre performer Yvonne Rainer who, in *TRIO A*, (originally choreographed for a female dancer) offered a female body in constant motion so that no body part was static thus displacing the idea of presenting the female body on stage as object to be 'looked at'. Further, Rainer, refused to allow the dancer to look at the audience thus disrupting the notion of the female body as the 'bearer of the gaze' – if the dancer did look forward it was always contained within a movement and the dancer's focus merely passed through the audience. In addition in her performance of, "The Mind is a Muscle Part 1" (originally performed in 1968 at the Judson Memorial Church in New York), Rainer also began to profoundly question differences of energy investment. She began to 'undo' normative and traditional ways of presenting a dance phrase. Her democratic approach to the dance phrase undermined the idea of 'climaxes' – that final big moment – in dance phraseology. In this way she began to break away from a reliance on the historic virtuosity of a (usually male) dancer

as some special or all-powerful super human. In her now infamous “NO” text (1965:1978), Rainer states:

No to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformation and magic and make-believe no to the glamour and transcendency of the star image no to the heroic no to the anti-heroic no to trash imagery no to involvement of performer and spectator no to style no to camp no to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer no to eccentricity no to moving or being moved.

While shocking in its day, no less for its commitment to a lack of virtuosity, as for its attempt to offer the female dancing body as something more than object, Rainer’s strategies were slightly problematic and perhaps naive in that she did not acknowledge the power of hegemonic and patriarchal discourse to construct the female body and to inscribe/write it through gendered social and political patterns. What Rainer and others did initiate, however, was a profound engagement of dance and choreography with feminist ideas around the body as a site of *transmission* of political gendered struggle; and as a medium that constructs and articulates languages written with and on the body. She made space for the unheard female dancer and choreographer’s voice to be inserted into dance language. Hers was a particularly female/feminist voice that altered completely the performance of dance and movement phrases to begin what is now often called ‘postmodern dance technique’. She challenged ways of perceiving and seeing the modern dance text.

As Carol Brown has said, “both feminism, as a politics, and dance, as a cultural practice, share a concern for the body” (1983:198). Further, Ann Daly has said (1991:2):

Amongst all the arts in western culture, dance may have the most to gain from feminist analysis. Certainly the two are highly compatible. Dance is an art form of the body, and the body is where gender distinctions are generally understood to originate.

While feminist concerns around ‘the body’ have mainly been about the gendered social and historical construction and reception of femininity and female-ness as potentially profound areas of inequality, dance is an art form which locates its practice and language in the moving body. As such, form and content (around the body) have often merged to the point where the visceral, body as flesh, has often not been politicised in the late Western 20th Century predilection for claiming authorship, artistry and politics around the choreographer. Dance utilises the body as a means of expression; perhaps we could say the dancer ‘speaks’. Dancer’s bodies are used as vehicles through which motion and dance languages are constructed – and

also mined and even unearthed – by the choreographer to communicate and articulate meaning to an audience. However, the body (as feminists have argued in varying ways) is not a neutral site onto which dance can be placed through training and choreography. ‘The body’ comes to dance already inscribed by discourses and ideology whether these be gendered, racial, or cultural. The visceral body (the flesh) is often encoded by cultural practices, social and racial constructions and gendered conditions of use and reception (Loots, 1995:53) – all of which form languages that *transmit* certain meanings and power operations.

Thus, while the dancer’s body is always marked with the physicality of race and gender, there remains the need to decode and deconstruct the dancing body, and the languages which it articulates and which it inscribes, in order to examine how discourse and ideology permeate the use and reading of this body. The contemporary body is nothing less than a battlefield where, as Sally Banes, appropriating a Foucaultian perspective, has pointed out “culture wreaks utter tyranny on individual bodies ... where bodies are disciplined, moulded, re-arranged by dominant powers, which simultaneously promote the illusion that people are ‘free’ to construct their own bodies” (1994:45/46).

⁴⁷In *The History of Sexuality. Vol. 1* (1976), Foucault (as hinted at in Chapter Two) interrogated the body as a site of struggle in the discourse of sexuality where he attempted to “show how deployments of power are directly connected to the body – to bodies, functions, physiological process, sensations, and pleasures” (1976:151). He writes of the way in which power as a relational concept not only operates on the body, but *through* it as well. He argues, for example, that within contemporary society, discourses around sexuality have become prime areas of struggle in which power is exercised through the constitution of the body. These discourses around the body do not carry neutral constructions, but have, operating through them, ideological imperatives which, in turn, become naturalised through being privileged by dominant institutions. Further, Foucault argues that in our society power has not been operating by denying or allowing sexual expression, but rather by constructing and validating particular forms of modern sexuality. In effect, therefore, Foucault, claims that subjects have been repressed *through* such constructions of sexuality that categorise ‘correct’ or ‘deviant’ sexual practice. Much like the feminist claims around language and how it, in and of itself

⁴⁷ Much of this discussion around Foucault and ‘the body’ is re-worked from a Chapter I wrote in Lengell, 2005.

inscribes power and transmits implicit value systems and modes of behaviour, language – like the discourses around sexuality – is gendered and never neutral.

What becomes important to note, however, is that the constitution of specific subjectivities through privileging certain discourses also creates the possibility for resistance and counter-discourse. Power is never absolute and controlled by one central site (Loots, 1995).⁴⁸ The possibility to resist is always open, as Foucault (1981:102) says:

There is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field force relations; there can run different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy.

Herein lies the value of appropriating Foucault’s thinking both for feminist writing and for re-thinking dance practice in the South African context – not only is the body recognised as a site for the struggle of subjectivity through ideas of language construction and reception, but Foucault also offers the understanding of how the body has the ability to resist the dominant (and naturalised) discourses that surround and permeate it. Marianne Goldberg, in her article “Ballerinas and Ball Passing” (1987/88), (and as discussed also in Chapter Two) picks up on these ideas and reiterates how the “body is constructed through discourse” (1987/88:8) yet has the ability to “become subversive” (1987/88:27).

Examples of these “subversive” bodies are plentiful in the contemporary dance landscape of South Africa. One example is the dancer/choreographer Dada Masilo. Masilo is one of South Africa’s most iconic choreographers who is re-framing, re-making and re-staging various ballet and operatic ‘classics’ (Swan Lake, Carmen and Giselle, for example) into layered dance performances in which she offers a gendered revision of South African histories. Her dance work is also significant for her constant re-vision of Western ballet technique and stylistics particularly into an African cultural and political landscape that has often historically denied the black body access to this particular historically ‘white’ (or privileged) training.

Masilo’s body of dance work is premised on intertextuality, on taking musical scores and narratives from established Western canonical traditions, and re-inventing them to speak to her own personal and socio-political meaning making as an artist. Far from simply

⁴⁸ These ideas have been extended in a previous article. See Loots, 1995.

'Africanising' Swan Lake, for example, (whatever this might mean), Masilo's engagement with these dance and musical texts is more about a very personal confluence of her own history; of a black female contemporary South African body, trained in ballet, but deeply conscious both politically and artistically of the race and gender histories that she embodies. Herein lies the possible subversion to which Goldberg (1987/88:27) alludes.

A black South African dance maker, Masilo virtually hijacks these Western ballet and musical texts so that she can insert a black woman's body centre stage and into histories where the intersectional politics of race and gender has often not been given a voice. It also remains significant that Masilo is both dancer and choreographer for almost all of her dance work; she retains agency in both the making (choreography) and the doing (dancing).

Of note too, in discussion Goldberg's notion of the body's ability to "become subversive" (1987/88:27), is that with the increased number of studies around masculinity, dance writers like Ramsey Burt (1995), for example, have picked up on these debates and used them to equally apply to the hegemonic and social constructions around the 'languages' of the dancing male body. Burt states (in reference to both the female and male dancing body), "Representation in dance might therefore be seen as ideologically produced and historically and socially situated" (1995:31). This is, of course, true for any kind of discussion around representation – all representation is mediated and is thus a deferred 'truth', and simultaneously its own 'truth'/reality all at once.⁴⁹

It needs to be pointed out, however, that while Foucault articulated the body as a site of struggle for meaning and power, he failed to recognise that the discourses operating on the female body are, and will be, different from those operating on the male body given that the disciplinary practices identified by him (for example, sexuality and medicine) have operated more powerfully upon the containment of women's bodies than on men's. What Foucault neglected is the feminist challenge to post-structural thinking; that is, how gender affects the discourse operating through and around the body and the language that it constructs and creates.

⁴⁹ While much has been written on the ideas around representations and truth, an interesting discussion is offered by Parr, 1997.

Much of this discussion, up until this point, has spoken about the body – and the language that it transmits and inscribes – as a site of struggle for meaning and power by focusing on issues of gender and gendered identity. Further relevant to the South African context is the powerful and all-pervasive discourse of race and racial oppression. Like sexual identity, racial identity embodies the flesh and is thus ever present no matter if an attempt is made to assume neutrality; as many postcolonial critics (Spivak, 1990) would argue ‘neutrality’ always assumes the centre hegemony of a white middle class male and is thus a violence on the (female) body of colour which does not embody these powerful discourses of the centre. To have a black dancing body in a South African ballet company, for example, offers two things; firstly, a profound relief that black dancers are finding their way into a historically white owned dance form thus challenging the racially constructed ownership of ballet history in South Africa, something similar to Arthur Mitchell’s reasons for setting up the Dance Theatre of Harlem in America. However, the often-assumed neutrality with which these black dancers enter the political ballet arena in South Africa, where they become ‘just part of the company’ often disguises more racial prejudice where they are assumed to act like ‘one of the company’ – meaning a white company, often European in its structure. Perhaps this debate around black dancers entering the ballet arena needs serious time and energy as it speaks not only to a sense of racial identity in an already racially fraught society like South Africa, but also bears the marks of how ballet was one of the only funded dance forms under the apartheid government which gave it a certain level of cultural privileging, where the assumed audiences for ballet was, and is still primarily white and middle class. This is an anxious debate as one also does not want to hold black dancing bodies in cultural stereotypes that assume traditional and ritual dance, as this is equally containing to the potential power of the (black) body to articulate and speak subversive languages and challenge racism. The above example of Dada Masilo’s current dance work speaks volumes to the idea that the black South African ballerina can indeed ‘speak back’ with power and agency to a Western classical tradition that has (and continues) to exclude.⁵⁰

However, what does become important in the above debate is the interesting connection that comes from thinking about gender and race, as *embodied* in the flesh, as both powerful

⁵⁰ For more information on Dada Masilo see <https://www.dansedanse.ca/en/dada-masilo-dance-factory-johannesburg>.

categories that define and often determine the effectiveness of the languages of the performing, moving dancing (South African) body.

The embodied "I"

The French existential philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty has been a key figure in recognising the body as playing a vital role in representing and experiencing the world. He has argued that our very being is not fixed but impermanent (1962). The transitory nature of the human body – its birth, decay and death – gives rise to an understanding that human existence is unthinkable or unimaginable in separation from this shifting and fluctuating body. A key idea in Merleau-Ponty's theories is that of embodiment in which he makes reference to the idea that we never perceive the world as pure consciousness; consciousness is always enmeshed or tangled up in the flesh and blood of the body. He writes (as quoted in Cavallaro, 1998:88:

The body is primarily a way of being in the world. It is a form of lived experience which is fluid and ever-shifting. And it is also a way of interacting with one's environment, of shaping it and being shaped by it.

This notion that the body becomes the first and primary 'knowable' way of engaging the world and our experience in it, is a key concept for those, like myself, who write with the body – the act of choreography. Thus far, I have argued for the notion that the body, especially in dance, is a form of language in that it inscribes power and transmits implicit value systems and modes of behaviour and that these bodily discourses usually carry both gender and race⁵¹ constructions. It is at this point that I take up Merleau-Ponty's notion of the body, my body, as the prime means of communicating with the world (1962) and this is the phenomenology of speaking from the embodied "I". This embodied "I", the self as the knower and the writer of language, becomes the self-referential transmission of theory and process. This 'writing with the body' (or what we call choreography) is a political act which understands the embedded power-plays that act through and on the body and is the very substance of a choreographer's writing on and with the body.

⁵¹ While this chapter deals primarily with race and gender, it needs to be noted that these are not the definitive plays of power that act on or are acted out by the discourses of the body; class, health, disability and sexuality (amongst others) remain further arenas of power operations; some of which are discussed further in Chapter 5.

The rest of this chapter moves to engage my personal voice, as author and as choreographer, in what is understood as the embodied “I” that challenges the notions of critical distance as ‘truth’. The assumption that linguistic and literary distance and lack of involvement in a creative process somehow offers a more ‘truthful’ analysis is thus critically engaged here with both a feminist challenge (the assumption of the normative male “I”) and with the particular notions that I understand the world and my creative processes through it, from the reality of my own body; a body which is the subject play of many discourses of power be these race, class, gender, health and sexuality (to name a few). Finally I am arguing that as a feminist choreographer working in South Africa, who better to investigate my own process and own work – work that emanates from my body – than myself, the embodied “I”. This does not preclude other’s writing on and around my words and choreography, but that far from offering ‘prejudicial’ discourse, the knowing body – my body – claims it linguistic and choreographic right to speak. I re-iterate a point made earlier from the post-colonial feminist writer Gayatri Spivak (1990), that ‘neutrality’ in speaking almost always assumes the centre hegemony of a white middle class (usually) First World male and is thus a violence on the female body which does not embody, or seek to embody, the powerful discourse of the centre. As Spivak has written (1990:62), “Why not develop a certain degree of rage against the history that has written such an abject script for you that you are silenced?” Dance is thus one example of the visceral and lived experience of using the body to write and create meaning; of exerting the “I” into a position of agency. And, profoundly, becomes not just a medium for speaking but a medium for being heard. This is what Section Two (both Chapters Four and Five) of this dissertation is attempting to do; to offer an account of how this embodied “I” is experienced and vocalised through the act of my choreographic process and how this process of ‘speaking’ is negotiated collectively in a manner that respects (and listens) to the ‘voices’ of the dancers and artists with whom I collaborate and work. My journey to seek agency in dance making is always a negotiation with the unfolding collaborative processes I seek and its challenge to hierarchical artistic processes, I argue, become part of a decolonising agenda.

Theatre and its “Double”

In 1931, Antonin Artaud declared that theatre’s double is life, that all formal performance events should supposedly hold a mirror up to life, its “double”. Audiences, as Artaud requested, thus should not simply watch performance as spectacle but use the theatrical

occasion to look at itself. In a way what Artaud is asking, is to take a leap into the notion of, not only an embodied dancer and choreographer writing and constructing meaning as I have argued, but an embodied, phenomenologically present audience watching theatre as a representation of life. By representation I do not fall into the realist assumptions of Aristotelian notions of 'good theatre' (Artaud's theatre was anything but realist in design) but simply make reference to the act of reflexivity required in holding up this mirror. In this way, theatre and theatrical performances become important social and political texts to produce self-understanding and indeed, self-reflection on the world around us. As dance academic and critic, Randy Martin has pointed out "If performance not only produces images of life but acts as the very mirror through which we reflect on life, then it is possible to study not only certain depictions of the world, but how the world is depicted" (as quoted from Lepecki, 2004:47).

Martin's above comment around the nature of action into reflection and reflection into action, is highlighted by one significant 'moment' in contemporary dance history and is the now infamous run-in between New York ballet critic Arlene Croce and choreographer Bill T. Jones over his 1994 dance work *Still/Here*. The work deals with illness and well-being and constructs of death and dying in a world of HIV/AIDS and other pernicious terminal illness. Some members of the dance company were HIV+ and openly stated their status. The work itself employed large video projections of intimate close-up face shots of HIV+ and terminally ill cancer patients talking about dealing with illness and dying. Alongside this, the choreography engaged a type of physical exuberance; a death-defying dance that celebrated the body's ability to move and speak alternate discourses to illness and dying. The embodied meaning behind the choreographic part of the work was indeed a celebration of life and the living. Meaningfully titled, *Still/Here* keyed into the HIV/AIDS crisis (a disease that eventually killed Arnie Zane, Jones's long-time partner) and as such explicitly linked itself to external mirrored references of the world outside the dance theatre.

Arlene Croce refused to review the work opting instead not to attend the performance and wrote it off, ironically in rather a long review, as "victim art."⁵² Titling her 'review' "*Discussing the Undiscussable*", she indicated that she considered the dance work beyond the reach of criticism indicating that the choreographer had "crossed the line between theatre and reality.

⁵² Much has been written about the Croce and Jones' encounter –I particularly refer to Martha Duffy's *TIME* magazine article from February 6. 1995.

I cannot review someone I feel sorry for or hopeless about” (as quoted from Duffy, 1995). More generally, Croce derided this “victim art” as art that forces the audience to pity “dissed black, abused women or disenfranchised homosexuals.”⁵³

As a dance critic, Croce makes assumptions about her role and this includes a judgment on the nature of art and its realisation. She makes an assumption around a neutral generic notion of ‘truth and beauty’ avoiding any engagement with arts adaptability or engagement with political and social issues. Croce has successfully avoided Artaud’s mirror, instead setting herself up as critic, someone who is able to write *beyond* what she would articulate as the confines of the embodied self. But far from the embodied self as being a confinement, this notion of the “I” placed into writing is a far more postmodern and feminist engagement with the positioning of self into discourses (be they choreographed or written) and that this modernist notion of ‘timeless art for humanity’, as Croce seems to imply, is a high art position that itself is socially and politically ‘written’.

Still/Here is a dance work that faces the act (even the performance) of self-representation, of embodied dancers and actors speaking for themselves as they create, dance, move and write the text of the performance. In this way, these embodied performers are anything but victims. Croce’s crisis in criticism, is firstly, a bid for a kind of authorial immunity; it is her attempt to stay away from the actual (messy) lived reality of dancing bodies on stage. Secondly, Croce’s crisis in criticism, in this instance, is more about her inability to see the self-reflexivity in the dance work, than her ability to write about ‘timeless art for humanity’. This is essentially the debate between understanding Merleau-Ponty’s theories of the phenomenology of the body as the prime means of knowing the world, and the notion that ‘good’ art is only knowable and thus writable if we sit on the outside with this implicit critical distance that assumes a hegemonic neutrality. This is carefully supported by dance critic Sondra Fraleigh’s (as quoted in Carter, 1998:137) understanding that when:

I look at dance I perceive something of the work’s identity, its individuality. Not only do I perceive it – I consciously construct it. That is. I imbue the work with the meaning I find there as a viewer (or critic). This requires both my perceptual grasp and conscious integration of the dance.

⁵³ As quoted from Duffy, 1995.

Indeed, South African theatre history, and its legacy, especially in the 1980s under the apartheid government, is full of what Croce might call “victim art”. Protest theatre emerged as a result of the visceral lived experience of black South Africans using theatre as a platform for ‘speaking out’ and for political conscious-raising amongst audiences. With the bans on political meetings and attempts to break the power of the trade unions, theatre in South Africa became a viable platform for raising solidarity and speaking texts that could officially not be spoken. In this instance theatre became what Artaud imagined, not only ‘the mirror’ but performances become important social and political texts to produce self-understanding and indeed, self-reflection on the immediate world around us. This is exemplified by the protest play *WOZA ALBERT!* (1983) in which the two actors (Mbongeni Ngema and Percy Mtwa) and the director (Barney Simon) allowed the script to evolve as history unfolded. Ruth First’s name, for example, was added to the list of great leaders and anti-apartheid heroes raised from the dead at the end of the play. This came on the night that the performers found out that First had been assassinated by a car bomb. The two actors also refused to court favour from audiences when they took their bow at the end of the performance. Preferring to remain sombre and to simply stand, it became a chilling indication that this was not ‘just’ a story but the reality of millions of black people’s lives under apartheid South Africa. What was operating was a type of meta-text that came through the physicality (the embodied “I”) of the two black male South African performers who stood as both the characters in the text and as themselves in the performance space. Thus the body in performance, as is being argued, has the ability to write itself in a self-reflecting act that belies victimhood but claims the discourse of the body to *transmit* certain meanings and power operations socially and historically constructed in society.

Transmission: “being a medium for”⁵⁴ choreographic process

Having argued that dance and performance represent a powerful means of constructing a language with the body, the rest of this chapter reflects on my personal experience, as choreographer, in creating firstly, my 2005 work *TRANSMISSION: Mother to Child*, and

⁵⁴ I use the word ‘medium’ within the ambit of artistic poetic license around my aforementioned (and further discussed in Chapter Five) role as excavator and choreographer of stories written on, and spoken through, the body.

following on, the 2009 work *BLOODLINE*. In speaking around these two dance works and my creative process of making (and writing on and with the body), I claim my own subjective autoethnographic narrative/s as a further critical art work that speaks, in this written text, to the one I created with the body. Both dance works were collaboratively created and deeply self-referential for all the participants. As such I use this written space to reflect on the act of language and its generation in dance, in the manner defined by *The Pocket Oxford English Dictionary* (1992) definition of “transmission”, as “be(ing) a medium for” the choreography of stories written on, and spoken through, the body. A medium conjures otherworldly hidden voices; the secret, the silent and the lost voices – this is what I begin to navigate in reflecting on my autoethnographic journey of looking at my role as dance-maker.

Much of the role of the choreographer, especially in the South African context, has become for me – in an evolving search for a decolonised and democratic choreographic practice – a journey away from imposing my own dance language, my pre-determined dance steps and my dance styles on the collective team of dancers. It has evolved rather towards harnessing and excavating a web of deeply personal narratives (both linguistic and physical) from the dancers and artists involved. In the rehearsal space the dancer is not just an instrument (like the pen that writes another’s thoughts) but the dancer is asked to bring her own personal life narratives and storytelling (both linguistic and physical) to the process. When the FLATFOOT dancer enters the rehearsal space, they know that the creating process that will unfold is not simply one where they will be asked to execute and fulfil steps given to them by myself as choreographer. My creative process always begins with a full day of talking and sharing personal narratives. I propose themes and ideas that I wish to pursue and then I ask the dancers to relate these to their own lives. The dancers are asked to be emotionally and physically present for a process of self-reflexive storytelling where we collectively excavate ideas. I ask the dancers to work from a deeply personal space of self-recognition that then turns outward to stories that embrace our larger sense of community. For *TRANSMISSION: Mother to Child* we began with the very simple reflection of what it means to mother. Three of the dancers in the cast were quite recent mothers and this allowed for stories of childbirth and childcare, while the rest of the cast (both female and male) who were not parents, took up the notion of ‘mothering’ as an act that we all share. The discussion led (as is discussed in more depth later in this section) to deeply conscious discussion around how race and class

also mediate notions of ‘mothering’ and with this came the reflections on various stories of our childhoods. I do not set myself apart in this process but become part of this storytelling so that the ideas I might have as the ‘outside’ choreographer, also begin to circulate in this collective gathering of narratives.

As the discussion and stories unfold, as excavator and choreographer, I take notes and begin to structure a series of cognate ideas. These ideas become the first step in a follow-up day of improvisations. From this physical research and improvisational playing, we begin to generate a series of vignettes that may (or may not) – as we journey on into the creative process – become starting points for bigger creative impulses and dance language.

As choreographer, I begin to use the creative space as one that allows for speaking and listening. While I hold the frame of the work being created (perhaps best understood as the overarching theme or subject), I do not determine or even pre-determine the performed outcomes. My role is to physically and conceptually begin the dance-making, to choose, to select, and to edit and help grow improvised dance material that comes out of specially designed rehearsal processes. In this way, I begin to act as medium, or linguistic choreographic conduit for meaning and its construction; an act which starts very profoundly with my own self and the narratives that emerge in my own body. This process – mine and the dancers involved – is what I will now begin to narrate and unpack.

TRANSMISSION: Mother to Child (2005)

*TRANSMISSION: Mother to Child*⁵⁵ began as a result of two of the female dancers (Marise Kyd and Caroline van Wyk) in our dance company (FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY) having recently given birth. A third dancer, Thulile Bhengu, was also a mother having fallen pregnant six years earlier as an unmarried woman at 18 and having thereby faced very specific family and cultural stigma. Not only did the embodiment of pregnancy shift a physical experience of working with the female body (a process we documented in a previous work called “*SURFACING*” in 2004)

⁵⁵ “*TRANSMISSION: Mother to Child*” was created with FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY as part of a commission for the JOMBA! 2005 Contemporary Dance Festival held in August in Durban, South Africa. The work was then performed again at the Durban Art Gallery as part of the 2005 Human Rights exhibition in November. A video copy of the work has subsequently been shown and discussed with me as choreographer and “medium”, with the delegates of the conference, at the 2006 Nordic Dance Conference (NOFOD) held in Stockholm (Sweden) in January of that year.

but the political implication of birth in a time of HIV/AIDS became a dominant discourse amongst us as dancers. Motherhood was no longer something that was about our generalised idea of mothering, but it began to be part of the existential intelligence of the dancers themselves, and of the physical experience and embodiment of pregnancy, birth and motherhood. As choreographer and as a feminist, I was intrigued with the process of working from the personal to the political, from the visceral body to the choreographed/written text of the final dance work and performance.



Image 17: FLATFOOT dancers Thulile Bhengu (and her child). Marise Kyd (and her child) and Caroline van Wyk (and her child) with Ian ewok Robinson in the background in TRANSMISSION: Mother to Child (2005) Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. PIC: Val Adamson.

With the idea of the personal embodied self-as-agent, I asked the three female dancers to write the text narrative of their pregnancy and birthing and to share both with each other and me the openly discussed and negotiated idea of using this text/material for the beginning of the dance work. The stories that emerged, were deeply personal and extraordinarily specific, and began to offer very challenging discourse around pain, birth and the social constructions that often leave huge silences around these issues for women (and specifically for two of

them, women of colour). These three personal narratives went through a negotiated editorial process and became the spoken voice-over text of the first section of the final choreographed work. The dancers spoke their own (edited) story and danced their own abstracted and symbolic children's birthing on stage. This became a re-claiming of the proscenium arch theatre space, strangely womb-like and yet still so paternal in its framed construction of how we look at the female dancer. For women dancers, and specifically for these three women, we began to challenge the boundary between their performing dancing constructed selves and the reality of their own physical and personal experience of being mothers and dancers. For me as choreographer, writer and 'medium', this negotiated step into the personal embodied lives of the dancers offered a visceral (and perhaps primal?) journey into the reality to women's experience of birth that claimed the discourses of the female body to *transmit* powerful personal text that I would – choreographically – place against the more overtly politicised texts (dancing, spoken and written) around motherhood later in the work.

Transmission, however, is not just about the reciprocity of linguistic meaning and sending through the body, it is also, in the context of this dance work and a further layering of texts, about the highly politicised transmission of blood. This blood is the life-blood of the mother to child, it is the stigma associated with 'mother-to-child-transmission' and it is the blood of a nation (South Africa's first democratic elections happened in 1994) as it too 'gave birth'. I was also overtly and politically aware that *Transmission* also could/did become the metaphoric meta-text of a dance work that itself transmits meaning in a performative space as ultimately it is through the body that I, as choreographer, generate language and meaning. *Transmission* is thus also about learning, mother to child, choreographer to dancer, dancer to audience, body to text, through the self, who we are as South Africans embracing the history, culture and politics of our personal selves.

Blood, and the *transmission* associated with it, is also highly political in the context of a society like South Africa dealing with the pandemic of HIV/AIDS and defining who is 'ill' and who is 'well'. *TRANSMISSION: Mother to Child* thus began to deal with the socially constructed imaging and stigmatising of women as disease carriers; as the transmitters of infection and illness to their birth children. The dance work asked where the men are in this '*transmission*' and why did the stigma for a child's positive HIV status get linguistically (and thus socially) blamed on the mother?

Transmission is also about knowledge; the passing on of history, culture and memory. As a white child growing up under apartheid South Africa, I recall our domestic worker – the transmitter of motherhood to me and my younger sister – wrapping my sister on her back and rocking her in a kind of physical lullaby as she worked. This simple body gesture of comfort and care embodied for me (and still does) a notion of mothering that is most powerful in its gentle care. In *TRANSMISSION: Mother to Child* this remembered physical gesture which spoke to me of the warmth of motherhood, became the basis of the dance language that I began to construct. Thus into the embodied narrative of spoken, written and danced texts by the female dancers, I began to insert my own remembered physical narratives around mothering and being mothered. This is, of course also profoundly about race and class and the South African reality of my time (I was born in 1966), which had many white middle class children raised and mothered by black working-class women. That this was given to me and my sister without any ill-will or anger, remains the grace with which I too have to confront the atrocity of the history, my history, of the country that is my home. On an embodied level of remembering this very simple gesture of rocking a child tied to the back, becomes the *transmission* of a race, class and gender history that, while it is my narrative, it is also one that is physically recognisable. This dance language, adapted and transformed from physical lullabies, thus becomes a dance language that speaks of women’s support and resilience and of a motherhood that cannot ever be free from a political sensibility, be this the paternally ‘written’ “mother-to-child-transmission” naming, or the race and class issues around motherhood in a country like South Africa.



Image 18: FLATFOOT dancers Marise Kyd (and her child) and Nasreen Rasool (and Caroline van Wyk's child) in TRANSMISSION: Mother to Child (2005) Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. PIC: Val Adamson.

The two male dancers (Lenin Shabalala and Sizwe Zulu) enter this female constructed dance space, transformed such that they wear open deconstructed hoop skirts reminiscent of 19th century elite white (perhaps colonial) women. As they walk in, dressed in this manner, they viscerally appear as black men but take on the notion of transgressive embodiment (Salih with Butler, 2004). The dance language I construct for them is faintly reminiscent of traditional *ngoma* and *ndlamu*⁵⁶ and so these two male dancers transmit both a sense of themselves and of discourses that can be written against their represented black male (South African) bodies. That this can be effected in the medium of dance and performance speaks of the multiplicity of readings of texts and a reminder that the body, like all texts, can be read (and performed)

⁵⁶ *Ndlamu* and *Ngoma* are two forms of traditional South African Zulu dance historically executed by men. Originally these forms of dance were performed before battle as a way of harnessing power and finding unison. They are exemplified by big bold leg stamping movements and the ability of the dancers to instantly react to the commands of a leader.

as resistance. In *TRANSMISSION: Mother to Child* this layering of the black male performing body was set against a video installation by Doung Anwar Jahangeer in which he had captured, in 2005, footage of young white children between the ages of 4 and 8 years old being collected by their black domestic workers after school. As the video footage unfolded on the back cyclorama of the theatre space, a sense of South Africa's (still) familiar childcare histories – that intersect with race and class – are still seen in operation in processes of care and mothering in contemporary South Africa. This scene was set against two iconic domestic worker uniforms that were flown into the theatre space above the male dancers. In a very carefully choreographed sequence, these dancers ritually put on the domestic worker uniforms to simply stand and look back at the audience. By so doing, I had hoped to create a palimpsest in meaning and in the performance text that connected the racially gendered care of white children (a text written on my memory and my history) that spoke of absent white mothers, but also of absent father's in a paternally constructed notion that mothering is female. I had hoped this would re-enforce my earlier text around a socially constructed absence of men in the naming of illness and the transmission of HIV *parent*-to-child.



Image 19: FLATFOOT dancers Sizwe Zulu and Lenin Shabala in *TRANSMISSION: Mother to Child* (2005) Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. PIC: Val Adamson.

The work ends finally, with slam poet Iain Ewok Robinson's spoken word poem especially written for this work in which he tells of knowing an "eleven-year-old mother". This 'mother' is both real and an image of our nation, which in 2005 was eleven years on since our first democratic elections. The poem speaks of an eleven-year-old mother who is HIV positive. This spoken text is placed against the performed danced text which has the three female dancers return on stage with their own babies and children. They dance with the babies and children held on their backs and, again the boundary between the performed and the real is broken.

This dance work is a journey from the personal embodied self (of dancer and choreographer), to the public assumptions around the meaning of motherhood. The work faces issues of self-representation, of embodied dancers and actors speaking for themselves as they create, dance, move and write the text of the performance. In this way, these performers and the choreographic process of writing dance, politicises the body as text (written and performed) to speak and transmit meaning and which – with personal and political agency – resists hegemonic notions of being and doing; be this as dancers, choreographers, poets and beyond, as women and mothers.

Finally, in speaking about *TRANSMISSION: Mother to Child* and writing about my choreographic process and the linguistic and physical performed texts that I have created and written, I have taken up the position articulated by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) (as pointed out at the beginning of this chapter) that the body is our prime way of being in the world and thus our best reference for understanding it. That dance is a language that uses the body to write and speak, is linked, in this example, to how race, class and gender is constructed on the body and its representative sense of knowledge (both remembered and constructed) around motherhood and mothering. Dance and the collaborative choreographic process – for me – thus develops a vehicle for *transmission*; it becomes to be one of the ways in which we actively construct shared assumptions and transmit implicit value systems and modes of behaviour. It is also, as has been argued, available for resistance and the power of speaking against the socially and historically written narratives of our lives. For me, as a writer who chooses the linguistics of the physical, I am left with what Randy Martin (2004:59) describes as dance which is a "continuing site of self-recognition". If the phenomenological notion of self as the knower of the world holds, then I claim the writing of this and other dances on the body, as a feminist

(and collaborative) act of re-naming and re-writing (and, I add, decolonising) the world I live in.

BLOODLINES (2009)

The title of this fourth chapter offers the idea of the body as history and memory. Thus far I have argued for the idea of an embodied response to creating, viewing and making dance theatre; a response which is aware of the layer upon layer of power that operates as the texts of the physical begin to speak. These embodied texts are never neutral but offer physical messages that decode and deconstruct the complex narratives of the transient nature of memory and history. I turn now to two historically layered South African dance theatre works, one my own – *BLOODLINES* (2009) and the other, *Body Of Evidence* (2009) by South African choreographer Jay Pather, in order to further navigate my own embodied history writing and making through the texts of the body and South African dance theatre. Both of these South African dance works were created in the same year and both speak in synchronicity of similar themes and ideas. Both of these works were made isolated from one another, so I do not narrate them intertextually as one body of work speaking to another. Instead however, I grab the moment of both works being created and performed in 2009, to reflect on both my own embodied process and, further to relate it to a larger body of contemporary dance work coming out of my own city of Durban. This aids me in looking into the perceived relevance of my own work and process, and also allows me to (marginally perhaps?) open up the discussion to include fellow South African dance makers whose presence and work have influenced my own.

In the programme notes to his choreographic work *Body of Evidence*,⁵⁷ Jay Pather writes:

The body remembers more than through the head. Nerve and vessel, artery and synapse all carry information from point to point, suffusing muscle, bone and cell with a plethora of images and sound, a flicker of light, a scream or a touch. Sometimes we wish that a delete button might annihilate some of the information. But the body instead stores relentlessly, file upon file, bottomless cabinet of memory, individual and collective.

⁵⁷ Pather's work *Body of Evidence* has been performed in numerous locations (theatrical and site-specific) in South Africa, but all reference in this chapter is made to the versions staged at the Playhouse Complex in Durban performed in the Drama Theatre between the 15-17 October 2009.

This sets the tone of Pather's harrowing dance theatre work in which the audience is taken physically, through both the architecture of the human body, and the architecture of memory and our nations not-so-resolved history. Video artist and collaborator on *Body of Evidence*, Storm Janse van Rensburg's images of the internal building blocks of the human body, the spine, the skull the rib-cage, are set against Pather's iconic dreamlike images of bandaged, semi-naked and blinded male dancing bodies. These dancing bodies writhe, leap and draw the audience in a landscape of pain and hurt – both physical and emotional. Interestingly enough these are images of the damaged male who inhabits a very male (paternal) landscape of South Africa's legacy of apartheid suffering. These bandaged men are endlessly supported and pushed up physically by female veteran dancer Ntombi Gasa, whose matriarchal presence on stage offers an image of women endlessly caught up in the rolls of support and nurture. What becomes clear in the work is the almost absence of the female body on stage and in Pather's reading of history; albeit his alternate history. While women dancers are present in Pather's *Body of Evidence*, this is clearly not their story, nor are the women dancer's narrators of their own (highly politicised) stories of pain and hurt within the race landscape of apartheid South Africa.

Using Henry Grey's 1918 classic publication of *Grey's Anatomy* – and the anatomy of the male body and bones – and beginning with the skull, the head, and moving down the spine to finally end with the bones of the feet, Van Rensburg's projected images layered Pather's dance theatre work that asked the audience to also travel from the viscerality of the body; starting with the head, through the heart, to the feet; feet that ultimately are our connection to a fragile earth. Working on the premise that the body retains all the memories of past violence, *Body of Evidence*, makes the audience acutely aware that the "I'm sorry" from apartheid *Vlakplaas* operatives,⁵⁸ has no weight against the remembrances in our cells and blood. Artaud's idea, discussed earlier in this chapter, of theatre being a mirrored "double" (1931) to life, is pushed by Pather's intentions in *Body Of Evidence* where his negotiation of embodied cellular memory is a journey beyond the mirrored reflection, into the broken surfaces of the skin where the cellular memory of Grey's 1918 anatomy is our most authentic history – and indeed, a very physically male history.

⁵⁸ See for example, <https://www.enca.com/look-vlakplaas-apartheids-death-squad-hq>

Thus, in relation to the argument that the body is political, and that dance is text, Pather's work adds a performed reminder that the (male) body is also both history and memory. Within the body, this contested site of struggle, as Foucault (1981) has called it, lies another layer of the multiplicities of meaning. Pather begins to suggest that beneath the skin there is contained a cellular memory of self, and this 'self', like all fluctuations of identity, is both historically and politically imprinted. So, while it has been argued that the body cannot remember pain⁵⁹ in *Body of Evidence*, Pather provokes us to contemplate the contrary: that the cells do indeed remember.

Pather goes on in his programme note to ask, "(We are dealing with) the perpetual containment of memories of violence in our bones ... Why do memories reappear in so many violent forms?" Perhaps the answer to his own question is in the actual performance of the work, of a staged theatrical event which is about an act of memory. If, as Pather is arguing, the body – and the cells – remember, then this dance theatre work is a witnessed reminder for the audience that art and dance, if given space to speak, is part of our nation's visceral remembering.

Perhaps understanding this, *Body of Evidence* also finally forces us to re-consider notions of political forgiveness and forgetting. Some of the most disturbing series of images created in *Body of Evidence* are those portrayed by dancers Siyanda Duma and Neliswa Rushualang. Rushualang spends most of the work walking around the stage trailing loaves of bread in a Marie Antoinette-like costume. Unwilling to see the suffering around her, she walks on while Duma in white face and white suit echoing Fanon's powerful postcolonial "black skin, white masks" (1986), offers us an image of a new order of elites whose allegiance to power has him sycophantically arranging the loaves of bread trailing after this South African black Marie Antoinette. This is a grim reminder of how the political wheel turns, and how forgetting – which Pather is perhaps arguing is a decision not to remember has become a political game around allegiances to power. There is a reminder that history is not about 'truth' but has become a contested space for choices around what is remembered and what is forgotten. Again, it is the male landscape and the primarily male bodies of Pather's almost all male dance company (Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre), where history and the counter-history of the inner

⁵⁹See for example: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/could-memory-traces-exist-in-cell-bodies/>.

body is remembered. While this work *Body of Evidence* offers a very emotive and visceral physical viewing experience for an audience, there are still (as there always are) stories/narratives missing and these, of course, are the texts of the absent tortured and raped South African female bodies which we do not see in this work.

My own work: 'BLOODLINES'

Having previously argued for the embodied 'I' to speak for itself and to claim this as a site of meaning and power, and for dance and performance to represent a powerful means of constructing a language with the body – a language which is both memory and history – the rest of this article reflects on my personal experience, as choreographer, in creating the 2009 work BLOODLINES.⁶⁰ While as mentioned previously, I did not make BLOODLINES in response to Pather's work or even with an awareness of it, I am cognisant that in my own reflections and discussions of process and praxis, that I – as feminist dance maker – made the choice to engage those absent tortured and raped African female bodies. In many ways, these two works could thus sit beside each other (as I hope I am doing in the narrating of them) to offer a type of critical insight of this moment in historical time.

Canadian author, Margaret Atwood has said, "There's the story, then there's the real story, then there's the story of how the story came to be told. Then there's what you leave out of the story. Which is part of the story too (2013:56).

Both Pather and I, in these two synchronistic 2009 dance works, are engaging the postmodern palimpsest of storytelling and truth – as Atwood so incisively puts it above. Neither offer the whole truth but both are working to speak a performed and physical embodied truthfulness that is looking beyond accepted (endlessly) re-written memory and history.

In intent, *BLOODLINES* began as an act of challenge to this very notion of contemporary history and the idea that remembering/memory has become more about, as argued above, contested spaces for choices around what is historically – and hence politically – worth remembering and what is forgotten (or as Atwood puts it (2013), "what is left out"). I claim Ramsey Burt's

⁶⁰. "*BLOODLINES*" was performed first at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre in Durban between the 28 September and 3 October 2009 by **FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY**. It subsequently was invited to the Johannesburg Dance Umbrella in 2010 where it presented two further performances at the Dance Factory in February.

rather potent assertion that my writing from an embodied “I” is about “the way in which performances of (my) choreography have the potential to open up new possibilities for agency within discourses of theatre dance” (2004:34). In speaking around this dance work and my creative process with six dancers, a video artist (Karen Logan) and a Hip-Hop/Beat poet (Iain *ewok* Robinson), I hope to claim the subjective – and thus feminist – narrative as a further art work that speaks, in a written text, to the one I created with my (female) body. Much of the role of choreographer, somebody who writes with the body and the body’s memories (and as I argued earlier) especially in the South African context, is to harness a web of personal narratives from the dancers and artists involved in a performance. In this way, you act as historical medium (something I agreed with above when speaking about my 2005 work *TRANSMISSION*), or linguistic conduit for meaning and its construction; an act which starts with my own self and the narratives that emerge in my own body.

BLOODLINES began with two very significant moments of memory and contemporary history for me. The first involved the 2008 flare up of Xenophobia in South Africa and the constant and visceral bombardment, through our media, of images of dislocated refugees. Some images were of city centres across South Africa housing tents and other temporary dwellings and of hundreds and thousands of (mostly African) refugees sitting or standing with bags and suitcases holding very limited possessions. These images were of dislocated African people living in camps and temporary shelters. Some of these images were of violence; of burning bodies that were the recipients of a lack of historical remembering in how Mozambicans, Congolese, Botswanans, Namibians were key allies in a black liberation anti-apartheid struggle.

The second visceral act that began this work was a long bicycle ride one Sunday where I headed in the direction of South Durban. I chanced upon a strange, small bronze plaque around the Jacobs area commemorating the Women and Children of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) who had lived and died in the British Concentration Camp of 1902. It was a small insignificant little plaque in the middle of roads and parks and houses and people. I thought that it was some scrap from somewhere and out of place but it obsessively stayed with me and so I began to search. Libraries, books and internet; and I feel like I have stumbled on a history that our city (and our country) just does not speak about. It is silent and absent in the political landscape of history, memory and remembrance – and the history and remembrance

of white Afrikaner identity (and suffering). South Durban housed the three biggest concentration camps of Boer Women and Children in South Africa during the second Anglo-Boer War. Merebank was the largest and housed about 8000 inhabitants. The Jacobs and Wentworth camps were set-up in early 1902 about 3 kilometres away from the Merebank camp – each of these housed another 3000 inhabitants. And yet I have lived in Durban for over 38 years and knew nothing of this. Not once in all the history and the 23 years of the revision of our history has this been offered as a narrative that needs telling or remembering. Perhaps, the remembering that these interned women and children (and the men in other camps and war situations), were to become, not 55 years later, the fathers and mothers of the oppressive segregation history of apartheid South Africa, is just too much to contemplate, or for our histories to allow. Perhaps we do not want to be reminded that those who have formerly been oppressed can become even worse oppressors.

Finally, I was faced with two very different – yet painfully similar – historical images and memories of people dislocated and interned in camps; one of contemporary 2008 xenophobia related forced removals and temporary city camps, and the second of the historically distant (and hidden) 1902 white Afrikaner Anglo-Boer War concentration internment camps – both in my home city of Durban. Perhaps, this is where it all begins; with land and the bloodlines that define the ownership of land. Thus, while Pather asks his audience to travel under the skin to seek the cellular memory of violence in the bones in *Body of Evidence*, my *BLOODLINES* began to ask the audience to travel – with a reflection on their own blood lineage – to the place of memory where land and ownership of land began all the great battles of our history. All these battles end up defining a ‘them’ and an ‘us’; those interned in camps and those doing the interning. History, of course, being finally and endlessly (re)written by those who take ownership of the land. All of our multiple South African and African histories are written on the skin, or as Pather argues, under the skin, but all are written in blood.

BLOODLINES was furthermore a collaboration with poet Iain ewok Robinson, who wrote and performed three sections for this dance theatre work. In keeping with the idea of navigating history and memory along the lines of blood and land, “*BLOODLINES*” begins with ewok on stage dressed in the British red coat speaking his lines,

*Bleeding from the holes in my skin where the hooks of history sank in, hooked on the lines,
being drawn towards the end*

*Drawn by the line along the lines we drew
Bleeding on the lines where the hooks pierced through
Now my blood is on the line, I don't draw it, I never drew it
My life on history's line and I'm being drawn through it and I'm bleeding, yes I'm bleeding,
leaving blood where it lands
Where it lands is where the line is at that point in time BUT at that point in time the line is
where the lands is
LANDS defined by LINES.⁶¹*

This poetic spoken text sets up, with the iconic image of *ewok* wearing the British 'red coat', a step back into historical memory of colonial occupation of South Africa. The coat is further, a strongly iconic image of Boer oppression. This first section ends with *ewok* taking the coat off and dragging it along the floor – here the text could be read as marking a bloodline. This moves into dancer Vusi Makanya stepping onto stage, the blackness of his semi naked body a reminder of another type of territory fought over, often annihilated, through Africa's history. He begins to run against video artist Karen Logan's full cyclorama moving image of Durban south coast landscape as seen through a moving vehicle. Huts, people and peri-urban landscapes overwhelm an audience as all three male dancers in FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY (Sifsio Khumalo and S'fiso Ngcobo join Vusi Makanya on stage) performatively travel through the stage landscape.

⁶¹ Robinson, 2010. 64-66.



Image 20: Ian ewok Robinson (in British red coat) in BLOODLINES (2009). Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. Pic: Val Adamson.

In a jolt in time and history, the three female dancers in FLATFOOT (Nobuhle Khawula, Jabu Siphika and Shayna de Kock) emerge on stage dressed in pantaloons and Voortrekker kappies/hats. Against the backdrop of a video image of the white female dancer in FLATFOOT (Shayna de Kock) systematically having her head pushed under dirty urine coloured water contained in a metal bath, the three female dancers create a symbolically duel space of the torture of women (echoing the 1902 concentration camps in South Durban), but also the image of female support and care as the three bodies lift and carry one another across the stage.



Image 21: Jabu Siphika, Shayna de Kock (centre) and Nobuhle Khawula in *BLOODLINES* (2009). Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. Pic: Val Adamson.

Evoking one of dance's most profound challenges, this section asks black female bodies to embody white history, as the white female dancer is also asked, later in the work to embody black African history. Given that *BLOODLINES* does not have a narrative structure, this almost Butleresque (1990) process of performing identities outside of your skin, becomes part of the embodied meaning of this choreographic work. As a white South African with an Afrikaans surname, I am in the act of creating dance work that acts – and is re-enacted – upon primarily black dancing South African bodies. This is navigated as an act of transgression that further

dislocates history. As a choreographer and as a feminist, I am intrigued with the process of working from the personal to the political, from the visceral white body that belongs to me, to the choreographed theatre work that navigates a multiplicity of race and gender histories and memories. I journey, in the collective making and performing of this dance theatre work, into negotiating the performative possibility of embracing the potentially transgressive nature of body somatics and liminality to re-negotiate race, gender, class and indeed nationality. I understand that this “border crossing” (Naficy, 2001) is also part of the decolonising agenda of artistic creativity.

BLOODLINES then moves into the refugee section. Six dancers, with suitcases and torn clothing move in a lateral plane across the stage in slow motion lifting and carrying each other and the cases, sharing burdens and clearly dislocated. These are the moving images of 2008 ‘xenophobia’ refugees, similar to any images of refugees or dislocated peoples across the world. As they travel and eventually exit the stage a voice over of Jacob Zuma talking about white Afrikaners is heard. This is his controversial 2 April 2009 statement calling the Afrikaners “the only truly white tribe of Africa”. Dancers re-enter the stage and are lifted and dropped, working in trios where one dancer is always out of the couple. A video projection of hands pulling the wings off a flying ant (something I now painfully remember doing as a child) plays to Zuma’s words, and the dancers never seem to find a comfortable fit with each other – this is a landscape where who is ‘in’ and who is ‘out’ is never secure and comfortable.



Image 22: Vusi Makanya, Sifiso Khumalo, Sifiso Magesh Ngcobo, Nobuhle Khawula and Shayna de Kock in the 'refugee sections' in *BLOODLINES* (2009). Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. Pic: Val Adamson.

In the final section of the work *ewok* comes back on stage dressed in contemporary identifiable rapper/street clothing to belt out his final poem – a word rhyme that begins the chanting of “who started what stopped who did what to who [...]?” A journey back finally to the issues of land and blood – bloodlines. The dancers, dressed in red, walk on stage carrying the metal baths (imaged from the video of torture/bathing women’s section) and dance in solo and canon and use a kind of gestural physical language around these baths as *ewok* intones:

*I’m taking HIS story and make it MY story to
Take the ME out of YOU and tell me how far that gets you
Killing for a brick using bricks to kill/though stains remain i’m washing my hands still/don’t
trust the
dust/can’t match the mettle/how clean can you keep it when the dust don’t settle.⁶²*

⁶² Robinson, 2010. 67–71.

This collectively created dance work⁶³ is a journey from the personal embodied “I” as choreographer, to the public assumptions around what history and memory/remembering means. The work is rooted in notions of self-representation, of dancers and actors/poets speaking for themselves as they create, dance, move and write the text of the performance. In this way, these performers and the choreographic process of writing and creating dance, politicises the body as text to speak and, as Burt argues, “open(s) up new possibilities for agency within discourses of theatre dance” (2004:34) thus historically and politically resisting hegemony and, as Atwood (2013:56) ironically puts it, “the real story”. Dance making in these two 2009 performance works, for me (and I argue that for Jay Pather as well), thus becomes a vehicle for political and personal struggle. It is one of the ways in which I/we actively reconstruct shared assumptions and choice around which histories are ‘authentic’ and what we are encouraged to remember or forget. I return to Garuba’s notion (discussed in the introduction of the thesis) around alternate ways to imagine the decolonising agenda where he asks that we begin to, “rethink how the object of study itself is constituted and then to reconstruct it and bring about fundamental change” (Garuba, 2015). I take this on not only for re-thinking pedagogy (as discussed in Section One) but also, thus for performance practice and dance making. The choreographic practice – in collaborative manifestations discussed above – thus become a process of decolonising seen in action, in practice and now, significantly, in performance.

⁶³ This concept (and praxis) of ‘collective choreography’ will be explored further and in-depth in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE: EMBODIED STORYTELLING: USING NARRATIVE AS A VEHICLE FOR COLLABORATIVE CHOREOGRAPHIC PRACTICE – A CASE STUDY OF DAYS LIKE THESE (2015) AND MY 2016 HOMELAND TRILOGY (SOUTH AFRICA AND SENEGAL)

Introduction

⁶⁴Continuing to argue for the notion of the embodied “I” and interrogating the politics of autoethnography, this chapter offers an encounter with my own process of conceptualising and choreographing, firstly, *days like these* (2015), and then secondly my *HOMELAND TRILOGY* (2016). Working with Verbatim Theatre methodologies I continue to look at the politics of memory and history (discussed in Chapter Four) and ask if there is a potential crossover between this theatre-making method and the choreographic process. In looking at (firstly) *days like these* (2015), I also begin an interrogation of my own somatic choreographic process with FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY. This is a feminist act of responding to the constructions and play of knowledge and power within and on the moving dancing body: both my own body and those bodies of the six dancers with whom I collaborated for this performance work.

The second part of this chapter continues to interrogate and investigate the dual engagement with narrative and storytelling as a methodology towards collective and collaborative choreographic processes and engages narrative as a theory of making meaning. Narrative theorists for example; Kermode (1979), Wallace (1986), Mitchell (1981) and Ricoeur (1983) investigate in what manner stories both help people make sense of the world as well as how people make sense of stories. While narrative theory is generally located in the realm of literature and words, this chapter follows on from Chapter Three, to continue to look at the interface of words, meaning and the embodiment of using the physical to tell stories. The chapter begins to push a further understanding of Hélène Cixous “*l’écriture féminine*” (1975) to a feminist engagement that looks outside the word/logos and that turns to dance as a more

⁶⁴ Large sections of this Chapter Five have been taken and re-worked from two separate articles written by me. See: A Loots, 2016. *The autoethnographic act of choreography: considering the creative process of storytelling with and on the performative dancing body and the use of Verbatim Theatre methods*. *CRITICAL ARTS*. 30(3):370-391. b. Loots. L. 2018. *Embodied storytelling: using narrative as a vehicle for collaborative choreographic practice – a case study of FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY’S 2016 HOMELAND TRILOGY (South Africa and Senegal)*. *South African Theatre Journal*. 31(1):58–71.

open, fluid and layered way of telling embodied stories. In the second part of this chapter, I reflect upon how the act of storytelling and the act of theorising through narrative, frames my own autoethnographic engagement (see, for example, Holman Jones, 2005) with a trilogy of connected dance works that I collaboratively created with FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY over 2016 which I refer to as the *HOMELAND TRILOGY* – two performed separately in South Africa and the third performed in Senegal – over various time points in 2016. The three works are connected through theme and choreographic intention and were made to stand alone but also, significantly, to be read next to one another. Their connection though being performed in both South and West Africa also becomes a point of my own navigation of identity.

Theatre is a place of stories.

A people are as healthy and confident as the stories they tell themselves. Sick storytellers can make nations sick. Without stories we would go mad. Life would lose its moorings or orientation... Stories can conquer fear, you know. They can make the heart larger.

Ben Okri⁶⁵

At the quintessence, all theatre and performance is an act of storytelling. Sometimes it is the telling of one's own story, sometimes the telling of stories reflected in the imagination, sometimes, as the Nigerian author Ben Okri (above) hints at, it is the stories of history, politics, and of the lives of others. This performative imperative to tell stories is, perhaps, a need to reflect ourselves back to our world, to reflect our world back to us, and to try and make sense of our physical, lived-in realities. Early modernist, Antonin Artaud, as discussed earlier in Chapter Four, declared that theatre's double is life, that all performance events should supposedly hold a mirror up to life, its "double" (1931). Beyond this, Postmodernity (see Connor, 1997) has allowed us to give up the claim to 'truth' in our storytelling and instead we sit with ideas of *our* truth; stories that speak into the gaps left by histories written by conquerors. As discussed earlier, writers and activists, such as Ngũgĩ WaThiong'o (1981) ask us to "de-colonise the mind" so that we, as Africans, can begin to re-remember and re-tell our stories in a way that sheds the legacies of colonial "cultural bombs" (1981:3) that have devalued and often annihilated our stories, and our ability to tell them. Most early second-

⁶⁵ As quoted from: https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/31425.Ben_Okri.

wave feminist activist writing and critical social engagement (see Tong, 1989) has made it abundantly clear that global paternalistic imperatives silenced women's stories. The response from contemporary feminisms in all its ongoing and multifaceted diverse engagements with patriarchy, has seen women (and men) and those living with divergent sexual orientations (for example), beginning to tell, re-tell and re-claim space to speak their stories.

Beyond this, much current post-colonial critical storytelling (see Spivak, 1990) has asked that we begin to look at the ethnography and anthropology of who tells whose story and into the profound politics of allowing space for those historically silenced, in the grand canonical paternalistic claim to 'rightful storytelling', to begin telling their own stories into the gaps of history.

I too am a storyteller. I am a theatre maker, choreographer, dancer, academic, teacher and a feminist. This chapter continues to bring together some of my differing selves as I begin to interrogate, through this academic text and the writing and reflecting process, on my own artistic process as a dance maker and a choreographer. I tell stories in two mediums: the linguistic and the physical, and similarly for all good storytelling, the beginning point is always the self; and more acutely for a dancer and choreographer (and feminist), the body. Theatre dance is my corporeal storytelling medium as I focus specifically on offering this linguistic encounter with my own process of conceptualising and choreographing *days like these* (2015) with FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY.

The lived body as storyteller

As a choreographer, a storyteller of, and on the body, the act of making and doing is mostly instinctual. This intuition or instinct is not, however, simply *a priori*, but has arisen from years of training the body technically (the honing of instincts), of creating and making, of failing and succeeding, of falling and physically finding one's feet again. It comes from being in a body dedicated to the craft of physical storytelling through dance. What I am arguing, perhaps, is the age-old rejection of the Cartesian mind-body split: the assumption that the body is the dark unknown and that mind is light and reason. As alluded to before in Chapter Four, in *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1962) Maurice Merleau-Ponty puts the idea forward that lived experience of the body, by its very visceral being, denies the detachment of subject from object. The idea of the body as something which can both think and perceive, allowed

Merleau-Ponty to coin the phrase “the lived body” (1962:9). He states, “I am not in front of my body, I am in it or rather I am it ... If we can still speak of interpretation in relations to the perceptions of one’s body, we shall have to say that it interprets itself” (1962:150).

This idea of the body ‘interpreting itself’ gives rise to an understanding that human existence is unthinkable or unimaginable in separation from the body – we need a body to think and feel with (Carroll, 2011:252). Fundamental to Merleau-Ponty’s theories is thus the idea of embodiment in which, he argues, we never perceive the world as pure consciousness; consciousness is always enmeshed or tangled up in the visceral flesh, bones and blood of the body. He writes (as quoted in Cavallaro, 1998:88):

The body is primarily a way of being in the world. It is a form of lived experience which is fluid and ever-shifting. And it is also a way of interacting with one’s environment, of shaping it and being shaped by it.

Concurring with this, Totton (2010:21) suggests that “the experience of ‘having’ a body is intrinsic to human experience and a necessary component of ‘becoming’ a body”. The mind/body dualism of subject/object is thus no longer valid but, rather, as Budgeon suggests, the body should be seen as “events that are continually in the process of becoming – as multiplicities that are never just found but are made and remade” (2003:50).

This body that is ‘event’, that is in a process of being made and re-made, reveals this idea of the body as performative. Waskul and Vannini suggest the notion that “The body is always performed, staged and presented; the theatres (*sic*) of the body are raw materials by which the ritual drama of everyday embodied life are produced” (2006:2). The human body, my body, the performative body, is embedded in social practices where the body is not something we ‘have’ but rather something we ‘become’ or ‘do’.

In support of this, Thomas Csordas (1990) attempts to claim power back for the body by defending this concept of embodiment. Embodiment, Csordas argues, implies that the body is something other than, more than, and added to, the physical body. Embodiment is concerned with the ways in which people “inhabit” their bodies so that these become “habituated” (Scheper-Hughes, 1994) so that embodiment is/becomes “all the acquired habits and somatic tactics that represent the cultural arts of using and being in the body (and in the world)” (Scheper-Hughes, 1994:232).

Hence understanding that we *have* a body, *are* a body and *become* a body that we *inhabit* (or “habituate”) a body is key to engaging the world and our experience in it. These are key concepts for those, like me, who tell stories with the body – the act of choreography. Taking up Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the body, my body, as the prime means of communicating with the world (1962), what starts to emerge is the phenomenology of speaking from the embodied “I”. This embodied “I”, the self as the knower and the storyteller (on and with the body), becomes the self-referential conveyer of theory and process; of personal history and memory. This is, by its very performative nature and by the idea of a body becoming (Totton, 2010), a political act (and I continue to argue a decolonising act) which understands the embedded power plays that act through and on the body and is the very substance of a choreographer’s storytelling on and with the body. As Kreigar (2005:350) says:

Bodies tell stories about – and cannot be studies divorced from – the conditions of our existence; bodies tell stories that often – but not always – match people’s stated accounts; and bodies tell stories that people cannot or will not, either because they are unable, forbidden, or choose not to tell.

The choreographer as ethnographer and as auto-ethnographer

Unless I am choreographing a solo on and for myself, that I will then perform with my body on stage, my act of dance theatre storytelling is a communal one where I act on, am acted upon, by other bodies – the dancers. Kreigar’s “bodies [that] tell stories” (2005:350) are not simply my own but those that I engage with in the creative process. As a choreographer I am thus consciously an ethnographer who works out the stories of other bodies, who uses my craft to read meaning into other (dancing) bodies’ constructions of evolving self, identity, culture and being. An adult dancing body does not, for example, walk into the rehearsal studio as a blank slate; that dancer comes with history and memory written on the embodied self. As a choreographer I can choose to avoid this body history by trying to work for physical constructions of a (potentially impossible) ‘neutral body’ or disciplining my own physical technique and way of moving onto this other body (all of which are and have been present in the history of contemporary and classical theatre dance). Alternately, I could understand the power of the dancer’s body full of its own history and memory and its own “becoming” (Budgeon, 2003:50) and work from this place where I seek not to control and discipline but rather to create a dialogue of storytelling. This dialogue must, out of necessity, begin with me – my own body – and so any act of choreography is also an act of auto-ethnography.

Auto-ethnography is a contemporary movement towards personalised (mostly qualitative) research. Holt defines auto-ethnography as “highly personalised accounts where authors draw on their own experiences to extend understanding of a particular discipline or culture” (2003:18). This research methodology emanates from one’s own experiential body. McIlveen clarifies that, “the prominent features of autoethnography as writing about oneself as a researcher-practitioner, not an autobiographer, is a specific form of critical enquiry that is embedded in theory and practice” (2008:15).

This linking of theory and practice (perhaps another outdated Cartesian division that assumes we can only make sense of the world outside of living in it), is important in auto-ethnography as various criticisms of this methodology claim that a singular point of view (one body) does not allow for truthful social, political and cultural reflection and theorising. As a feminist choreographer working in South Africa, who better to investigate my own process and my own work – work that emanates from my body – than me, the embodied “I”. Far from offering a singular (and thus potentially untruthful) account, my body claims its right to tell stories (both verbal and choreographic). As spoken about earlier in this chapter, Gayatri Spivak (1990), further argues that ‘neutrality’ and ‘truthfulness’ in speaking almost always assumes the centre hegemony of a white middle class (usually) First World male and is thus a violence on the female body which does not embody – or seek to embody – the powerful (and mostly debilitating) discourse of the centre. Dance is one example of a physical and lived experience of using the body to write and create meaning; of exerting the “I” into a position of agency. And through my own agency as auto-ethnographer, perhaps I begin to embody the compassionate working methodology of becoming a choreographic ethnographer that enables rather than dis-ables/silences/disciplines other bodies against developing Spivak’s beautifully named, and decolonial, “rage against ... history” (1990:62).

Further, I am reminded by Wall (2008:9), fighting to remember the early second-wave feminist slogan and point of visceral theorising; ‘the personal is political’, that:

[...] those that complain that personal narratives emphasise a single, speaking subject fail to realise that no individual voice speaks apart from a societal framework of constructed meaning. There is a direct and inextricable link between the personal and the cultural. Thus, rich meaning, culturally relevant personal experience, and an intense motivation to know are what typify and strengthen autoethnography.

Linking the personal and the cultural – Verbatim Theatre⁶⁶ as a source/methodology

At the time of creating *days like these*, FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY comprised six full-time professional dancers. Naming them is an act of acknowledging their bodies: Jabu Siphika, Julia Wilson, Zinhle Nzama, Sifiso Majola, Tshediso Kabulu and Sifiso Khumalo. They ranged, at the time, in age from 23 to 39 years and some had been working with me for over ten years of the company's fifteen-year history. In this time of moving, dancing and lifting each other, where the leaking sweat of our dancers' bodies have connected and rubbed off on one another, I have found myself in the position of listening and learning some of the life stories of these dancers. I have listened, during a coffee break, from the small stories told around raising children, and what might be on offer for dinner that night, to the bigger stories of loss and love, and illness. In short, I, as a choreographer and a teacher, have been participant and witness to their "bodies becoming" (Totton, 2010:21). But like all audience for a story, this is never a neutral engagement. The continued legacy of race and apartheid within South Africa, gender and gendered differences, the age gaps, and mother tongue language differences (for example) between us has also meant that the listening and telling of stories is layered with history and politics. The body itself is marked by difference, age, race and gender. So while in the dance studio and in the act of creating a dance performance, we experience what Mohanty (1991:8) calls a "common context of struggles" within an "imagined community" (1991:8), the reality of our "lived bodies" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962:9) is that we are diverse and different. This very diversity and difference are, in the context of South African history, not always a place of meeting but can, and most often has been, a place of misunderstanding and violence.

I became fascinated by this dual possibility of a temporal imagined common context which I perceived as the public space that theatre and performance temporarily offers us, and the divergence of our lived bodies; which, in essence are our own personal bodily stories and the cognate becoming we experience in storytelling. My engagement in the physical lived bodies and shared life stories of the dancers with whom I was working offered my own body – as storytellers and dance makers too – the chance to see how we abandon the grand narratives of history that have so often been written and silenced us, to find a performative place where

⁶⁶ See, for example: <http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/video/an-introduction-to-verbatim-theatre>.

we could accurately (truthfully) speak ourselves into agency. I wanted to see if Garuba's claim towards decolonisation and to alternate pedagogy, "to rethink how the object of study itself is constituted and then to reconstruct it and bring about fundamental change" (Garuba, 2015:npn), was possible in the process of dance making and choreography.

Wanting to create a process of making and embodying dance that allowed the personal and the divergent to speak truth from the lived body, I became fascinated by the Verbatim Theatre movement that began in Europe in the early 1960s and which began to see a major rebirth in the early 1990s in Britain and America. Verbatim Theatre has emerged in theatre history at times of social and political distress where this methodology of theatre making is seen as 'truthful' and as offering document or even testimony. It is also loosely referred to as Documentary Theatre and has, as its core, the methodology where the text and the spoken words are generated by interviews with real people. As Cantrell (2012)⁶⁷ says:

In its strictest form, verbatim theatre-makers use real people's words exclusively, and take this testimony from recorded interviews. However, the form is more malleable than this, and writers have frequently combined interview material ... or used reported and remembered speech rather than recorded testimony. There is an overlap between verbatim theatre and documentary theatre, and other kinds of fact-based drama, such as testimonial theatre (in which an individual works with a writer to tell their own story) and tribunal theatre (edited from court transcripts).

Verbatim Theatre requires the theatre maker to engage a community around an issue, to use the actual spoken words of those who find themselves, bodily and politically, in the situation. The final theatre work is then constructed out of these lived stories and thus carries the mark of being 'real' and 'authentic'. Early on in Verbatim Theatre history, interviews were recorded on tape machines/recording devices and actors would sometimes spend hours of rehearsal time using these recordings to get not only words right, but dialect, intonation and original speech rhythms correct – such was the detail towards authenticity or the transfer of the real story to the performer/actor. Essentially though, the final performance of the stories was assigned to an actor, and the final construction of the theatre work was left to a director/playwright.

I began to ask myself if there could be a potential crossover between this Verbatim theatre making method and the choreographic process. For me, having spent nearly 25 years making

⁶⁷ <http://www.dramaonlinelibrary.co.uk/genres/verbatim-theatre-iid-2551>.

choreography for the stage, endlessly creating dance, has led to a weariness (and even boredom) around the sheer monotony of making ‘dance steps’. This no longer holds too much interest for me and this choreographic methodology of the all-knowing dance-maker coming into the studio instructing unsuspecting bodies to imitate and replicate steps given from ‘the master’ seemed to echo all the power plays that I have spent my life trying to deconstruct and decolonise, be they (for example) colonial, gendered and paternalistic, or about race hierarchies. If I am to claim my own “body becoming” (Totton, 2010:21), and the agency of embodiment, then surely, as a feminist, an artist and an activist, I should afford this to those I work alongside – the dancers.

So, the evolving methodology of my own choreographic embodied process begins to draw on Verbatim Theatre methodology in that I am constantly asking the dancers (in a collaborative process) to bring their own life experience – through their bodies – into the dance theatre we make. Working with guided improvisation and guided physical dance play in the studio, I will ask the dancers to take verbal or physical ideas given by myself and ask them to generate dance material on their own bodies; material that is both personal and which ‘fits’ the idiosyncrasies of their individual body movement patterns. In this way the dance material is both deeply personal and is physically resolved on the body performing it I then use this dance material and cut, edit, re-arrange, re-shape, create duets, and sometimes re-choreograph in a manner that suits my vision of the whole. In this way, the dancers present me, as a choreographer, with the stories they write on their own bodies. As a choreographer, I thus begin to think of myself as a type of ‘collector of stories’; some of them are my own, but others come from the dancers with whom I am working.

While this evolving process or methodology of collective and collaborative choreography (that begins with verbal and physical processes of gathering stories and small memories), begins in the earlier works discussed in Chapter Four, it is grounded in the work *days like these*. This is the first dance work that I have made in which I almost completely abandoned making any ‘steps’ at all and which relied almost entirely on movements and stories told (verbally and physically) by the dancers in the process that unfolded. In working with verbatim and testing this theatrical methodology into dance, I stepped away from any physical impositions of dance language and took on the newly defined choreographic role as a ‘collector of stories’, as being one of structuring, editing, staging, layering and theatricalising the work. I do not imply that

these are processes that choreographers have not taken on – in some shape or form – in the evolution of the art of contemporary dance making, but what is offered here, is the politics of this re-evaluation and socio-political definition of the role of choreographer. In the process of wanting to decolonise processes and ways of being and thinking as a South African dance maker, and in my desire to open up space for speaking and listening, these are some of the methodological strategies that I have begun to explore. As such, when I did intervene into dance languages offered by dancers it was in the role of extending ideas offered, questioning choice made, and pushing for clarity in the physical memories/vignettes presented. This methodology of being an artist that works in the physicality of dance, is evolving for me. In the 2016 *HOMELAND TRILOGY* (as will be discussed later in this chapter), I worked with a combination of this process of collecting stories, but I also journeyed back – alongside this – into offering my own physical stories as well – I made (choreographed) my own dancer vignettes that I gave and shared with the dancers. This interplay between what is historically understood as choreography (making steps) and my evolving methodology of excavating and collecting stories (both verbal and physical) is an interchange that continues to grow.

*days like these (2015)*⁶⁸

days like these (2015) began with the little stories told between myself and the dancers; the small moments of personal narrative and storytelling shared and offered in everyday conversation in the meeting of our seven divergent South African lives; stories often told during a tea break, after a technique class, or between the making and doing of the daily life of a dancer. These narrative offerings often stayed with me as they offered a deeply personal and often physical glimpse into another life. Sometimes I was struck by the familiarity (of losing a grandparent or of being ill) and sometimes it was the stark difference that gripped me (of dancers growing up, for example, in an apartheid defined township, of being a young black boy being forced to witness race violence).

⁶⁸ *days like these* was first staged at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre (Durban, South Africa) in March 2015. This is a proscenium arch theatre. It was performed by FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY with choreography by Lliane Loots in collaboration with the dancers. It featured film and video installation by Durban filmmaker Karen Logan, and lighting by Wesley Maherry. *days like these* was subsequently invited to be performed at the artSpace (Durban) Gallery on the 26 June 2015 where it was restaged for a thrust or surround gallery type performance space. In 2016, the work was invited to the main dance platform for the South African National Arts Festival held in Grahamstown in July.

As a curator/choreographer (as hinted before, a 'medium') and as an ethnographer and auto-ethnographer, I began *days like these* (2015) with a clear two-month rehearsal process planned out. The first part of the rehearsal process was spent away from the dancing moving body, where I asked the dancers to travel within their own lives and bring instead, in written form, specifically focused stories (or what we called 'memories') of their lives. I asked them to focus on my chosen three themes of politics, love and loss, and food, and for each theme they had to bring three memories or stories. No memory was too big nor too small to be considered and we would simply tell them to each other without censoring or editing. I also emphasised that for this phase we would not record stories but simply listen and select. I imagined, stepping into the process, that it would be like a story swap and that I would, verbatim style, begin to pick those stories that resonated with my own larger vision of the work – a vision that was beginning to see that the small and seemingly insignificant memories, when placed and performatively structured against one another, begin to tell a bigger story themselves of what it means to be a contemporary South African. As Wall (2008:9) echoes, I was interested in this "link between the personal and the cultural".

The reality of this phase of the process, however, surprised all of us. What was intended as a one-week process took two weeks and involved a deep and very personal dialogue between us. The six dancers punched in with stories that had us laughing, crying, and observing our intense race, class, gender and sexuality differences, but also allowed us to weigh in on shifting commonality. The telling became a cathartic process, not unlike giving testimony. Surprisingly it became clear how many stories there were and how much, in hindsight and as the process got underway, we needed to be telling them. One of the dancers, Zinhle Nzama, shared after the process that she was "terrified that I would have nothing to say and no stories to tell" but as the process evolved, she remarks: "I found I had literally hundreds of what we called 'memories' and had to actually sit at night and decide what to choose to tell – this was a surprise for me."⁶⁹

Despite the clear and negotiated goal of using these stories – verbatim – in the final performance, what also emerged was the need for myself and the dancers to be able to articulate when a memory/story was to be kept open for only ourselves in the rehearsal room,

⁶⁹ These comments were taken from personal interviews, debriefings and discussion sessions conducted with me and the cast collectively after the process of making *"days like these"*.

and when a memory/story could be offered for shared public telling. This overwhelming need to talk and to listen, in this phase of the rehearsals, thus meant that some of the insights offered were not for the final performance. Some memories had to remain personal, being too close to the bone and the blood. Spivak (1990:62) has pointed out it is not only about who speaks but also about who listens and so, as the ethnographer/auto-ethnographer I willingly re-claimed the rehearsal and theatrical and performative space as a site of both speaking and listening. Echoing this, the dancers and I were amazed on the nights of the performances how the audience, in an unprecedented manner, all wanted us to listen to stories they had to tell; stories that keyed into the final performance choices. The dancers and I were literally cornered by audience members after each show. It seems that we had dug into a “personal and cultural” (Wall, 2008:9) need to speak and to be heard.

What also intrigued me in the initial storytelling phase was the manner in which the dancers demanded that I, as the curator and collector, should also tell my own related stories. I think the feelings of exposure and vulnerability shift if everyone participates, so that the idea of a dispassionate ‘collector’ is done away with. I was not exempt (as the perceived outside ‘authorial’ “I”) from bringing my own memories to the process and revealing my own histories. So while it was clear that this work would be about the real lives of the dancers and that their stories would form the fabric of connected meaning, my own embodied storytelling self, stepped into the process.

Like a Verbatim Theatre director, the final selection of stories and the ordering was left to me and once selected we worked with the Durban filmmaker Karen Logan to record them. The recording of these spoken stories was thus the second verbatim telling of them and we decided to film the stories being told in a close-up shot for intimacy. Furthermore, the final theatre projections would be viewed on hanging cloth on stage thus affording the talking heads to be taken *into* the dance happening on stage. This was a way of keeping both the verbal and physical dance storytelling all connected. Once I had selected the stories and what narrative would go into what section, I left the filmmaker the choice of how the selected stories could and would be broken up and interrupted by each other.

We finally ordered the sections according to each dancer and to the choice of his or her main narrative chosen. So, *days like these*, for example, starts with Sifiso Khumalo’s ‘section’ which

we called “Clermont” in reference to his stories about growing up as a young back boy in Durban’s Clermont Township during apartheid. His story and section also carried the political narrative of Julia Wilson and Jabu Siphika and so the embodied narratives of whiteness from Wilson, and of being taken away from your township home to live in the relative safety of the rural areas (via Siphika) are all spliced with Khumalo’s memories of apartheid and race violence and warfare.

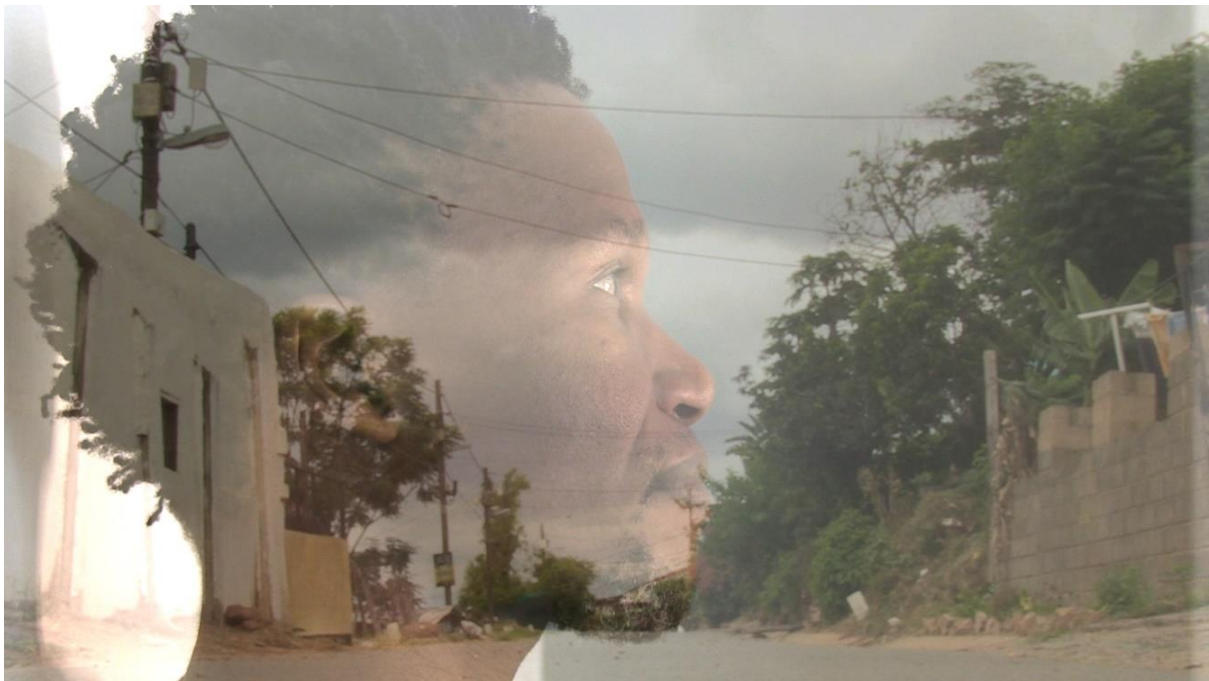


Image 23: Video still from Sifiso Khumalo’s “Clermont” sections in days like these (2015). Image courtesy of Karen Logan.

In Julia Wilson’s section [Section Six: “*Julia Wilson and The Grandmothers*”], for example, we collated all the stories about grandmothers and about the love and the loss in such a way that Wilson’s own memory of a World War II grandmother, who cooked in the army trenches, was spliced with various other memories across race and gender, of the loss of a grandmother who was the primary parent (in the case of Zinhle Nzama) and the need to leave a grandmother behind in the rural areas when moving to the urban area to look for work (Sifiso Khumalo). The tenderness of love across three generations is embodied and offers one of the few transient moments of narrative connectedness in *days like these*.



Image 24: Video still from Julia Wilson’s “Grandmothers” sections in *days like these* (2015). Image courtesy of Karen Logan.

The filmic visual storytelling took on one further layer in *days like these* as I asked all the dancers to identify one physical place in Durban (our geo-political landscape) that they felt offered another visual key into who and what they are. Karen Logan travelled with them to these public spaces and filmed them performing selected solo dance material generated with me in the studio. These “Place Films” as we called them, were projected onto the back cyclorama of the theatre and formed the final loop (or setting) into the interior landscape of the performance of *days like these*. Sifiso Khumalo, for example, chose a prominent road in Clermont Township while Julia Wilson chose an overgrown, unused and badly cared for public children’s park near her home (the same home where she grew up).



Image 25: FLATFOOT dancers Tshediso Kabulu, Zinhle Nzama (being lifted), Sifiso Khumalo and Julia Wilson in a performance photo from days like these and the “Grandmother’s” sections. Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. PIC: Val Adamson.

What I have not discussed so far, finally, is how we used this storytelling and collecting process to come back to the body, to generate the physical stories of the final dance performance.

Turning the speaking voice into the speaking body

In discussing the idea of “embodied writing”, Anderson brings a very nuanced understanding and experience of the body into the process of writing “relaying human experience from the inside out and entwining in words our senses with the sense of the world, embodied writing affirms human life as embedded in the sensual world in which we live our lives” (2001:84).

For me, Anderson’s idea of a sensory moving from “the inside out” (2001:84) seems to be directly linked to the idea of choreography where movement takes on a state of “becoming” (Totton, 2010:21) as the impulses – be they physical, psychological or intellectual – drive the body to move or be moved. And given that our bodies are not something outside of ourselves, that we are our bodies (Waskul & Vannini, 2006), as we dance and choreograph, we begin to tell stories – our deeply personal stories – that invite an audience to find a “sympathetic

resonance” This “sympathetic resonance”, Anderson goes on to explain, is by its very nature: “visceral ... and kinesthetic” (2001:84). This is the speaking body, and it suggests that this internal corporeal movement from “the inside out” (2001:84) is how meaning is made and in turn, sympathetically, understood or read.

In *days like these* I began to understand my role as a choreographer as both ethnography and auto-ethnography in that I took on Klein’s notion that choreography is a “creative act of setting the conditions for things to happen, the choreographer as navigator, negotiator and architect of a fluid movement that he/she, himself, herself is part of” (2007:1082). Thus in the same way that I set the conditions or framework for phase one of the rehearsal process (the excavation of our stories or ‘memories’), I was equally aware that the process of finding the dance language and dance material (the excavation of the speaking body’s memories) would work in a similarly archaeological manner. So while my corporal body was present in the rehearsal room, creating and finding my own embodied dance language and choreographic signature for *days like these*, I was equally mindful of the other six bodies of the dancers who, quite literally, brought their embodied histories – histories written on their bodies – into the process.

Roche speaks about dancers as “a fluid and mutable body-in-flux with the creative potential to significantly influence the outcome of the choreographic process” (2011:105). I am, of course, strongly interested in how this idea of working on and with other bodies – dancers’ embodied selves – challenges the traditional, and often hierarchical, relationships between dance maker and dance performer. I am interested, too, in how this choreography of excavation and “negotiation” (Klein, 2007:1082) thus allows for difference that I begin to navigate my way through; identities and embodied histories of race, gender, sexualities and even ages that are not my own. In fact, these embodied differences, like those in the unearthed spoken ‘memories’ become the very fabric that holds *days like these* (in process and in performance) together.

As a choreographer I worked with improvisation where the dancers’ individual bodies were asked to resolve various tasks given to them as they related to the verbal stories/memories selected. Mostly we worked on our own stories/memories, where for example, dealing with the male rape of a gay friend by men out to punish homosexuality as ‘un-African’, was

choreographically resolved by the dancer (Tshediso Kabulu) who had offered this story. But into his embodied memory/performative space, I placed two other male bodies/dancers that were equally able to find a corporal connection to acts of social and gendered violence perpetrated by one man against another man, and so the last and final performance section of *days like these* starts to layer difference and, cognately, an “imagined community” (Mohanty, 1991:8). In this way, the idea of embodied improvisation keys into the methodology of Verbatim Theatre where the visceral dance language comes from the speaking body of the dancers – and my role as the choreographer/navigator/negotiator (Klein, 2007:1082) is to frame, to generate the impulse for creation, to edit and to fix dance languages, and to be the “architect” (Klein, 2007:1082) who imagines the final structure and asks a team to build with her.

In the end, too, questions arise around who takes ownership of this final performance work. Given the embodied in-put and sheer labour of the dancers, given the nature of Verbatim/improvised choreographic processes, and given the desire by myself as a feminist to create non-paternalistic hierarchies within my creative methodologies of choreographing, I am left wanting (maybe needing) to share ownership.

Strategies for this, while by no means complete, involve, firstly, always crediting the dancers as co-choreographers of a creation (for example the programme for *days like these* states that the work is ‘choreographed by Lliane Loots in collaboration with the dancers). Secondly, by intentionally not putting my own name on posters and publicity material but rather promoting each performance season by selling it as FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY – so the communal sense of the company is consistently profiled. And finally, and perhaps most significantly, to make sure that when dancers come and work with me, I make them consciously aware of our working methodology and of the nature of our working process. This is not, after all, all the preferred working process of all dancers. Some dance training still continues to focus exclusively on a very narrow physical definition of a body in such a way that (for example) height of leg, turn-out and ability to do four turns, constitutes training. This training alone does not and will never prepare a dancer for improvisation and cognate embodied dance work – as has been significantly spoken about in Section One of this thesis. I am more interested in a speaking body, a body understood to have corporal history and memory, a body that, through physical dance training **and** embodied living, continues to be in the state of

“becoming” (Totton, 2010:21) – a body that is willing to think, feel and speak. This is, for me, as I write auto-ethnographically, what moves me from the “inside out” (Anderson, 2001:84) and is, in its own way, finally, a choreographic act.

Finding the right sound – music choices for days like these

An area that I have, thus far, not navigated in this thesis is the relationship of music to dance and while this is of itself a very worthy area of potential further research for me, it has not been my stated focus. But given that *days like these* (as has been discussed above) relied so heavily on my growing methodological role of choreographer as being one of structuring, editing, staging, layering and theatricalising the work, it becomes germane to also begin to offer some discussion of how music and sound was selected or chosen for this work. In ‘collecting’ and finally choreographically structuring these verbatim physical stories, I also took on the role of finding the ‘right sound’ for each section of *days like these*. Given that each section also contained spoken and filmic voice overs, the music or sound needed to add a further layering to the dance work. In this layering of dance, film/video, spoken words, lighting and now music, the emphasis for me was to seek cognate and atmospheric sound that allowed the aural/audio to be one of the key binding agents to the final dance work. A binding agent, by definition, cannot overpower or change flavours, it has to hold together and ground that which is present.

For *days like these* this meant that the dance came first, and the sound/music came second. As choreographer/collector/excavator, I could not know or even explore the possible sound of the danced narratives until they were quite far into creative process. This opens up a complex relationship of dance to music/sound as the common assumption is that dance is made to the music – that music (and perhaps rhythm) is understood⁷⁰ as the impulse to making dance. Historically, choreographers like Merce Cunningham, and his seminal collaborations with composer John Cage (for example),⁷¹ have upended the notions that dance is inextricably bound to the music, offering instead, ideas that music and dance can simply be two art forms that occupy the same time and space, that music can randomly be situated against dance, and that dance can indeed work through and against music and not

⁷⁰ See, for example, <http://manuelmarino.com/relationship-dance-music/>.

⁷¹ While much has been written on the Cage/Cunningham collaborations, the following offers a very interesting discussion: Raskauskas, 2017.

be related to it either in form or rhythm. This kind of contemporary postmodern freeing up of music and its relationship to dance and dance-making, offers a contemporary choreographer an infinite series of possibilities to consider. If, as was the case with *days like these*, the dance creation and storytelling comes first, and the music second, how then do the dancers and the choreographer allow for this meeting of music and choreography in time and space? Since I was not working with a Cunningham/Cage-like experiment of (for example) the music arriving on the night of the dance performance, once the music was selected and the 'sound' agreed upon for each section of *days like these*, the rehearsal process did allow for a closer and perhaps evolving synergistic relationship that – by its very nature – had the music influence the dance even if this meant (simply) shifts in tempo. I was open, as were the dancers, to allowing the final music choices – brought into the rehearsal process after the danced and spoken stories were excavated and created – to also begin to edit, shape and shift the evolving choreographic process as we worked towards the final staging and performances.

Thus, while there is some measure of writing on the generic contemporary relationship of dance to music, most of it sits within the popular domain.⁷² And while much has been written on very specific examples of choreographers working with specific musical scores (South Africa's Dada Masilo with Tchaikovsky, and American Mark Morris with J.S. Bach⁷³ as two of many such examples), the rather enigmatic way in which dance makers go about choosing music is still under researched. It is somatically difficult terrain as it also sits alongside the difficulty of a choreographer trying to explain why they chose one way of moving over another, or one direction in space over another, and why a phrase of movements is made in the way it is. In part, this Section Two of the thesis is attempting to unpack my autoethnographic ways of making these liminal decisions and choices and the difficulty of this resonates in the fact that I journey mostly into unpacking my *process* as a way in. This is the murky territory of circumnavigating a discussion of artistic 'instinct'. Instinct is not, of course neutral. 'Instinct' is born for years of training both mind and body, of years spent in dance studios and in rehearsals, of decades spent watching dance, of physically and intellectually negotiating dance process and practice. 'Instinct' becomes an embodied sense of knowing that Merleau-Ponty (1962) reminds us is always related to the physical experience of living in

⁷² See, for example, Brenshofl, 2014. Simonian, 2011.

⁷³ For a review of the Mark Morris and cellist Yo-Yo Ma collaborations with J.S. Bach's music see; Moy & Choi, 1999.

and with a body. Merleau-Ponty writes, “[The body] is a form of lived experience which is fluid and ever-shifting. And it is also a way of interacting with one’s environment, of shaping it and being shaped by it” (as quoted above, in Cavallaro, 1998:88):

This bodily and somatic ‘instinct’ that chooses music that ‘feels right’ and choreographic steps and pathways that ‘make sense’ are thus shaped by a constantly evolving life history, dance memory, and environment of dedicated (and evolving) art-making.

In *days like these* each section had a different sound and needed to also fit alongside the other sections such that the final dance work felt holistic and integrated. This layering of the music and sound into the dance, asked me to also to listen to the dancer’s stories in another way; to begin to ‘hear’ the feeling and mood. While I will not navigate all the final music choice, I will briefly speak about three of them.

For Sifiso Khumalo’s “Cleremont Section”, given the overt political childhood memories engaged in the chosen narratives, I looked to Jürgen Bräuninger – a local Durban composer – and his curated compilation of various soundscape (in collaboration with local and international artists) in a collection titled *Southern Cones – Music out of Africa and South America* (Leonardo Music Journal CD Series Volume 10). Rather than easy listening music, this album offers some very intriguing localised African sounds that evolved out of Bräuninger and his fellow musicians/composers synthesizing both traditional and contemporary African voices and instruments into a cross-cultural synthesis of sound. The use of human voices and distorted rallying political cries set against spliced rhythms and short bursts of melody offered, for me, a layering that gave aural context to the evolving choreography.

For Julia Wilson’s section (in rehearsal fondly named the ‘grandmother section’ as it navigated various memories of grandmothers), I finally settled on minimalist piano compositions by South African/Irish composer Kevin Volans called *Chandos* (with the Netherlands Wind Ensemble) (1997/2000). This musical compositions for a single piano offer a faintly haunting half melody that is constantly interrupted by large tracks of silence in the score, and added what I felt was a somatic melancholy to the spoken (and danced) memories of these grandmothers.

Sifiso Majola’s section, which finally evolved into a duet between Majola and Jabu Siphika, offers Majola’s voice over which questions the politics of language, meaning and identity for

a young black man who battles to understand how the idiomatic meanings in *isiZulu* becomes bluntly translated into English where no fluidity of multiple meaning is possible. The filmic narrative of this work was Majola himself dancing his original solo on the giant human size chess board that sits outside one of Durban's popular shopping malls. The checkered black and white squares over which Majola moves with fluidity and grace, filmed slightly from above, is a beautiful and stark visual narrative that echoes his story. In a bold and, what I hoped might be, a provocative musical choice, I used J.S. Bach's unaccompanied Cello Suite no.4 in E-flat major (played by virtuoso cello player Yo-Yo Ma). The dual complexity and strangely firm rhythms of this Cello Suite allowed the rigid black and white squares of the chess board, and then the fluid grace of Majola and Siphika's dancing bodies, to find a choreographic and music 'fit' that also hinted faintly at the colonial ownership of sound and language.

These music choices were not made randomly or, indeed, lightly. The variables of layering the final dance work and honouring the voices (both spoken and physical) in this Verbatim dance methodology of excavating and collecting for *days like these*, required key pivotal choices of sound and music. After negotiating endless processes of shared dance collaboration, the sound could not be imposed but needed to be harnessed as part of a bigger narrative for the whole work. While I took on the role of finding the sound for each section, no music was finally chosen and worked with that was not collectively agreed upon.

The waltz that ends it all

I chose to end *days like these* with a form of embodied and visual confession. After the intensity of the interior, and simultaneously public/private storytelling of text and body, of memory and flesh, the dancers return to the stage: men in suits and women in evening dresses. The body is covered and dressed – it is ready for performance. The six dancers carry with them a swathe of white cloth. In a performativity act, facing the audience head on at the front of the proscenium arch of the theatre, the six dancers tie the cloths over their faces effectively cutting off any expression and any sense of individuality. To the strains of Kate Gibson's remake of Leonard Cohen's "dance me to the end of love", the dancers couple off and begin the Viennese waltz that continues to circle and circle as the lights fade to a final black-out. This is simultaneously a parody of the waltz of life; the circles of time and memory

that bodies – all bodies – endure and survive as part of the condition of being human. It is also the glamour of the waltz set against the violence of the image of faces shrouded that echoes apartheid’s water torture methods used against detainees (and a method of torture more recently made public through images of Guantanamo Bay prisoners)⁷⁴ It is also, finally an image reminiscent of René Magritte’s 1928 painting called “Les Amants” (The Lovers), where a man and a woman kiss intimately but with white shrouds over their faces. It echoes both the deeply intimate act of lovers kissing, but also of anonymity; of presence and concealment.



Image 26: The final waltz section of *days like these*. Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. PIC: Val Adamson

This ‘presence and concealment’ is, for me, the final statement as a choreographer and a storyteller that I wish to make both for *days like these*, but also for this text written on a laptop with words; no less a visceral encounter of mind, heart and body. In the presence of the storytelling body and the embodied sense of self, there is always concealment and camouflage. Like the choices a choreographer makes as to what finally goes onto the stage, and like our internal process of deciding which stories were for us only and which could be

⁷⁴ See for example, : <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/01/21/americas/guantanamo-bay-prisoner-book/>.

made public in *days like these*, our sense of bodily survival – much like the making of theatre and the telling of a story – asks us to construct, and then re-construct, and then de-construct, in an endless interplay of private and public. For me, this is a profoundly gendered understanding of both my craft, my art, and of myself and my body. This too is the value of an ethnographic and auto-ethnographic study: that we keep meaning open, fluid and multiple in an interplay of self in relationship to a constantly shifting world and to the practice of making art. This is finally, for me, a democratising and feminist impulse that honours multiple voices and processes, and which opens up rather than shuts down.

FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY – bodies continuing to meet to tell stories

The home base of FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY, as already discussed in Section One, is located in the heart of the East coast of South Africa in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. It is nestled in the centre of the warm ocean facing city of Durban. This geographical location is important as it offers a sense of place and a unique flavour to this contemporary dance company. Working with the politics of memory and history FLATFOOT has developed a unique 15-year performance identity as a contemporary South African dance company that is known to offer socially charged dance theatre work. Working from a contemporary based training that includes a confluence of Graham, Hawkins, Limon, Horton, and Release Technique, the company also takes ballet class once a week and has a strong pull from the traditional African dance forms that are located in KwaZulu-Natal. Unique to FLATFOOT is the ability of the resident professional dancers to traverse both traditional *isiZulu* dance forms and then step into strong contemporary technique and performance.

I created FLATFOOT 'unofficially' in 1994 as a part-time training programme that aimed to offer technical contemporary dance training to any Durban based dancers who were able to make the classes. The company began with no funding and simply the good will and political and artistic impulse to offer dance training to those who had historically and economically been denied access due to the apartheid systems. The company presented small-scale choreographic works at any free platforms in Durban until, in 2002, a decision was made to begin applying for funding to secure a more permanent base for some of the exceptional dancers who were coming through. In 2003, the National Arts Council of South Africa. FLATFOOT with its first official project-based funding thereby assisting in the long process

towards becoming a fully registered and now internationally recognised South African contemporary dance company. The professional company is made up of dancers who audition and take on work as full-time dancers and dance educators. Dancers who seek this full-time position in FLATFOOT, must demonstrate a combination of high performance and contemporary dance training skills and a proven track record as a dance teacher. While FLATFOOT continues to train and educate those who want to find employment in the company, some history of professional and pedagogical experience is necessary for full-time employment. The dancers who gravitate to this full-time employment tend to come from KwaZulu- Natal. FLATFOOT's now on-going programmes like the ADD FLATFOOT Programme (discussed in Section One) and the adult FLATFOOT Training Company are our fertile grounds for promoting access and training to a professional career with the company. Statistically 90% of the company are black and I work towards an even gender ratio usually preferring three men and three women.

I narrate (once again) a renewed and simplified history of FLATFOOT above as a way of inviting you into the embodied practices of the company. Our roots from a training programme to a 15-year-old professional company in 2018, become significant in the on-going understanding of the performance work we do. The impulse towards historically making space for black bodies to enter the dance training arena in 1994, has evolved into a politics of engaging difference and intersectionality in the company. We move and continue to move in a narrative by-play that looks towards race, gender, sexuality, health, ability/disability and increasingly, notions of citizenship and belonging. As artistic director of the company, I am intrigued by the uniqueness of each dancer working for the company – I move away from historical notions of a 'sameness' (a *corps de ballet*) to actively find/employ/dance artists who unashamedly express unique patterns of moving and unique embodied stories to bring to our work. The richness of divergence and difference in spaces of schooling/education, home-life, politics, rural/urban identities intersect in the studio and offers a complex embodied ethnographic narrative of the dancer's own histories. Kreigar's (2005:350) notion, thus, that "bodies tell stories" is my first choreographic impulse when working with the FLATFOOT dancers.

The HOMELAND TRILOGY (2016)

The first leg of *THE HOMELAND TRILOGY*, *Homeland (security)* was created over a five-week process that began in March 2016. The final work was performed at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre in Durban (South Africa) between 6-10 April. I worked with six *Flatfoot* dancers; Jabu Siphika, Zinhle Nzama, Kim McCusker, Sifiso Khumalo, Tshediso Kabulu and Sanele Maphumulo and in naming them, once again also claim for them, part authorship of the work (duly credited in the programme and ensuing media coverage). Over 2016, I set out to explore, interrogate and respond – with the dancers – to contested notions of belonging to a nation state, of citizenship and of feeling safe at ‘home’. With a deep resonance towards the pain of South Africa’s own recent resurgence of violent xenophobia and continued racism, this year of dance-making, for me, began a deeply personal and political need to claim back the internal safety of an embodied resistant (dancing) self that attempted to seek community in ways that talk back and resist hegemonic (and violent) emerging notions of nation-state, belonging and citizenship.

The title itself, starting with “Homeland” echoes the imagined and the very fraught real constructions of belonging to a continent whose borders, ironically, have nothing to do with indigeneity but more to do with colonial scrabbles for land and minerals. The global politics of refugees and the displacement of millions of people (many African),⁷⁵ the continued shameful xenophobia of Africans against Africans that flared up in 2009 (and continues to do so) in South Africa, began to feed into a growing discontent and questioning of what it means to ‘belong’. Further, the ever present global American media hype around the resultant 9/11 notions of internal safety via the “Department of Homeland Security”, with adjunct state departments and million-dollar industries, began to make me feel as though we, as Africans and as the American mass media constructed ‘other’, were imaged as people and geographical spaces at war with ourselves.

I brought these thoughts and feeling into the rehearsal room, and as we began to work, I asked the dancers, once again, to put pen to paper and write two short paragraphs for me. The first was for each dancer (and me) to remember and narrate for the group, an embodied memory

⁷⁵ See for example: Edwards, 2013.

of a moment when they felt safe and secure and 'at home'. A lot of discussion ensued around how we define home, and we agreed that it did not necessarily mean the house in which one lives/d. Already on Day One of rehearsals, the concept of 'home', via negotiation and discussion, began to transform into an imagined/metaphoric and symbolic space. It was clear that in a room of seven divergent South Africans, 'home' was not necessarily a physically, emotionally and politically safe place. Secondly, I asked the dancers (and myself as choreographer) to offer up some internal ruminations that asked each one of us to define or explain what 'home' should be or could be.

As with *days like these*, even before we even began to construct steps, we began with our stories; with telling, with explaining and with vocal sharing. After writing studio notes on the stories offered, I went away and selected elements of each dancer's stories. The sections were made solely by myself and by what had moved me in light of the stories divergence or synergies with the larger possible sense of what the work could be. I then asked the dancers to take my chosen, and carefully selected elements of their offered stories and translate them into a physical narrative. I chose some full stories and I also selected some parts of longer narratives. What ensued was a process of personal improvisation. The written text was left behind, and the body's' somatic voice began to take over. The result of these improvised fragments and vignettes became the core dance language of *HOMELAND (security)*. I worked with, and took hold of, the dancer's unique viscerally constructed solo narratives and began to situate them within a greater – and now – connected dance work. This method involved differing processes whereby we for example, as a group, learnt sections of each other's dance narratives (and dance language) and sometimes the improvised solo was taught and given over to another dancer to perform. Sometimes two solos were crafted and re-arranged into a duet. What became interesting in this shared process was an unspoken synergy of style and meaning as the dancers and I began to link in and physically absorb each other's somatic choices and phrasings. The audience would no longer see 14 (2 from each dancer and from me) divergent narratives in solo format, but would engage the physically situated border crossings of these connected and inter-spliced stories (and the resultant dance language) that began to evoke feelings of displacement, separation, isolation, loss and indeed, at times, love and belonging.



Image 27: FLATFOOT dancers (L to R) Sifiso Khumalo, Jabu Siphika, Sanele Maphumulo, Kim McCusker-Bartlett (on the floor), Thsediso Kabulu and Zinhle Nzama in HOMELAND (security). Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. PIC: Val Adamson.

The frame for all of this became the simple and yet deeply complex act of refugees forcibly leaving their homeland. Internally our African, South African and the global politics has made us feel like metaphoric refugees, like people who cannot/do not physically and emotionally live at 'home'. To this end I inserted a wild card into the choreographic work in the form of the lengthy spoken word voice over text by Mexican-American performance artist Guillermo Gomez-Pena. I refer to it as a 'wild-card' simply because I had kept this poetic text separate and 'hidden' from the original narrative storytelling improvisation process with the dancers. Gomez-Pena's text was an 'outside' voice in a process of internal and situated use of personal narrative in creation. Having used our own texts/stories to move into dance, I now asked the dancers to move with and through spoken word. I was inserting a verbal narrative that moved us away from our localised stories to connect with a global voice of defiance that spoke to many of the issues that we had felt and spoken about. It was our moment of connecting our own struggles to a wider global resistant community.

Gomez-Pena's "A Declaration of Poetic Disobedience from the New Border"⁷⁶ is a poetic/polemic encounter with "talking back" and begins:

"We" the Other people
We, the migrants, exiles, nomads and wetbacks
In permanent process of voluntary deportation
We, the transient orphans of dying nation-states
La otra America: lautre Europa y anexas
We, the citizen of the outer limits and crevices
Of "Western civilization"
We, who have no government:
No flag or national anthem
We, fingerprinted, imprisoned, under surveillance
We millions abound,
We continue to talk back!

As dancers, the six performers moved in isolated up-stage to down-stage corridors of light – hands up in defiance and demanding to be seen – the embodied presence of the six dancers moving in and out of one-another's pathways, became the affirmation of self against the world, of rebellion against being defined, of being forced to move and move again, of having no safe home, and of the affirmation of the physical dancing moving body as the only home finally that we are left with; the affirmation of the lived/performative presence of the (African) body on stage against the histories that have owned, defined, defiled, and violated it.

As choreographer I attempted to dislodge any singular linear narrative in the work and rather set-up small intimate multiplicitous and layered moments of remembering home. This 'dislodging' was about allowing all six dancers agency within the creative process – for their voices to be included and validated. In the end, however, while many resultant choreographic choices were made collectively in the studio, I remained 'outside eye' or even, what we might still call choreographer. There are, of course (and as discussed earlier in this chapter), embedded power plays and paradoxical tensions in this role especially in the self-proclaimed

⁷⁶ See: Gomez-Pena. *Declaration of Poetic Disobedience from the New Border*. <https://youtu.be/yrmAd6rldqk>.

autoethnographic and decolonised desire to find other non-hierarchical ways of making dance. I offer this as a beginning and as a way of me re-imagining creative processes that acknowledge the bodies that come into the dance space, and the lives of the people with whom I work.

Homeland (security) was performed against the backdrop of a video installation by Karen Logan in which she follows a sunrise to sunset Durban ocean/beachscape that places the work against the moving tides of water, sun and sand. This moving image is reminiscent of refugee boats launched into unknown oceans, of water that separates us, of the familiarity for us – as Durban based dancers – with our own Indian ocean as a marker of ‘home’.



Image 28: FLATFOOT’s Kim McCusker-Bartlett and Sifiso Khumalo (center) against the Indian ocean video installation backdrop in *HOMELAND (security)*. Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. PIC: Val Adamson.

Unlike *days like these*, where music selection came after the choreographic excavation process, for *HOMELAND (security)* I spent much time researching and trying to find the right ‘sound’ for the work before we even stepped into the studio for rehearsals. My own ‘instinct’ around music that adds layers and does not necessarily define the dance work, set in as I began to search for a somatic soundscape that echoed rhythmic ocean currents, and which

could move one into a dreamscape that could sit against Karen Logan's filmic motion of the sea. I finally settled (for most of the dance work) on the tonal music of Steve Reich⁷⁷ – a contemporary composer who often works with one reoccurring note and/or tone that endlessly builds and recedes – and for me this simulated and hinted at the waxing and waning of ocean. His music hardly ever hits crescendos and is often without overt rhythmic patterning other than the endlessly repeated notes or tones. Reich's music offered us a sound landscape against which (and alongside which) we began to pattern our storytelling.⁷⁸

The second part of *THE HOMELAND TRILOGY* was created *in situ* via a commission given to me by the 2016 *Jomba! Contemporary Dance Festival* held in Durban (South Africa). This new work was commissioned for the KZNSA Gallery JOMBA! event and was performed only once (29 August 2016) in the context of a larger festival of contemporary dance works. The second part of the trilogy, I titled, *Migrations (at the Feet of Kali)* and, given the nature of the site-specific disruption to audience/performer as set up by this art gallery space, I opted, alongside FLATFOOT, to collaborate with two Durban based artists with whom I had worked before and whose unique voices inspire me. Both Ian *ewok* Robinson (spoken word poet, author and actor) and Manesh Maharaj (impresario, Kathak classical Indian dancer and teacher) came to the project with the brief that this work would begin to explore the more (politically and historically) familiar notions of home (and South Africa) as set up by histories of colonisation and Indian indentured labour. I chose to work with these two performers before setting up space to rehearse with the dancers as I knew, going in, that their embodied race, history and gender, would be a guiding place/space to work on.

Asking a fearless *ewok* to head straight into his own deeply personal histories of whiteness and how he landed up in South Africa, and the ensuing hours of storytelling, he opted to go back and rework a short poetic spoken word piece titled "*Hunting My Ancestry*"⁷⁹ in which he disarms with a deeply honest and painfully personal – and exposing – account of an uncle (also

⁷⁷ For more information on Steve Reich's compositions see; <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Steve-Reich>.

⁷⁸ I selected the following three Steve Reich tracks: ELECTRIC COUNTERPOINT-FAST (MOVEMENT 3), 2005. MEGAMIX (REMIX), 2005. NEW YORK COUNTERPOINT:FAST, 2000.

⁷⁹ Robinson, 2016. *Hunting My Ancestry*.

called “Ian”, with only one ‘i’ and thus a kind of legacy namesake) who was one of the ‘great white hunters’ in the then Rhodesia.⁸⁰

He intones:

That’s the difference between history and heritage: Heritage has a warmth that makes it easy to hold, but History is slippery and leaves you clutching empty air, its cold.

My grandfather was a White Hunter. I can’t remember at what point I stopped telling people this about him, can’t remember the first time the outward pride gave way to the hidden inner questioning, and this continued confusion.

This illusion: Pride.

Behind *ewok*, Kathak maestro Manesh Maharaj, embodying a history of indentured labour being sold to the then named Natal,⁸¹ re-tells the story of this ‘great white hunter’ in the language of classical Indian dance that is further echoed by two video installations by Karen Logan that set up these two divergent histories. On the one side of the stage, historical photographic images of indentured labourers who are identified only by a number, stare out at the audience; while on the other side, images of the ‘other’ Ian (the uncle) and the kills made during his colonial hunting days, stare back at us. With both *ewok* and Maharaj, I worked with and choreographed spoken word and dance material brought to me into the studio. Essentially, we used the same methodologies employed in *Homeland (security)* where the performers, and their self-generated material, went through a collectively driven process of selection, editing and re-phrasing to take the two ‘solos’ and turn them into a duet/dialogue where their two bodies and voices speak against, through and around each other.

⁸⁰Rhodesia was under colonial British rule until 11 November 1965. At its independence Rhodesia was renamed Zimbabwe.

⁸¹ After the 1994 democratic elections in South Africa, all formerly British named provinces of South Africa were re-named and some even re-zoned. Natal was renamed KwaZulu-Natal.



Image 29: Manesh Maharaj (back) and Ian ewok Robinson in Migrations (at the Feet of Kali. JOMBA! 2016 KZNSA Gallery. PIC: Val Adamson.

The juxtaposition of a violent colonial white history and a South African indentured colonial Indian history as embodied by the narrative of Maharaj's Kathak and *ewok's* spoken word, was then further layered by the presence of the six FLATFOOT dancers – black bodies – who are, in the discourses of the above colonial politics, the least historically heard and voiced. These black bodies, once again through improvisation and evolving methodologies of narrative and storytelling, become a vocally silent but powerful moving chorus that begins to speak back (in somatic language) another version of history. Black bodies moving, physically commenting on the performed and spoken narrative of Maharaj and *ewok*, offer another layer of storytelling. Their motion and the idea of 'migration' – of people moving and settling from one place to another – becomes the metaphor for the work.

The linking narrative is the story of Kali. Mother and goddess in ancient Indian Sanskrit literature, Kali is perhaps best known as the goddess of war and destruction. Images of her hoisting severed heads in a battle's blood rage are the most dominant. But Kali's story is also one of love. Her consort, Lord Shiva, is made aware of her rage during a battle with the demon

Rakthabeej and in an act of deep love he lays himself at her feet. If she stands on him, he dies. Kali senses her beloved and is wooed out of her rage by his act of humility.

Migrations (at the Feet of Kali) ends with the dancers vocally silent, but speaking through their embodied actions, a form of chorus washing each other's feet. The physical act is complemented by a black and white video installation of the dancers bathing each other. Again, I dislodge a singular linear narrative and rather offer segments (maybe even broken fragments) of histories that intersect with my own – as dancer, as dance-maker and as author and leave an audience to make connections that are embedded in their own narratives of history and their own “becoming” (Budgeon, 2003:50). I seek not to regulate and discipline and construct singular meaning *for* an audience, but rather I hope we, as FLATFOOT, begin to negotiate a dialogue of storytelling and meaning-making through the body.



Image 30: FLATFOOT dancers in the final sections of *Migrations (at the Feet of Kali)*. JOMBA! 2016 KZNSA Gallery. PIC: Val Adamson.

Goree Island, Senegal – telling these stories in West Africa

The *Homeland Trilogy* finally came together in a performance on Goree Island in Senegal. FLATFOOT was invited by the National Arts Council in a diplomatic linking of Goree Island to Robben Island, to perform at the Goree Diaspora Festival on the 25 November 2016. We were asked to link these two works (mentioned above) as one of three offerings from South African artists. I called this new evolution *Southern Exposure*. Traversing this journey to West Africa meant negotiating histories outside of Southern Africa. We were travelling to an historically French colony (and thus little English is spoken here) but most significantly, we were stepping into one of the country's worst affected by colonial slavery. Narratives of historical African slavery were not in our minds when creating this *Homeland Trilogy*. We were engaged more with contemporary manifestations of refugees, of how past and current localised South African histories affected/effected our bodies in various types of embodied and emotional migrations. I was concerned that we would be seen to be 'speaking for'. My own whiteness as a choreographer dealing with notions of my own, and, collaboratively, the company's intersectional politics, lay wide open for further attack. We, all of us, felt fragile entering Senegal; 18 hours of circular cheap flights, and foremost in our minds the terrible and shameful current history of how many West Africans (and Senegalese) are treated in South Africa.

As we stepped onto Goree Island, a boat ride away from mainland Dakar, I watched myself and the full company begin to breathe differently. Apart from the sheer joy of being in another part of Africa, we viscerally began to feel another layer of our identities as African beginning to unfold. On the tour of Goree Island, a slave island and one of the last ports of call before slaves were shipped to the Americas for sale, the FLATFOOT team and I were confronted with the living museum of *Maison des esclaves* (House of Slaves) as we walked through and stood at the infamous door of no return. Every one of us, from technician to dancer, broke down at some point of the tour. I was aware that we were not just negotiating the horrors of the past, but each of us was feeling this history (our history) on our skin. It was one of the few significant moments of my life where I **felt** history. I was struck, as choreographer and storyteller, once again by the layered multiplicity of sources from which stories can spring. When I set out to create the initial part of this trilogy – HOMELAND (security) – in Durban (South Africa) long before we visited Senegal, with my foray into embodied storytelling method and the desire to

deeply honour and listen to all the voices and bodies present in the work, I was reminded when we travelled to Senegal, how the embodiment of stories on stage can be affected by the feelings, thoughts, intuition and relationships that are experienced off stage. I return to Budgeon, quoted earlier in this chapter, when he asks for the body to be seen as “events that are continually in the process of becoming – as multiplicities that are never just found but are made and remade” (2003:50). A body that is ‘event’, that is continually in a process of being made, re-made and even re-imagined, opens up this idea of the body as a process of endless possibilities.

That night, with the Atlantic Ocean as the backdrop to the Homeland Trilogy, FLATFOOT stepped onto the open-air stage – Dakar’s city lights in the distance – with a sacred understanding of our task as embodied storytellers. The performance, English texts and all, was taken into the lives of the Senegalese visiting Goree Island and was engaged vocally as an act of resistance and of speaking truth to power. Audiences cheered at *Gomez-Pena’s* “A Declaration of Poetic Disobedience from the New Border”, and finally in exploring history, memory, belonging and dislocation, the work seemed to echo the spirit of Goree Island, itself steeped in the history and memory of violent dislocation.



Image 31: FLATFOOT dancers on Goree Island (Senegal) rehearsing for the final performance (2016). PIC: courtesy of Clare Craighead.

We all returned from Senegal a little more careful with each other – had we not confronted through the echoes of ancient stones, one of the world’s most shameful process of dehumanisation; slavery? We wondered why, in this great agenda to decolonise, we had not learnt about Goree Island at school? We wondered if those 20 million slave bodies that were carted out of Goree Island’s ‘door of no return’ will ever find rest, but most of all we were deeply reminded that the human body, my body, your body, the dancing body, and hence the performative body, is rooted in real social practices where the body is not something we ‘have’ but rather something we ‘become’. In Senegal, on the last and third leg of the *Homeland Trilogy* we felt our bodies as vehicles in which we narrate self, our identity and our on-going multiplicitous engagement with the world in which we find ourselves. I took great pleasure in being reminded that this is not a fixed and definitive site but an on-going process of a body ‘becoming’ (Totton, 2010).

I conclude, that perhaps my acts of choreographic creation and praxis, while collaborative and potentially open to be part of the decolonising artistic agenda, are also profoundly acts of autoethnography. Autoethnography understood as a contemporary academic undertaking towards personalised (mostly qualitative) research. Holt for example, defines autoethnography as “highly personalised accounts where authors draw on their own experiences to extend understanding of a particular discipline or culture” (2003:18). What I narrate in Chapter Four and Five thus are also deeply personal stories that negotiate the complexity of my own identity. I return to the words of Stuart Hall quoted right at the beginning of Chapter One; “Identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past” (1990:225), and I also now add, the present and any imagined future/s.

CONCLUSION – PAUSING TO REFLECT AND IMAGINE A FUTURE

I sit at my computer, finally, bearing the weight of having to ‘conclude’ this thesis and what perhaps feels like a counter-intuitive structural (and choreographic) need for an ‘ending’ after spending so much time asking and arguing to open space up and to avoid linguistic and artistic closure. As a choreographer/excavator and dance-maker my greatest artistic struggles have been in finding closure to dance works created; the notion of an ending often sits in antithesis to stories told and re-told, and of voices being heard. What I hope for, as any storyteller would, is the silent internal longevity of images and meaning resonating in an audience/reader’s head. What is it we take away with us as we walk out of the theatre? I end too, with some additional understanding – as I hope I have begun to navigate – of the sheer personal and political (potentially Aristotelian) catharsis⁸² of the process of excavating/choreographing, and indeed of writing as a South African. In being afforded the space to be an artist on the African continent, and of the multiple roles of academic and teacher for the past 24 years, I have used this thesis to reflect primarily on myself and the world (geographical, social, political and artistic) that I inhabit. If the phenomenological notion of self as the knower of the world (Merleau-Ponty:1962) holds, then I claim the writing of this thesis and other dances on the body, as a feminist act of re-naming and re-writing (and, I add, decolonising) both myself, and the world in which I live. I use this ‘conclusion’ to both implicitly and explicitly, bring together Section One and Two of this thesis – the pedagogy of dance teaching and the artistic practice of reflecting on live art making in the form of choreography.

The methodological nature of this study (as indicated in the Introduction) is interlaced throughout and it takes an autoethnographic turn that allows for another, very personal layer of reflection and re-visioning around seeking a decolonised pedagogy and praxis that also engages the feminist struggles of breaking silence and further, about moving beyond speaking, to being heard. That this is moreover profoundly gendered, means that I come back to Pinar to claim this thesis as, “a way for me to couple inquiry into what is felt, fantasized, and thought ... with questions concerning the embodied experiences of dancing, research, and curriculum in relation to sociocultural context” (1988:138–139).

⁸² See Butcher, 1902.

I have not (as is often expected) secluded methodology in a chapter of its own in this thesis. Given the feminist and autoethnographic nature of this study, I have opted to allow the methodology to inform and be articulated in each and every chapter as it reveals process and practice – and significantly, reflection. It has been a conscious decision not to isolate theory, methodology and praxis into neatly defined and isolated chapters. I continue to be guided by early French feminist Hélène Cixous and her appeal to write with the (female) body as in *l'écriture féminine* (1975) and its multiplicitous and open connections. This thesis is ultimately an attempt to bring together some of my differing selves as I begin to interrogate, through this academic text and the writing and reflecting process, on my own artistic process as dance maker, dance educator, and choreographer/excavator.

I hold onto the word 'excavator' to define what I do, with a keen understanding of the meaning; "to reveal or extract by digging, systematically to explore."⁸³ At its core, this is what this thesis is; a digging and an exploration of both my internal and external processes of decolonising old paradigms of training, writing/researching and making dance and attempting to re-imagine an inclusive dance practice in South Africa. I have used (and continue to use) the conceptual framework of 'decolonisation', in part, because it is the key political and pedagogical terminology being used in South Africa within current student protest movements such as '#Fees Must Fall' and within the 2016 (onwards) South African debates around re-curriculum of higher learning institutions.

More pointedly, however, I have used the frame of decolonising as it offers me personally, pedagogically and politically an opportunity to look deeply at what this might mean **in action** and **in practice** for my own dance teaching and dance making in South Africa. I have proposed some of the feminist and decolonising strategies and interventions with which I have begun to work and explore. These have been – and continue to be – my 'call to action' when picking up the politics of inclusivity and seeking democratic artistic process. By no means do I imply that these artistic and pedagogical processes are definitive, nor do I hope to imply that they are finished. The onward journey, as a South African dance maker, to question and challenge my pedagogy and art making is only just beginning. This autoethnographic study of a 23-year temporal space in my own engagement with dance, is thus set against the larger geo-political,

⁸³ Thompson, 1992.

social and cultural conflicts of South Africa. That these conflicts continue and are ever present is also a testimony to the fact that the act of decolonising, the act of interrogating racism, sexism and class discrimination (amongst other categories of power), needs constant vigilance.

This thesis of autoethnographic personal narratives offers what I hope is a microcosm of larger issues.⁸⁴ These narratives focus a lens on how arts (and dance particularly) have been, are, and become, an axis in the enactment of lived – and significantly – embodied democracy. This ‘embodied democracy’ is an act of decolonising by virtue of finding dance praxis that promotes the body choosing, self-defining, and moving in ways not externally defined. I continue to pursue and search for ways to give agency to the South African/African body to speak its own narrative/s within in its own context of dance education and dance making. I decipher and understand decolonising as a personal and political act. It is a journey away from the paternalistic and demanded authority of grand truth and the construction of monolithic hegemonic ways of being often defined by those outside of who and what we are. This too is the value of an autoethnographic study: that we keep meaning open, fluid and multiple in an interplay of self in relationship to a constantly shifting world and to the practice of making art. That we continue to work towards open and constantly shifting self-definition. This is finally, for me, a democratising and feminist impulse that honours multiple voices and processes, and which opens up rather than shuts down – and an avoidance of the conundrum of writing and choreographing a ‘conclusion’.

Part of my own decolonising is that I am reminded – as dancer, choreographer and dance teacher – that English is my second language. Every time I step in the studio, I willingly and joyfully return to my mother tongue – the body. In my own journey to avoid being prescriptive and to seek a living practice of this ‘embodied democracy’, I journey into a pedagogical and choreographic practice where I actively seek not to tell/demand/narrate/instruct how other bodies should move and what they should look like moving; I seek to facilitate the ‘bodies’ that I work with finding their own ways to tell/move and excavate their own stories when they dance. What I continue to excavate for myself, is my own on-going desire for inclusive ways of moving and of making dance and art that supports my own embodied vision as a

⁸⁴ See Clifford, & Marcus, 1986.

choreographer/story-teller and dance teacher. In interrogating my own methodologies for teaching and for making dance, I hope to continue to find ways to assist and journey with the dancers with whom I work and collaborate as they begin to perhaps also break through externally defined and inherited ways of moving that do not speak to their own embodied political and spiritual sense of being.

In this endeavour, I continue to be guided by an interesting contemporary dance practitioner called Frey Faust whose work on his 'Axis Syllabus'⁸⁵ continues to inspire me in my journey back to my mother tongue; to blood, sinews, tendon, ligaments and the bones of the body. Faust actually calls his Axis Syllabus 'decolonising the body'⁸⁶ and it has nothing to do with what the body does, what it looks like, what story it is telling. For him dance is a journey back to the connecting tissue of the body – the fascia – as the place of true knowing and being inside the body:

The body is mostly made up of an involuntary, spiralling web of tensegritous suspension that generates, regulates and manages the forces and energies arising from movement, the fascia. We can therefore look to fascia as the most pertinent aspect of our possibilities and potentials. My impression however, is that the perception of the body and many approaches to educating it exact a wilful imposition of aesthetic concepts that compromise a harmonious relationship to the fascia, and can actually turn it into the enemy of the skeleton.⁸⁷

I feel confident that none of us – dancers, choreographer, academics and teachers – wish to be the enemy of our own skeletons. In an on-going journey to find authentic ways of being and moving, I am reminded of the intense simplicity and intense complexity of coming back to the most fraught political terrain on our planet – the body. For me, this is where the process of real decolonising begins. The fascia and the body are – in a constant state of “becoming” (Totton, 2010) – the primary site of transformation. For me, dance – art made manifest on and with and through the body – becomes my embodied site of action.

This thesis has been broken down into two sections that are linked by the need (as articulated above and through the writing) to find new embodied ways of being and doing as an artist and educator – ways that do not fight “the skeleton”. The impulse to decolonise, to “rethink how

⁸⁵ <https://www.freyfaust.org/the-axis-syllabus/>.

⁸⁶ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOJliwUEsCO>.

⁸⁷ <http://axisyllabus.org/resources/fascia-a-perspective>.

the object of study itself is constituted and then to reconstruct it and bring about fundamental change” (Garuba, 2015), is the thread that weaves its way between these two sections and the chapters.

Section One journeyed into an excavation (still on-going as there is always more systematic exploration to do) through my work with FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY, into a methodology and praxis for a decolonised pedagogy. In Chapter One, I set up a post-colonial look at who I am (identity, subjectivity and embodiment) and where I am (the politics of location and space) as a dance practitioner. That led to a synergy with post-development theory that both assisted and continues to assist me in re-articulating myself as a citizen of the global South, as an African, and in search of alternate and counter narratives to Western and paternalistic version of (dance) history. Chapter Two moved on to look specifically at FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY’s urban and rural township-based dance interventions and programmes as narrative case studies. Here there was a focus on gender and child sexuality as a lens through which my own decolonising agenda is concentrated, and in Chapter Three, within the sphere of disability dance practice, my ideas on a decolonised arts education pedagogy were (and still are) most radically tested and so this became the second lens through which I navigate an attempt to challenge the “epistemic violence”(Heleta, 2016:npn) of thinking about/doing/making/teaching dance.

Section Two turned away from an overt discussion around pedagogy and moved towards an examination of my choreographic practices with FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY post 1994. I have not attempted to define and interrogate this past 24 years of creating dance work but have chosen to focus on a selected few of the choreographic works created, those where I felt – in my own practice – I had (and have) begun to shift my methods of creating towards more inclusive choreographic methodologies that seek to honour democratic processes. This has afforded me an autoethnographic opportunity to excavate my own body’s history and memory as I consider the history of the bodies I work/dance with and reflect on the history of a/my ‘body’ of dance work. I selected six works to discuss – dance works that range from 2005 to 2016 and thus offer what I hope is a significant reflective history of my own choreographic praxis.

Further, I again signal, that this thesis is made up primarily, though not exclusively, of collecting together, re-considering, re-writing and re-focusing some of my previously published articles that have spanned 24 years as an academic scholar interrogating and writing about my own praxis. Very seldom do we as choreographers and writers get a chance to go back to words written and dancers already choreographed – time and funding often forbids it. I have revelled in this space to re-think and re-imagine what has been and what is; all of which leads to imagining a future.

Imagining a future

For the past two years, since 2016, my dance pedagogy and dance-making praxis has come together in further ways which will – I hope – become the space for further research (both academically and artistically) around constantly re-seeking and re-interrogating this physical practice that I have begun to negotiate in this thesis, of a journey towards articulating an ‘embodied democracy’. I have been involved in two long term collaborative performance projects that have begun to question (as I do in Chapter Three) the relationship between inclusivity, diversity, disability and dance training and performance practice. This work has essentially stepped out of pedagogy and teaching practice, into praxis and into art and dance making. If pedagogy is the arena in which we grow dancers and re-vision and re-consider dance training (see for example, Clement, 2007) methodologies, then dance-making and the act of choreography is perhaps one space where we might see this enacted on a stage and in practice. I am intrigued to contemplate that both performance projects are (and have been) collaborative and creative partnerships that ask not only deep circumnavigation of ownership of artists productions, but which also speak – as has been argued in these discussions (most notable with FLATFOOT’s *days like these*) – to collective and joint creation.

The first is a project established two-years-ago in which FLATFOOT and I work with four adult dancers who live with an intellectual disability in the form of Down Syndrome. This dance work does not aim to offer pedagogical access to dance training (which it does anyway) but is a clearly articulated professional performance project. Given the nature of Down Syndrome, the working methods of creating dance has been a journey into understanding what this intellectual disability means and of how this is negotiated with each of these Down Syndrome dancers. We launched the *FLATFOOT Downie Dance Company* at the 2017 JOMBA!

Contemporary Dance Festival with a performance titled *Cardiac Output*, and performed our second season of work in November 2018 at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre called *Ngila!/I am here!* Most profoundly the work has turned up a partnering methodology of creating, learning and performing where one FLATFOOT dancer is partnered with one dancer living with Down Syndrome. The work has the effect of breaking cultural and social stereotypes around persons living with the syndrome, but it also begins to question who is included and excluded in our art making pedagogy and practice. This performance practice is seated in a number of cultural and social taboos⁸⁸ within an African context and has the potential to place notions of ‘the other’ on display. Avoiding the voyeurism of watching and shaming the disabled ‘other’, we work towards a practice that give agency to both abled and differently-abled dancing bodies. The work is on-going and gives particular agency to Frey Faust’s notion of not fighting one’s own Skeleton⁸⁹ – and importantly, even when this skeleton is outside of the functional and the normative.



⁸⁸ See for example: <https://www.kidsnewtocanada.ca/mental-health/developmental-disability>.

⁸⁹ Frey, 2012.

Image 32: FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY (Zinhle Nzama in foreground left) in session with the Downs Syndrome dancers (Charles Phillips in foreground right) (2017). PICS: Val Adamson.



Image 33: FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY in session with the Downs Syndrome dancers (2017). PICS: Val Adamson.



Image 34: FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY in session with the Downs Syndrome dancers (2017). PICS: Val Adamson.

The second choreographic and performance collaboration that has occupied my working life has been a partnership begun in August 2018 with Cape Town's UNMUTE DANCE COMPANY. UNMUTE is a company of South African artists with mixed abilities/disabilities using Physical Theatre, Contemporary and Integrated Dance to create awareness of accessibility, integration and inclusion of people with disability. They aim to address and challenge the social state of mental-misconception on disability(s) and encourage people to be aware that we are all abled and have our own individual abilities. They have created a working dance praxis that enacts the belief that having a disability does not make any dancer less capable.⁹⁰

The company came into existence in 2013 after a performance creation entitled *Unmute* by Andile Vellum. Vellum based this work on his own experience of being a dancer who is deaf. This dance work became a way for Vellum to find his own voice as a choreographer, using sign language as the source of the movement vocabulary. He brought together artists from different backgrounds to investigate and explore what they would like to 'un-mute'; feelings, perceptions, social norms and expectations. The inception of the company UNMUTE DANCE COMPANY then developed in 2014 The company was co-founded by Nadine Mckenzie, Mpotseng Shuping, Andile Vellum and Themba Mbuli. It now also boasts dancers Yaseen Manuel and Rae Claassens in the company.

⁹⁰ <http://unmutedance.blogspot.com/>.



Image 35: FLATFOOT's Sifiso Khumalo and UNMUTE's Nadine Mackenzie in the longitude of silence at JOMBA! 2018. Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. PIC: Val Adamson.

FLATFOOT and I joined forces with UNMUTE for the first time for a joint choreographic venture which debuted at the 2018 JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Festival in Durban, South Africa. This has sparked the beginning of a more focused and long-term partnership which we are only beginning to explore. For JOMBA!, Vellum and I took the reigns as choreographers for a joint conceptualised work called the *longitude of silence*. We created the work over 14 days and 4 rehearsals in a process that asked all of us to abandon and hold off the linguistic and return to the mother-tongue of the body. I, who am used to working in spaces where English is not the dominant language – where I am linguistically the odd one out, had to slip further into trusting the body as my creative partner, communicating only with sign language – a language I can only just claim to be learning. The process of working with an integrated and differently abled group of professional dancers further pushed us all to re-consider and de-construct ways of instructing and guiding a dancer. A simple instruction like “Walk forward and turn on your left leg” was (and is) no longer possible. We moved instead (similar to what has been detailed in Section Two) into the liminal and somatic practice of improvisation where choreographer becomes not just an excavator, but a guide and a medium (as discussed in Chapter Four).

Vellum and I used the 14 days to conjure the dance work from both the FLATFOOT and UNMUTE dancers – a dance work that began profoundly (and perhaps simply) for me about needing to understand the silence in which my dance making partner, Vellum, lives.⁹¹



Image 36: Dancers (back) Mthoko Mkhwanazi and Sifiso Khumalo, and, (front) Lionel Ackerman and Yaseen Manual in the longitude of silence at JOMBA! 2018. PIC: Val Adamson.

Dance making in these two current (2017/18) performance projects have opened up the potential for more ethnographic and autoethnographic research and continue to be a vehicle for political and personal struggles. It is one of the ways in which I/we actively (as both academic and artist) reconstruct shared assumptions and choice around what histories and bodies are ‘authentic’. I return to Garuba’s notion (discussed in the introduction of the thesis) around alternate ways to imagine the decolonising agenda where he asks that we begin to, “rethink how the object of study itself is constituted and then to reconstruct it and bring about fundamental change” (Garuba, 2015). I take this on not only for re-thinking pedagogy (as discussed in Section One) but also, for performance practice and dance making as I continue

⁹¹ For a review see: <https://medium.com/jomba-khuluma-blog/a-cocktail-of-emotions-felt-in-unmute-flatfoot-collaborations-6dc8cdc620a2>.

to journey forward in my search. The choreographic practice – in collaborative manifestations as discussed in this thesis and particularly in Section Two) – thus become a process of decolonising seen in action, in practice and now, significantly I hope, in performance. It is how I dare to hope and imagine the future.

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