

# Ethical Formation on the Threshold

*A study of the implementation of  
HIV University in Mphomeni Township,  
South Africa*

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Presentation of the project

AIDS represents one of the largest medical, social and spiritual challenges facing the global community today. Since the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) began to spread silently across the globe in the late 1970s, more than 25 million people have died from the disease. Southern Africa continues to bear the heaviest burden of the pandemic. In 2007, 67% of all people living with HIV lived in this sub region. The rate of infection has increased over the years, and the number of women living with HIV and AIDS has also surpassed the number of men affected by the disease. In 2007, 12 million women were reported infected in sub-Saharan Africa, compared to about 8.3 million men. According to UNAIDS' estimate, three quarters of all HIV positive women live in sub-Saharan Africa (Spink 2009)<sup>1</sup>.

Medical and social initiatives have continually been implemented in attempts to fight the pandemic. The development of antiretroviral medication (ARV) has made significant impact on the lives of those infected – a long and relatively healthy life is now possible for HIV positive people. Faith communities and nongovernmental organizations have developed educational programs and empowerment training to help combat the stigma as well as the silence related to the disease.

These social facts constitute the background for this thesis, which in short is a descriptive analysis of one specific empowerment model for HIV positive women and its implementation in a poor township in South Africa in 2008. The model is called HIV University (HIV U)<sup>2</sup>, and was developed by the nongovernmental organization WORLD (Women Organized to Respond to Life-Threatening Diseases), established in the United States in 1991. WORLD is based in Oakland, California, and runs different training programs for HIV positive women all over the U.S. One of these programs is HIV U, a program which carries the basic principles “peer based education”, “consensus decision-making”, and “women advocating for themselves”.

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<sup>1</sup> Spink refers to statistics developed by UNAIDS. These numbers are continuously changing, but the article I refer to was recently updated.

<sup>2</sup> In this thesis I refer to the model both as HIV U and HIV University

The South African township in which we implemented HIV U is called Mpophomeni. This township is situated on the outskirts of the small town of Howick, around 30 kilometers northwest of Pietermaritzburg, the capital city of the province KwaZulu Natal. Our intervention was the first time the HIV U model was implemented outside of the U.S., and should therefore be regarded as a pilot project.

This thesis is part of the research project “Broken Women, Healing Traditions? Indigenous Resources for Gender Critique and Social Transformation in the Context of Aids in South Africa”, running from 2007-2010. This is a bilateral project between the theological schools at the University of Oslo and the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN). The collaboration was initiated in 2004 with the first research project “Broken Bodies, Healing Communities: Faith-based Contextual Responses to HIV/AIDS” (2004-2006). The new project received extra funding from the Norwegian Ministry of Education in 2007 to implement HIV University in Mpophomeni. The Norwegian scholars of the program, Jone Salomonsen and Sidsel Roalkvam, had at the time already conducted research in Mpophomeni for three years, and wanted to give something back to the community. After close collaboration with Moher Downing, one of WORLD’s board members, the idea of implementing an HIV University in Africa developed. WORLD provided a facilitator, Shalini Eddens, for the project. Eddens has extensive experience in community building and advocacy work from the U.S. She has implemented the HIV U model in several places in the U.S., and is also a director of the “Lotus Project”, a program that educates HIV positive women to become peer advocates.

After the HIV U pilot project in Mpophomeni received funding, the project announced two MA grants that allowed two students to also take part in the project. Together with fellow student Marie Thorstensen, I was enrolled in the project, which involved participating in the implementation of HIV U as well as writing an MA thesis in relation to the work.

My thesis focuses on the efforts of HIV positive women in a particular location to counteract silence related to HIV, and aims at being a critical contribution to the comprehension of the AIDS pandemic and its cure in South Africa. In the following I will account for the analytical perspective I make use of in order to discuss the process through which the Mpophomeni women went through.

### 1.1.1 Analytical perspective and presentation of research questions

HIV University's main goal is to foster empowerment in HIV positive women in order for them to be able to organize and advocate for themselves, as well as improve their living conditions. The goal of fostering empowerment implies that the women will undergo a personal development, and thus entails an idea of instigating deep inner change. HIV U adheres to the fundamental idea that the participants hold an active role in their own process of "owning" the disease, and of personal development as HIV positive women, by conducting practices through which they will achieve a sense of empowerment. Because the HIV U program seeks for its participants to assume the practices of the type of person they want to *become*, I will describe and analyze their process of becoming empowered with an analytical framework developed by anthropologist Saba Mahmood and her renegotiation of the Aristotelian concept of *habitus*.

Mahmood theorizes *habitus* to be understood as

(...) an acquired excellence at either a moral or a practical craft, learned through repeated practice until that practice leaves a permanent mark on the character of the person. Thus, moral virtues (such as modesty, honesty, and fortitude) are acquired through a coordination of outward behaviours (e.g., bodily acts, social demeanor) with inward dispositions (e.g., emotional states, thoughts, intentions) through the repeated performance of acts that entail those particular virtues (Mahmood 2005: 136).

Following Mahmood I will study the process of implementing HIV University as an example of such an ethical project of inner change being brought about and manifested in bodily acts. In order to understand how the women accomplish this ethical project, I will focus on the practices that constitute HIV U as an empowerment model, and furthermore, how these practices, in part, enable moral norms to become integral to the participants' senses of self. Mahmood argues against conflating agency with action and against a common understanding that agency emerges from scaled, natural feelings. Rather, she suggests that agency is a modality of action and that external, performative acts<sup>3</sup> can create corresponding inward dispositions. *Habitus* can thus be seen as a pedagogical process by which a moral character is secured (Mahmood 2005: 135).

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<sup>3</sup> Mahmood refers to external performative acts as "practices". I do the same in this thesis.

Saba Mahmood is particularly critical to liberalist feminist theorization of the feminine subject and women's agency. Mahmood finds a tendency among these theorists<sup>4</sup> to regard agency as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination (Mahmood 2005:10-13). She therefore suggests that instead of limiting agency to acts that disrupt existing power relations, one should think of agency in terms of the capacities and skills required to undertake particular kinds of moral actions<sup>5</sup> (Mahmood 2005: 29).

The ability to foster empowerment in the subject resides therefore in the actions that the subject performs, as a conscious effort to transform her moral character. The research questions I seek to answer in order to understand and analyze the process the women underwent at HIV U are divided into three parts. First, I will seek to answer the following: How does the process of "empowerment" take place when women meet for HIV U in Mpophomeni; in other words, what form does it take? It will be crucial to describe and discuss the practices that the women conduct in order to undergo a change. My second research question is: What are the particular tools that HIV U provides to facilitate and support an ethical process of inner change? At this level I will focus on what new possibilities the model might open up to by making use of these tools, as well as what obstacles the model ran into when utilizing these particular tools. The third aspect I seek to find an answer to is: Does "empowerment" as defined in the HIV U model differ from how empowerment is understood by the participating women and, if so, in what sense?

The heart of the answer to these questions is found in the model's ideology and in how this ideology meets the needs of the women in Mpophomeni. Secondly, it lies in the interface between the women and their community, as the women seeks to promote social change through their empowerment. Thirdly, the answer lies in the relationship among the women and how they act out together to build the skills necessary to promote a change for themselves. In this thesis I put emphasis on how empowerment materializes in inner norms of reciprocity, dignity and trust. Such inner norms, however, are difficult to measure. This means that my analysis is somewhat temporal and that the outcomes I discuss may change over time. Because of the difficulties of measuring inner change, I have chosen to write a descriptive analysis, focusing particularly on the practices collectively conducted by the women, and

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<sup>4</sup> Mahmood here refers to, among others, Strathern 1988; Chodorow 1978; Gilligan 1982.

<sup>5</sup> Mahmood is here inspired by Michel Foucault and what he characterizes as "modes of subjectivation" (Foucault 2003a: 111).

furthermore how these practices relate to the ideology, and the tools, that HIV University provides to facilitate a process of empowerment.

The structure of my thesis is determined by the dynamics in the process the women underwent. I attempt to give a descriptive analysis by focusing on the pilot project in its totality, and to accomplish this attempt by letting the chapters follow the steps of the women's training. Furthermore, I will add theoretical perspectives to the observations I did in the field in order to understand better. In other words, I do not start from theoretical premises but from empirical. This means that I will employ several theoretical perspectives throughout my analysis in order to shed light on my observations of the women's practices.

## **1.2 WORLD**

### **1.2.1 Central values and principles in WORLD and HIV U**

WORLD was founded by Rebecca Denison and a small group of HIV positive women in North Oakland in April 1991. When Denison found out about her HIV positive status there were no support networks for HIV positive women in her community. Denison thus started WORLD out of her living room as a small grassroots organization. The small group of members published a newsletter and contacted instructors to teach them about different aspects of living with HIV. WORLD was therefore established through self-organization.

WORLD characterizes itself as a diverse community of women living with HIV, and their supporters, who work together toward common goals. These goals can be seen on three levels. On the first level, the goal is to provide support and information to women with HIV/AIDS, as well as their friends, families and loved ones. On the next level, the main goal is to educate and inspire women with HIV/AIDS to advocate for themselves, one another and the community. On the third level, there is an outreach aspect in which the goal is to promote public awareness of women's HIV/AIDS issues and a compassionate response for all people with HIV/AIDS (WORLD 2007)<sup>6</sup>. Though WORLD has grown significantly in their over 15

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<sup>6</sup> <http://womenhiv.org/aboutworld/mission>. This web page was downloaded April 10, 2009. Today these goals have been changed, and on their web page today WORLD's mission is termed: "WORLD connects HIV-positive women, their families, allies, and communities to one another through peer-based education, support, advocacy, and leadership development. WORLD is a diverse organization for, by, and about women living with, and at risk for, HIV/AIDS". This change indicates that the organization today has a larger focus on community building.

years of operation, the organization remains very community-based. This means that all of their programs emphasize peer-based advocacy and training. Furthermore, they rely on diverse volunteers and community members to support their programs and basic operations both within and out of the office.

These goals of WORLD are put into practice through HIV U. First, the women come together and get to know each other, provide each other with support and become confident in each other's company. The next level, or goal, seeks to empower the women to reach out to their communities, to ideally advocate for themselves and others affected by HIV. The final goal is to promote public awareness and compassion for people with HIV and AIDS. This level aspires to a total transformation, not only of the individual, but of the entire community and discourse surrounding HIV<sup>7</sup>.

Consensus decision-making is a process whereby decisions are reached when all members of a group present consent to a proposal. It does not mean that everyone must be in complete agreement, as they can also agree to disagree (Butler & Rothstein 1995). At HIV U the students utilize consensus decision-making to decide the curriculum of the program, how many classes they will have, and how graduation from the program will be celebrated. The method of consensus is also used in the choice of deans. To be a dean in this context is simply understood to be a person with a particular responsibility that contributes to the fulfillment of the training. HIV U uses institutional language from schools and universities such as "deans" and "teachers" in its training program. Calling the students "deans" is thus an invert of the hierarchal structure at schools and universities. A dean is the supreme authority at a university. Hence, merely in terms of language, the women participants at HIV U enhance their social status and the importance of their work.

The selection of deans starts by the women suggesting what kinds of deans they will need, and subsequently volunteer for the dean role they themselves would like to take on. In Mpophomeni we operated with deans of nutrition, students, instructors, calendar and graduation. Normally, one or two people in each category will have the title of dean, and the role of the dean is to make sure that everything works properly within her 'field'. This does not necessarily mean that the deans have to do all of the work by themselves – it is just as

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<sup>7</sup> This characterization of HIV U stems from a manual Shalini Eddens worked out prior to the implementation in Mpophomeni

much a dean's task to delegate work to others – but that the deans are overall responsible. In Mpophomeni, all of the women held a dean title, and hence there were small groups that shared the different responsibilities. The deans of nutrition had to make sure that food was served after every meeting. The deans of students made sure that the women met up and were given relevant information in cases of absences. Deans of instructors were responsible for contacting the people the women wanted to come and teach, while the dean of calendar was to make a calendar with all of the dates and topics of the meetings. Finally, the deans of graduation held responsibility for planning an extraordinary ceremony to mark the end of the training.

### **1.2.2 WORLD in the context of social movements**

Due to its beginnings as a grassroots movement, WORLD does not acknowledge any external sources of inspiration to their pedagogical thoughts or their way of organizing. However, as a social movement it is possible to trace the foundational practices that WORLD employs to mobilize and organize back to the US civil rights movement of the 1960s, which inspired – and continues to inspire – a wave of non-violent social movements in the United States. According to Bill Moyer, “social movements are collective actions in which the populace is alerted, educated and mobilized (...) to challenge the powerholders and the whole society to redress social problems” (Moyer 2001: 10). WORLD fits well into this definition as a social movement with the aim of challenging powerholders to redress the social problem of HIV/AIDS.

A main goal of the US civil rights movement was to achieve for African Americans the rights guaranteed by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, and which therefore could also be contested in the court system. The civil rights movement succeeded in achieving most of its goals, and hence has inspired a broad specter of other social movements such as the feminist movement, the anti-Vietnam War movement, the peace movement and the environmental movement (Salomonsen 1991).

The US Congress called the African-American seamstress Rosa Parks “the Mother of the Modern-Day Civil Rights Movement” after she refused to give up her seat on the bus to a white passenger in Montgomery, Alabama on December 1, 1955. Her act inspired, among others, Martin Luther King Jr., and resulted in the 381-day Montgomery Bus Boycott from

December 5 and onwards. King had studied the principles of Gandhian non-violence at university, and combined Gandhi's method with a mass movement approach. The successful boycott was carried out with a strong commitment to love and non-violence based on the words of Gandhi and the Bible (Moyer 2001: 119).

Before the bus boycott, Parks attended a two-week training conference at the Highlander Folk School, a centre in Tennessee founded in 1932, which among other things trains community social change activists. Co-founder of the school Myles Horton was influenced by the Nordic Folk High Schools in Denmark started by the Danish theologian and minister Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Highlander Folk School was therefore based on many of the same principles as the Nordic Folk High Schools (Horton 1983). At the beginning of the 1950s, Highlander became active in a pre-civil rights movement and was later known as a civil rights school (Horton 1983: 18). It has educated a number of organizers of the civil rights movement, and has hence both directly and indirectly influenced present-day social movements in the United States.

My aim for emphasizing the link between WORLD and the civil rights movements is to place the model into a wider context, and show that WORLD's basic principles in terms of education, empowerment and work for social change are informed by historical and long-standing efforts. Interestingly, these movements are partly inspired by Grundtvig's ideas, and his philosophy and concepts will be used in my reflections on HIV University's pedagogy. Furthermore, the methodology and ethics of the civil rights movement were deeply shaped by African-Americans. Hence, it is not surprising that the basic notions of peer-organization and consensus decision-making in a circle of peers are well-known in traditional African cultures, for instance the Zulu culture which is dominant in Mpophomeni. According to the Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu, "[it is ] interesting to observe that the habit of decision by consensus in politics was studiously cultivated in some of the most centralized and, if it comes to it, warlike, ethnic groups of Africa, such as the Zulu and the Ashantis" (Wiredu 2000: 3).



## 1.3 Description of the field

### 1.3.1 Mpophomeni Township

Mpophomeni was founded in 1966 as a result of the Group Areas Act, which carved up the geographies of towns and cities in South Africa, declaring them as White, Coloured, Asian or Black. Mpophomeni was founded as a black community. In order to fulfill the new laws, many people became victims of forced removals from their homes, often losing their livelihood, pride and identity in the process. Thus, Mpophomeni is not a “natural” community, but stands as a reminder of the unjust laws of apartheid that left many black communities impoverished and vulnerable to epidemics such as HIV/AIDS.

Mpophomeni is situated in the middle of the province KwaZulu Natal, and the Zulu culture permeates the society and its existing structures of power. The community also comprises Xhosas and Sothos, but the Zulus are the largest ethnic group in Mpophomeni. One central aspect of this culture is the patrilineal kinship tradition, which among other things includes the women’s mobility between families in terms of marriage. In a patrilineal descent system, a person is considered to belong to the same descent group as his or her father. After marriage, however, the woman moves to her husband’s family and is integrated as a permanent guest in his lineage. She still belongs to her father’s lineage, but her children are recognized as members of her husband’s patrilineage. The husband’s family pays a bride price or *lobola* to the wife’s family that entails a certain number of cattle and other gifts (Kauffman & Lindauer 2004: 19-20). These gifts may be seen as substitution for the children lost to her own lineage when she uses her reproductive capacities to bring new members to her husband’s line of descent through childbirth, and not to her father’s.

The patrilineal kinship system is blamed as an etiological factor in the African pattern of HIV/AIDS. In this regard it is argued that patriarchy gives men the incentive to acquire as many wives as possible because of the value of children as economic assets, and as such, promotes polygamous behavior outside of marriage (Oppong & Kalipeni 2004: 51). Another factor in the relation between patriarchy and the transmission of HIV/AIDS is the stress which is laid on a girl’s chastity before marriage. As this stress is not reciprocal in terms of men’s chastity, transmission is therefore common within marriage.

The patrilineal kinship system in Mpophomeni also affects the gender structures in the community. Traditionally, the woman’s domain has been the house. Inside the house she

nourishes and honors life through her roles as mother and wife. Women generally have a lower rank than men both within the family and in society. They do not participate in the public to the same extent as men, and gender inequality becomes further visible through increased incidences of sexual abuses. Mike Kesby explains the gendered context of sexual decision making with the kinship traditions of many countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Women move from father's to husband's household at marriage, while *lobola* travels the opposite way. Husbands are said to refer to this payment when they demand access to their wives' bodies, regardless of these women's feelings<sup>8</sup> (Kesby 2004: 222). Dr. Simangaliso Kumalo<sup>9</sup> emphasizes in addition the difference in upbringing between the boy- and the girl child as a contributing factor to gender inequalities:

In Zulu culture, boy-children are raised differently from girl-children. They are taught that they are strong and powerful and have to provide for their wives and children who are their subordinates. Girl-children on the other hand, are encouraged to adopt a weaker, but caring and nurturing role and to be subservient to their husbands. These roles are internalised and shape the way people behave in their sexual relationships (Kumalo 2006: 7)

Gender inequality thus affects the spread of HIV in Mpophomeni. Women do not often have a say in relationships when it comes to matters relating to sex. When a man refuses to use a condom, for example, the woman lacks the power to argue against this decision as she has been brought up to respect her husband. The prevalence remains high thus remains high both among married and unmarried young people. Although there are no certain numbers of the HIV prevalence in Mpophomeni, the infection rate has been estimated to around 40% (Salomonsen 2009, Kumalo 2006). In the province of KwaZulu Natal, the infection rate in 2008 was 15, 8 %, which is the highest number in South Africa (Avert 2009).

The last years, antiretrovirals (ARV) has become an offer for everyone living with HIV in Mpophomeni. However, some people with HIV are deliberately not taking medication in order to lower their CD4 count<sup>10</sup> so that they can qualify for a government disability grant.

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<sup>8</sup> Oppang & Kalipeni (2004) are skeptical of blaming the "exotic" nature of marriage and kinship systems prevalent in traditional African society for the African AIDS crisis, such as Kesby tends to do in his theory.

<sup>9</sup> Dr. Samangaliso R. Kumalo is a senior lecturer at the School of Religion and Theology, UKZN, and is also a deputy director of the Ujamaa Centre for contextual bible interpretation. Based on research conducted in Mpophomeni he wrote the article "Mpophomeni: Community of Pain and Hope" in 2006, which was supposed to be published in a book fostered by the research project "Broken Bodies, Healing Communities". The book has not yet been published, but I continue to refer to the article, as it provides necessary information for this thesis.

<sup>10</sup> CD4, or T-cells, are specialized cells in the immune system that help protect the body from infection. HIV attacks these types of cells and uses them to make more copies of HIV. This way the immune system is weakened.

This is a major concern in South Africa today, not least because the contagiousness increases when the CD4 count is low. HIV/AIDS patients who have a CD4 count of 200 or less qualify for a monthly disability grant of significant amount. Unfortunately, many people see a disability grant as their only chance of an income (Nkuna 2007).

Mpophomeni has a population of about 35 000 (Masibumbane 2007). Upon first entry, the township is striking as a small town with beautiful hilly surroundings. The first houses one sees are privately built, and belong to those holding better jobs, either in government or private industry. However, the conditions under which most people live in Mpophomeni are characterized by a constant struggle for survival. Basic needs are difficult to meet in Mpophomeni. For example, housing has been inadequate to accommodate the number of people who have moved into the community. Furthermore, the unemployment rate remains high; in 2007, 80 % of Mpophomeni's inhabitants were unemployed (Masibumbane 2007). There are few opportunities for post-secondary education or training, and therefore difficult and rare for young people in Mpophomeni to undertake further education. The lack of basic services perpetuates the cycle of poverty, and limited educational opportunities lead to high unemployment rates.

### **1.3.2 Religious life in Mpophomeni**

There is a church on almost every street corner in Mpophomeni. Religious life is highly visible, especially on Sundays when the streets are full of church members on their way to mass dressed in the specific outfits of their respective congregations. Because of the important role that Christianity plays for the inhabitants of Mpophomeni, one must also look at the religious life of the community when studying the impact of HIV in Mpophomeni. Some church members, for example, provide home visitation services and home prayer for people who are sick.

It is common for Christians in Mpophomeni to mix their faith with African traditional beliefs, and their religious practice with traditional African rituals. This means, among other things, that they pray to their ancestors and contact African traditional healers, or sangomas, when they are sick or in trouble. Traditionally, many sangomas have confirmed people's suspicions that their diagnosis means that they have been bewitched, and that way they are evading the reality of HIV and maintaining the stigma that goes with it. According to the women I worked

with, however, things are changing in this regard. People are very knowledgeable when it comes to HIV. During a dialogue between the women attending HIV U and three men from the community, the men were asked if they believed in traditional healers in the context of HIV and AIDS. Their answer was that because of their tradition they believed in them, but they were aware that sangomas could not give them a cure for HIV.

In many congregations in Mpophomeni, especially in the reformed churches, women's prayer groups are central. These groups are called *manyanos*, and have become a significant force in South Africa. The manyanos evolved in the late nineteenth century revivalism of the mission churches, and are essentially a union of mothers coming together to pray. These prayer groups began as a solidarity movement, and they constitute an important part of the social history of black women's economic and religious roles in South Africa. For the women who belong to a manyano, their organization means for them the sharing of life. This means that they enrich each other spiritually, helping each other to for example work through problems. Their weekly gatherings provide an outlet for them that has been denied through history in patriarchal and westernized churches. In this outlet there is a space for them in which emotions and needs can be articulated. Particularly in the area of HIV, the manyanos work as a solidarity network for women to come and pray for those who are sick or dying, or for other reasons are in need for support (Haddad 2001, Holness 1997).

### **1.3.3 Social relevance of HIV U in Mpophomeni**

Around the turn of the century, HIV became a major concern for the community of Mpophomeni, and today a number of NGOs and sectors in the society are working to fight the pandemic. In this section I map the HIV work that is being done in Mpophomeni, placing HIV University among these initiatives.

Many young HIV positive women and men in Mpophomeni attend support groups<sup>11</sup>. These are private meetings where people can talk openly about their status. Generally there is a facilitator for the group who organizes the meetings and suggests topics to discuss. The

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<sup>11</sup> The Ujamaa centre, a centre for contextual bible interpretation belonging to the School of Religion and Theology at UKZN has been an important contributor to the development of support groups. In addition to providing a space to talk openly, Ujamaa also runs groups for leadership training

support groups mainly take place in *closed space*. By this term I mean that there is dialogue between the participants in the group, but not between the group and the society.

One of the most important local initiatives in Mpophomeni is the Zenzeleni Community Centre. The centre facilitates community development, serving as a springboard for projects that address the various needs of the community. The centre is run by an elected committee, and a large number of volunteers make Zenzeleni a junction for different activities. One of Zenzeleni's main focuses is to train the community in different skills, so that those who are unemployed or affected by HIV can have something meaningful to do. Zenzeleni also acts as an umbrella organization for other community building projects, not least in the area of HIV and AIDS. For instance the "Gender and Paralegal Office" is housed in the same building as the community centre, an advocacy organization for issues concerning gender and rape.

There is one health clinic in Mpophomeni. It is run by the Wellness Centre and provides voluntary counseling and HIV testing. However, very few people choose to go to this clinic because of the stigma related to it. If one attends this clinic, I was told, people will notice and immediately understand the reasons for going there. According to the women I worked with, attending the Mpophomeni clinic is like announcing that one is HIV positive. People therefore choose to go to Howick where they can be more anonymous. This, however, costs money besides being contributing to the division of the local community when it comes to HIV. It is a visible proof that the stigma remains, and that people keep their status to themselves in fear of being judged.

Despite the fact that there is still a long way to go in the area of HIV in Mpophomeni, a change, as I have illustrated above, is happening in the community. People have started to realize the dimensions of the pandemic and the impossibility of ignoring the problem. Different organizations have arisen that provide necessary help for those affected and infected. In the churches too, something has changed the last few years. Many churches now provide home visits and prayers for their sick members.

After observing the work that is taking place in Mpophomeni in the field of HIV and AIDS, it is necessary to ask what HIV University can provide that does not already exist in the community. I view the new project not as something distinct from the other initiatives in the community, but rather, as a supplement to them. In this regard it is important that HIV University includes both a safe space in which to open up, and a platform from which to reach

out to the larger society, adding an outreach aspect to the support group model. Another crucial aspect of HIV U is the fact that it is only for women. As the description of Mpophomeni has shown, women generally have a lower position in society than men. There is therefore a great need to focus specifically on them.

## **1.4 Research context**

In this subchapter I map out relevant existing research in my field. Since HIV was discovered in the early 1980s, much has been written in an attempt to understand the pandemic. The selection of research for this subchapter therefore necessarily excludes important contributions to the HIV/AIDS discourse. Most relevant to my field is research done in the social sciences and in theology. When I highlight these two fields of research I focus specifically on research done towards women in sub-Saharan Africa.

### **1.4.1 HIV and AIDS research in the social sciences**

Today, AIDS research in the social sciences has developed immensely, becoming a central force in HIV prevention alongside medical research. In “International AIDS Research in Anthropology: Taking a Critical Perspective on the Crisis” anthropologist Brooke G. Schoepf (2001) focuses on the contributions of anthropologists and their collaborators from other disciplines working in the international arena of HIV and AIDS.

In the 1990s a growing number of anthropologists conducted processual ethnographies that linked individuals’ life worlds to global structures and processes, showing how these are involved in the spreading of HIV. Researchers then started to acknowledge the necessity of including political and economic factors in HIV/AIDS research. Medical anthropologist and physician Paul Farmer is a pioneering figure in this kind of HIV research. His articles rest on participant-observation with people at risk of contracting HIV in their community, focusing on a Haitian context. In *AIDS and Accusation: Haiti and the Geography of Blame* (1992), Farmer links the structures of the AIDS pandemic to the personal experiences of HIV positive people in a poor society. A central claim of the book is that the global pandemic of AIDS and the social responses to the disease have been patterned by social structures (Farmer 1992: xi).

Dr. Jonathan Mann, former head of the World's Health Organization's global AIDS program, was one of the first to criticize the one-sided focus on individual risk reduction in HIV research and prevention. According to Mann, the method of epidemiology, largely employed in the first few years after the discovery of AIDS, left little scope for understanding how behaviors are related to social conditions (Mann 1999: 218). In the late 1980s, Mann claims, political, social and economical considerations that influence individual behaviors were taken into account in AIDS research, but failed in going beyond the stage of simply listing contextual factors and influences (Mann 1999: 218). Mann's claim for behavioral change has been a critical and important contribution to AIDS research and work. A claim for behavioral change also lays the foundation for empowerment training as a tool in the fight against HIV and AIDS.

The issue of gender and vulnerability in the area of HIV and AIDS in Africa is emphasized by Anne V. Akeroyd in "Coercion, Constraint, and "Cultural Entrapments": A Further Look at Gender and Occupational Factors Pertinent to the Transmission of HIV in Africa". Like Jonathan Mann, Akeroyd goes beyond epidemiology and she suggests that the vulnerability of women to HIV may be rooted in customs and laws which render African women subordinate to men in everyday gender relations (Akeroyd 2004: 94).

Beth E. Schneider and Nancy E. Stoller, sociology professors and editors of *Women Resisting AIDS: Feminist Strategies of Empowerment* (1995), contended already in 1995 that women are the group most affected by HIV, and stand therefore central to the multifaceted ways in which AIDS is approached on a world-wide scale (Schneider & Stoller 1995: 1). Schneider and Stoller's book combines current social scientific knowledge and theory with case studies of feminist practice in HIV prevention, care giving and organizing. The book is interesting because Stoller contributed in the founding of WORLD and because WORLD reflect upon their own work in this book through Rebecca Denison's article "Call Us Survivors! Women Organized to Respond to Life-Threatening Diseases (WORLD)".

### **1.4.2 HIV and AIDS research in theology**

Sub-Saharan Africa is the region most affected by AIDS. Hence AIDS is a major issue to the research conducted in the field of theology in these countries. Professor in the New Testament, Musa Dube, claims that there has been a disparity between responses to the

disease and the needs of the people in poor societies in Africa. In “*Andinkra! Four Hearts Joined Together*” (2006), Dube discusses HIV Prevention work that has failed to take into account traditional African culture, instead exclusively operating from a Western system of values:

The structural epistemology that assumes that the West/North holds the best answer for the whole world (...) was established in colonial times and continues today, informing the economic, political and reproductive policies that are often recommended to all world wide. The global approach to HIV & AIDS has been no different. Western categories of understanding and preventing HIV&AIDS became the standard approach in extremely different contexts around the world (Dube 2006: 134)

In the case of sub-Saharan Africa, Dube especially stresses the tensions between the rights of the individual and the rights of the community regarding HIV. She argues that the West has traditionally given precedence to the value of confidentiality rather than community support. The African cosmology was robbed of creatively informing its own communities about the prevention of HIV and AIDS due to the defining power of HIV being situated in the Western biomedical arena (Dube 2006: 136). The policy of confidentiality spread fear and shame, and made HIV appear different than other diseases that they traditionally tackled together. HIV thus became the burden of the individual (Dube 2006: 138). According to Dube, the policy of confidentiality also caused the refusal of people to get tested or disclose their status, leading to further unconscious transmission of the disease.

Many faith-based organizations are now actively engaged in HIV/AIDS prevention (Dube 2006: 132). Dube is a central figure in “the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians” (often simply called “the Circle”) which has become a significant player in the area of gender, religion and HIV in southern Africa. The Circle’s mission is to undertake research and publish theological literature written by African women with special focus on religion and culture. In addition to the Circle’s contribution to the HIV discourse of South Africa, their work is central to this thesis due to the fact that two of the South African partners in the research project “Broken Women, Healing Traditions?” are active in the Circle. Dr. Isabel Apawo Phiri and Dr. Sarojini Nadar have contributed in many books written by members of the Circle, and together they have edited *African Women, Religion and Health* (2006).

Dr. Beverly Haddad, professor and ordained priest in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, has emphasized the role of the manyano movement in the area of HIV and AIDS. She



regards the manyano movement as a site of survival practice and a place where poor and marginalized women can take control of their lives and find courage in the face of imminent death (Haddad 2001). Dr. Haddad is also director of the “Collaborative for HIV and AIDS, Religion and Theology” or CHART, a collaborative for research, reflection and engagement within the School of Religion and Theology at UKZN. One of the project’s aims is to understand religious obstacles to prevention and treatment and to communicate these in a language accessible to non-religious people. Furthermore, CHART provides a channel for collaboration with agencies outside UKZN, including religious groups, faith-based organizations, other universities, and funding agencies. CHART also develops and oversees post-graduate research on HIV and AIDS, religion and theology, through formal teaching programs at this level (CHART 2009).

### **1.4.3 The call to faith communities**

In and around Pietermaritzburg, faith communities have made significant efforts to facilitate social and personal transformation in the situation of people with HIV. The Ujamaa Centre, a centre for contextual Bible interpretation for poor and marginalized and belonging to the School of Religion and Theology at UKZN, is one of the contributors. Gerald West is a professor in the Old Testament at UKZN and is also the manager of the Ujamaa Centre. According to West, contextual bible interpretation flows from a dissatisfaction with “standardized” or “prescribed” reading of the bible that do not fit the specific circumstances of the reader (West 1995: 61). Hence, in the case of Ujamaa, the gospel is read from within the community of struggle in South Africa (West 1995: 74). Despite the role of the theologian as a facilitator, the poor and marginalized are active participants in the reading group.

In the spring of 2000, Jan Bjarne Sødal submitted a postgraduate thesis in Christianity at the Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo, entitled, “Tause Tungers Tale: Om myndiggjørende bibellesning og teologen som tilrettelegger med utgangspunkt i en sørafrikansk kontekst”<sup>12</sup>. In his thesis, Sødal studies the contextual Bible interpretation groups at the Ujamaa Centre, focusing particularly on the voice of the poor and marginalized in society. Sødal sheds light on the work carried out by Ujamaa, which is helpful in my own reflections of HIV University and its relation to pedagogy and theology. Sødal’s study of Ujamaa is an important

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<sup>12</sup> Speech of silent tongues: Empowering bible reading and the theologian as facilitator in a South African Context (my translation)

contribution also to a Norwegian context due to the fact that the organization “Norwegian Church Aid”<sup>13</sup> supports Ujamaa financially.

In contextual theology at the Ujamaa Centre, poor and marginalized hold a unique and privileged position as dialogue partners and as a basis for theological reflection (Sødal 2000: 10). Contextual theology is an interpretation of Christianity that comes into being through the interpreter’s awareness of their context (Sødal 2000: 12). Contextual theology is furthermore inspired by, and has similarities to, theology of liberation. This movement’s support of the poor and oppressed is grounded by the fact that God himself has chosen this side. The God of the Bible is hence the God of the poor and oppressed.

A central contributor to the field of empowerment and education in developing countries is the Brazilian professor of education Paulo Freire. Freire was one of the most influential educationalists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and he found his inspiration in Christianity, Marxism and existentialism. He has inspired several other educationalists all over the world, especially among the poor. The contextual bible interpretation groups fostered by Ujamaa are inspired by his philosophy, and he has been a fundamental source of inspiration to the development of theology of liberation. Freire became internationally known through the method of education called “the pedagogy of the oppressed”, and the book with the same name was first published in 1963. It is crucial in his methodology that the meeting between teacher and pupil takes place as a *dialogue*. Through this dialogue, the teacher can experience that oppressed, poor or ignorant people can develop self esteem, become conscious about their own situation and be critical and active. In Freire’s pedagogy, the teacher holds a central position, but remains equal to the students in terms of authority during the teaching process.

The work of Paulo Freire has had large impact in the theological milieus in and around Pietermaritzburg. His pedagogy of the oppressed has influenced the work being done to improve the life situation of the poor and marginalized, not least through the contextual Bible interpretation groups. The implementation of HIV University in Mpophomeni thus happens in this context where impressive efforts are already underway in order to empower people with HIV and improve the conditions in which they are living.

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<sup>13</sup> Kirkens nødhjelp

## **1.5 Conceptual framework**

The research context I have outlined above illustrates that research on HIV and AIDS is being carried out on many levels today. From solely focusing on transmission and risk groups in the early 1980s, research today encompasses roughly all aspects of a human's life, and on the global, societal and individual levels. The conceptual framework I make use of is an expansion of the research context described above, and attempts to situate the thesis in relation to the field of ethics, theology and pedagogy.

### **1.5.1 Action-research and empowerment**

In recent years there has been an increase in research that attempts to improve the life situation for those most affected by the disease, evident in action-research and empowerment. In and around Pietermaritzburg this kind of research is especially evident in the work carried out in the field of theology and by faith communities. As I will discuss in Chapter 2, the implementation of HIV University in Mpophomeni can be regarded as action-research. According to Brooke G. Schoepf, action-research can be defined as “a transdisciplinary method designed to foster social change” (Schoepf 2001: 349). The HIV U pilot project aimed to both foster empowerment among women in Mpophomeni, and to conduct research in the field. The research project actively chose WORLD to facilitate the process, thereby studying if and how the model opens up to something new and fruitful for the society. The analytical perspective I have chosen leans on Saba Mahmood's analysis of a women's mosque movement in Egypt. Mahmood, however, never aimed to facilitate a change in this context. Hence, I discuss the work conducted by faith communities in South Africa to bring perspectives on empowerment and action into my conceptual framework. This is important due to the fact that the model I study is action-based and seeks to foster a change in the women who participate.

### **1.5.2 Ethical formation through habitus**

I make use of Saba Mahmood's theoretical perspective from *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (2005) in my analysis of the practices I observed among the women in the training. The book builds specifically upon Mahmood's research among a

women's mosque movement in Egypt, but I regard her theory as also relevant on a more general level. In her fieldwork, Mahmood observed how the mosque participants formed their ethics by submitting to bodily practises, and through these bodily practices, such as weeping in prayer and donning of the veil, the women internalized ethical systems, in turn making them pious Muslims.

For Aristotle, moral virtues have to be distinguished from intellectual virtues (Mahmood 2005: 136). Intellectual virtues, in an Aristotelian notion, owe both their birth and growth to teaching, and for that reason require experience and time. Moral virtues, on the other hand, arise as a result of habit. This means that they do not arise in us by nature because “nothing that exists from nature can form a habit contrary to nature” (Mahmood 2005: 136). There are many things that we cannot do before we have learnt them, for example building a house or playing the lyre. The same is the case with moral virtues – we learn by practicing them. Just like men become builders by building and lyre players by playing the lyre, so too do we become just by performing just acts, and brave by performing brave acts. A virtuous habitus is thus acquired through virtuous habits. These two concepts, however, are not to be confused. Once acquired through assiduous practice, habitus, unlike habits, becomes a person's character. Consequently, the habitus leaves a permanent mark on the character of the person (Mahmood 2005: 136).

Mahmood connects the concept of habitus with Foucault's notion of ethics. She refers to Foucault's notion of ethics as “those practices, techniques, and discourses through which a subject transforms herself in order to achieve a particular state of being, happiness, or truth” (Mahmood 2005: 28). Furthermore, Foucault sees ethics as always local and particular, pertaining to a specific set of procedures, techniques, and discourses through which highly specific ethical-moral subjects come to be formed. To Foucault, “morals” refers to sets of norms, rules, values, and injunctions (Mahmood 2005: 28). In this regard morals become the inner norms that enable the subject to conduct particular practices.

Mahmood argues for the necessity of detaching the notion of agency from the goal of progressive politics and several feminist theorists, where freedom and liberty are regarded as *the* political ideals (Mahmood 2005, 2009). Agency to Mahmood is not a fixed and defined concept, and the ability to effect change in the world and in oneself is historically and culturally specific. The meaning and sense of agency must thus emerge through an analysis of the particular concepts that enable specific modes of being. In this sense, agential capacity is

entailed not only in those acts that resist norms, but also in the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms (Mahmood 2005: 15). Agency is thus not considered as an ability to act, but rather, as a mode of behavior.

Mahmood argues furthermore that the set of capacities inherent in a subject should be seen as a product of operations of power, rather than something that exists prior to these operations. Hence, instead of looking for liberal practices when studying women's agency, Mahmood, in her account for agency, puts focus on the subject's self-formation through the acts that this specific subjects performs. This capacity of action is furthermore enabled and created by historically specific power relations (Mahmood 2005: 18).

Mahmood draws a distinction between the old Aristotelian concept of habitus and the term used in the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Basically, the difference lies in Aristotle's emphasis on habitus as a conscious act, while the same act, for Bourdieu, is unconscious. For Bourdieu, habitus is a "generative principle" through which "objective conditions" of a society come to be lived in human experience (Bourdieu cited in Mahmood 2005: 138). Bourdieu acknowledges that a habitus is learned; his concern, however, "lies in the unconscious power through which objective social conditions become naturalized and reproduced"<sup>14</sup> (Mahmood 2005: 138). In Bourdieu's theory, habitus may therefore, more than a conscious act, be regarded as society written into the body (West 2009: 31).

Habitus includes a connection between norm, practice and bodily form. The body is seen as a site of moral conscious training performed through practices. This involves the notion that inner moral norms are developed as a result of outer practice, meaning that action does not emerge from natural feelings, but rather, creates these feelings. I emphasize the concept of form in Chapter 3, as I regard the circle in which the women sit throughout their HIV U meetings as the form which enables practices to develop. In this regard, the circle is considered to work both as the means by which the norm is enabled to leave a permanent mark on the person's character *and* the bodily expression of this particular norm.

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<sup>14</sup> Mahmood here refers to Bourdieu (1977)

### 1.5.3 Anchoring the thesis in theology and pedagogy

The process of ethical formation described above illustrates a view of human growth and alteration, which is relevant in the fields of theology, pedagogy and pedagogy of religion. As mentioned, the women I worked with in Mpophomeni were all active in their respective churches. This was also the reason as to why the women, when they chose the topics that they wanted to learn about in HIV U, decided to have a class on religion and culture. They invited Bongzi Zengele from of the Ujamaa Centre as a speaker to the class and were thus provided with a class on contextual bible interpretation. Despite HIV University and Ujamaa's common goal of empowering HIV positive people and improving their dignity and life situations, I argue in this thesis that there are certain fundamental differences between the two initiatives. HIV University, I contend, brings something new to the context in which it is implemented.

WORLD's philosophy may, as described above, be linked to movements influenced by the philosophy of the Danish theologian N.F.S. Grundtvig. Unlike Paulo Freire, Grundtvig is not deeply rooted in the African context I have been working in, but represents a practice that is highly reflected upon in Scandinavia and put into practice also in the United States. Chris Spicer, Director of the Institute for People's Education and Action in Northampton, USA, describes Grundtvig's educational philosophy as "an indirect method"<sup>15</sup>: first you must learn to love life, and then you can reform the world. In order to grow as a human being it is therefore necessary to accept yourself as well as taking pride in your life (Spicer 2000). In addition to providing concepts relevant for my analysis, Grundtvig's philosophy also speaks to the theological relevance of the research project I have participated in, and can therefore function as a dialogical bridge back to the theological institution to which I submit this thesis. In the area of HIV, Grundtvig's indirect method includes accepting one's status and cultural identity, to love life as an HIV positive. Then the struggle for change can begin. Hence, the method of Grundtvig runs contrary to a yearning for a new life to come in the future, and a longing for something beyond the reality here and now such as a social redemption after death. The idea that you must love life before you can transform is closely related to HIV U's idea that societal change starts by working individually and locally.

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<sup>15</sup> Spicer here refers to conversations with the Danish Folk High School teacher and administrator Frederik Christensen

A cardinal concept in Grundtvig's philosophy is what he terms "levende vekselvirkning" or "living interaction" in English<sup>16</sup>. This concept laid the foundation for the Nordic Folk High Schools, which were established in the Scandinavian countries in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and have since been implemented in other countries around the world, for instance in the United States and in Africa<sup>17</sup>. The concept of living interaction has similarities to the more well-known term of "dialogue". In dialogue, however, mutuality is considered of prime importance, as the concept does not entail a theory for what may precede or follow it (Bugge 1994: 278). Educational interaction is to Grundtvig a way in which human beings gradually gain more insight into the meaning of life. This happens through a meeting between our cultural and historical roots, our present lives, and new knowledge. Interaction thus includes the mutuality of dialogue, while adding a developmental perspective to it.

When Grundtvig established the Folk High Schools, he emphasized the necessity of local and historical roots in education. He characterized the Folk High School as "a school for life", in reaction to the Latin school, which he regarded as "a school for death" (Grundtvig 1838). In a Folk High School, youth are to utilize their mother tongue and personal experiences in order to become more open, empowered and educated in a natural and dynamic way. This demands that students themselves must have the possibility to choose what they want to believe in and learn (Grundtvig 1837: 196-197). The schools should educate for life and shed light on basic questions regarding the students, both as individuals and members of society. "A folk high school becomes what it is because of the individuals of which it is made for" (Højskolerne 2009). This principle reads similar to HIV U's slogan, "You decide what you want to learn, when you want to learn it and who you want to learn it from" (HIV U manual 2008). Because many of the basic ideas of Grundtvig can be rediscovered in HIV University's pedagogy, I utilize Grundtvig's concepts to shed light on the process of implementing HIV U in Mpophomeni.

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<sup>16</sup> There is a problem in the translation from "levende vekselvirkning" to "living interaction". This is because in inter-action there is a connotation to personal agency. Vekselvirkning, on the other hand, connotes the effects of repeated exchange between tradition and people. Vekselvirkning is therefore not necessarily a conscious act, but rather a change of tradition through the repeated exchange with something new.

<sup>17</sup> In "Education for Life" (1993), Dr.Kachi Ozumba, founder of the Grundtvig movement of Nigeria, describes the implementation of the Folk High School model in Nigeria

## 1.6 The configuration of the thesis

This thesis maintains a ritualized structure inspired by the French ethnologist and folklorist Arnold van Gennep's *The Rites of Passage*. I have classified my material into three sections, based on an analysis of the training the women underwent as following the same structure as a rite of passage. Van Gennep states the following about the rites of passage:

For groups, as well as for individuals, life itself means to separate and to be reunited, to change form and condition, to die and to be reborn. It is to act and cease, to wait and rest, and then to begin acting again, but in a different way (van Gennep 1960: 189).

According to van Gennep, social life involves continuously crossing different thresholds and placing oneself in various sections in society (1960: 189-190). He labels the movements “rites of passage” and they incorporate an individual into a new status in a group or society, as an “opening of doors” (Kimball 1960: x). Despite the fact that the term “ritual” is religiously loaded, van Gennep claims that his theory can be applied to all movements involving a social change for a human being. Ronald Grimes also rejects the notion of rituals as related to beliefs. Rather, he claims that any action can be ritualized. (Grimes 1990: 13).

This thesis includes three chapters of analysis (3, 4 and 5). As van Gennep maintains, when activities associated with rites of passage are examined in terms of their order and content, it is possible to distinguish three major phases: separation (pre-liminal phase), transition (liminal phase), and incorporation (post-liminal phase) (Kimball 1960: vii). My first chapter of analysis, Chapter 3, illustrates the women's separation from their roles in the house. In this first part of the training, the women sit in a circle and build up a sense of safety necessary for them in order to reach out to the public community. When they separate from their traditional roles, they focus on the self with the aim of healing the self and love life as an HIV positive. This separation is enabled by practices that take form in the circle, and by which the women create a norm of reciprocity. Chapter 4 then focuses on the women's period of transition. Here the women perform collective acts in which they take on roles different from those they have held in the past. The focus is on the women's community outreach, and I emphasize how this outreach to promote a change was enabled by the preceding work with the self. In Chapter 5, the last chapter of analysis, I emphasize the women's celebration of their ethical project – the graduation ceremony – ideally meant to function as the women's re-incorporation into society as bearers of new knowledge and skills, and ultimately as new agents.



## **2 Methodology**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The material that lays the foundation for this thesis stems from four weeks of field work in April 2008, and an additional two weeks in December 2008. The implementation of HIV University took place in April, and in December we went back to do a follow-up and evaluation of the project. During my time in Mpophomeni, I participated in every group meeting, as well as other activities carried out in HIV University. Living in the women's neighborhood, I also spent time with the women outside the HIV U setting, for instance by going with them to church and visiting them in their houses.

This chapter starts with an account for the process of collecting my material. This process includes the preparations done prior to the implementation, as well as the actual process in the field. Thereafter I emphasize the methods I have made use of while being in the field, before calling attention to the hermeneutical process of interpreting the material. Finally I reflect upon ethical concerns related to the fieldwork, as well as limitations arisen on the way.

### **2.2 Establishing HIV University in Mpophomeni**

When I was introduced to the project of implementing HIV U in Mpophomeni, the proposal had already been written and granted. In this regard, the goals, strategic objectives and target groups were already decided. My research process was greatly aided by the three years of research already carried out by Salomonsen and Roalkvam in the research project "Broken Bodies, Healing Communities: Faith-based Contextual Responses to HIV/AIDS". The community centre in Mpophomeni, Zenzeleni, was already familiar with the research team, and hence we could do a great deal of preparation via telephone. During the four months before our arrival to Mpophomeni we were continuously in contact with our translator Lucy Chibambo. Lucy went back and forth to the township, making appointments and sorting out practical matters, so that as much time as possible could be spent on the actual project when we arrived. Through Lucy, it became also possible to keep in touch with one of our key informants, who at that time was employed at the gender/paralegal office in the township, in addition to running support groups for HIV positive women. Our informant therefore had a

large network, and before our arrival she had already gathered a group of 12 women to participate in the pilot project HIV University. Before our arrival to Mpophomeni we had also cooperated with Zenzeleni, that provided us the venue in which the meetings could take place.

Another practical matter to be sorted out on beforehand was the cooperation between the research team from UiO and the social worker from WORLD. This was negotiated through four telephone conferences in which representatives from WORLD, the Faculty of Theology at UiO, and the School of Theology at UKZN participated. WORLD had also been familiar with Mpophomeni before the pilot project. In October 2005, Moher Downing went to Mpophomeni together with the research team from UiO and presented the project to representatives from different sectors of the community.

HIV U in Mpophomeni began by having participants, the social worker and researchers sit together in a circle and get to know each other. We presented ourselves and our roles in the project, explaining to the women that the project was a combination of social work and research. Following the introductions, two important decisions – choosing deans and topics – were to be made during the first two meetings. Furthermore, in the spirit of WORLD, the women decided themselves the progress of the training. They wanted to meet eight times altogether, and they wanted each meeting to last for about four hours. It turned out that we met for much more than eight times, but this is what they planned for.

At the end of our stay in Mpophomeni, the women were offered an office in a house in which HIV University could continue to take place. However, a few weeks after we left the township, the house was sold. The sale of the house resulted in a temporary breakdown of the training, as the women did not see the continuation of the training as possible without a place to work. In chapters 4 and 5 I see the fact that the group split up as a result of the sale of the house as an indication of the vulnerable position the women found themselves in after our departure to respectively the United States and Norway. Consequently, in my thesis I do not regard the women's project as completed when we left them in April. They did have a graduation ceremony, but as the narratives will show, the process had not yet undergone the different stages necessary for the women to gain the self-security, dignity and solidarity that was necessary for them to continue on their own. The sale of the house and split of the group thus confirmed our previously tentative plan of returning to Mpophomeni.

We also returned, however, to evaluate the project with each participant. During our stay in December we cooperated with a local community worker, Linzi Rabinowich, who taught the women how to organize and build a network around themselves. The women gradually rebuilt the solidarity between one another that had begun to develop in April. When we left this second time, there was no ceremony to mark the end of the training. Rather, we left while new practices were taking form and while the women were still in a process of establishing something new. Rabinowich was willing to meet with the women occasionally after our return to Norway in order to help them with their goal of reaching out and promoting public awareness.

### **2.2.1 Presentation of the participants at HIV University**

The women's ages ranged from 20 to 45, although the majority of them were in their early 30's. All of the women had children and none were married. When the project began, all of the women were unemployed and supported themselves through social grants and family allowance. One of the aspects I found remarkable about their situation was the lack of activities in their lives. They all took care of the house and the garden if they had one, sent their children to school or preschool if they could afford it, and primarily took care of their family. Despite this being a great responsibility, the women expressed a desire to engage in a different, new and fruitful activity. In one of our first meetings with the women, we spent the last 10 minutes discussing the training's impact on their lives thus far. Many of the women then voiced that the very fact of coming out of the house, meeting people and doing something, made them feel much better than before.

All together there were 12 women who participated in the entire training and received a certificate at the graduation ceremony. When we came back in December, we managed to track down all of the 12 women. Our challenge, but at the same time delight, was that some of the women were very busy at the time. Two of them had gotten proper jobs, one at the police station and another at a hospital. A few others had started to learn how to garden, while another had managed to expand her croqueting business. Due to some of the women's busy days, we only managed to do the evaluation with 10 of the women. Nine out of these 10 attended the follow-up training.

## 2.3 Methods utilized in the field

### 2.3.1 Ethnography and participant observation

I have described so far in this chapter the way I gained the material for this thesis. In this section, I attempt to anchor the process with theory on methodology. I make use of Alan Bryman's *Sosial Research Methods* in order to view advantages and disadvantages with the method that I use – ethnography and participant observation. I use the two terms together, and it should be noted that the definitions of the two terms are difficult to distinguish. Some researchers prefer to use the term “ethnography” because “participant observation” seems to imply, erroneously, pure observation. The main difference between the terms, however, is that “ethnography” includes *both* the method of research *and* the written product of that research, while participant observation refers merely to the process of collecting material (Bryman 2004: 292).

A key question when carrying out field work is that of the role the ethnographer<sup>18</sup> adopts in relation to the social setting and its members. Bryman refers to Raymond Gold's classification of participant observer roles which distinguishes between four roles. At one end is the complete participant, and at the other the complete observer. Between these two ends are the participant-as-observer and the observer-as-participant, in which the former refers to a more active participation than the latter (Bryman 2004: 301). The degree to which the ethnographer should or could be an active or passive participant is an issue in every situation in which the ethnographer participates (Bryman 2004: 303). The fact that the researcher at the same time is a participant and an observer may bring about ethical challenges. The research may in some cases be left out on behalf of the participation. Furthermore, the other participants may feel betrayed if one suddenly takes on a distanced observer role after having earlier been a participant like all the others (Fangen 2009).

During my own field work, I participated in every activity of HIV University together with the women. However, my role as participant continuously shifted between participation on the facilitator's side and participation on the HIV U students' side. This combination of roles may

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<sup>18</sup> Due to the short amount of time I spent in the township, as well as the fact that the research was for a Master dissertation, I was not able to conduct a full-scale ethnography. Ethnographic research usually entails long periods of time in the field. Nevertheless, it may still be possible to carry out a micro-ethnography, which involves focusing on a particular aspect of a topic (Bryman 2004: 293). When referring to my own research as “ethnography”, I am aware that it, strictly speaking, should be regarded as “micro-ethnography”.

have caused some confusion. On the one hand I was attending the meetings in order to collect data for my thesis. On the other hand I had a role in the facilitation, assisting Shalini with practical matters when this was needed. In addition, I participated as one of the students when classes were taking place or when different activities were carried out. However, no matter which role I took on during the training, I always was a part of the circle in which the meetings took place. This means that I was never a complete observer, placing myself on the outside of what was happening. I am aware that my presence in the circle had an impact on the dialogue that developed, and that the dialogue would have been different in the absence of the Norwegian researchers, who in many ways represented a contrast to the women's own lives. However, the fact that we met this way, as researchers, social worker, translators and students, and also representing three different corners of the world, could be seen as a means by which a norm of reciprocity, despite differences, could grow.

### **2.3.2 HIV University as action-research**

The implementation of HIV University in Mpophomeni was a cooperation between a research team and an NGO and hence a combination of research and social work. The HIV U project can be considered as action-research because we as researchers actively attempted to influence the field we were studying<sup>19</sup>. From the very beginning, however, the women were informed about our role as researchers in the project. It is also crucial that it is the participants who actualize the change that we seek, and that we as researchers merely lay the conditions for such a change to take place. This is also a central principle in the methodology "outcome mapping" described below.

Group dynamics and empowerment methods cannot substitute for socio-economic change. However, action-research designates a method to generate collective strategies that enhance the capacity of poor people to take charge of social relationships and to improve the conditions of their life by creating cultural change (Schoepf 2001: 349). The changes we wanted to see in Mpophomeni are explicitly expressed in the goals that were outlined in the

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<sup>19</sup> According to Brooke Schoepf, action-research uses carefully crafted, structured group-dynamics exercises that incorporate ethnographic knowledge (Schoepf 2001: 349). We did not use such structured group exercises that Schoepf refers to in Mpophomeni. Rather, as researchers we simply followed, and studied, the program worked out by WORLD. This program is not worked out with a view towards research. This particular aspect of HIV U in Mpophomeni therefore runs contrary to Schoepf's characterization of action-research.

project proposal funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. The goals are divided into two levels:

1. Community level

- Help mobilize, train and empower HIV positive women to self-educate, organize, advocate and seek power/higher education
- Help foster positive, preventive action and increased awareness in the entire community by providing leadership skills and peer-based behaviour change-education through an HIV University Program

2. University level:

- Develop new methodologies for community intervention and grass root education programs aimed primarily at women living with and in the effects of AIDS
- Build methodological, pedagogical and theoretical competence in women students and researchers who participate in theory/action work in South Africa and Norway

The first level is concerned with the community in which we were working, and expresses a desire for raising awareness around HIV among its members. Simultaneously, the project was set up in order to build competence in the students and researchers who participated. Action and research are consequently interlinked in this project. In order to avoid overpowering the participants with our aim of creating change, the action research approach was set up through cooperation and openness between researchers, social workers and participants. A general principle in action research is that the integrity, freedom and co-determination of the participants are protected (Fangen 2009).

### **2.3.3 Field notes**

Because of the frailties of human memory, Alan Bryman states the importance for ethnographers to take notes based on their observations (Bryman 2004: 306). During my fieldwork I realised the importance of Bryman's words. The notebook became the most frequently used piece of equipment in the field, as I soon realized that all of the new experiences made words and settings confused after short amounts of time. Every evening I elaborated the keywords from the field into proper texts. These texts now work as the narratives to which I refer in my analysis.

Bryman points out the challenges in using field notes, referring to the feelings of self-consciousness the method may cause for the informants (Bryman 2004: 306). In this regard it may be useful to take short time-outs, or write the notes down immediately after a social situation has taken place. I did not find it a problem, however, keeping my notebook open during the meetings at HIV University. The women themselves took notes, and note-taking soon became an integrated part of many of the meetings. Another fortunate aspect in this regard was the fact that there was another student, Marie, also involved in the project. We therefore occasionally took turns being active and taking notes.

My field notes lay the foundation for my analysis. However, I mark my reference to them in foot notes only if I directly quote what people have said. In the women's graduation ceremony, we brought a Dictaphone. In my account for this event I therefore occasionally directly quote the women, as my field notes includes direct quotations based on these recordings.

### **2.3.4 The qualitative interview**

The interview is probably the most frequently used method in qualitative research (Bryman 2004: 319). The qualitative interview is a flexible methodological tool in which one has the flexibility to withdraw from the original layout. It gives insight into what the interviewee sees as relevant and important. The researcher may at times also adapt her research to the material she gains through the qualitative interview (Bryman 2004: 320).

We utilized what Bryman calls "semi-structured interviewing" (Bryman 2004: 321) for the evaluations we performed in December. Our interview guide consisted of a list of questions and specific topics to be covered. The interviewee, however, had flexibility in responding, and even though we wanted each question to be answered, the interviewees did not always follow the pattern of the interview guide.

Marie and I both participated in each of the interviews so that one of us could take notes while the other did the interviewing. We decided to hold the interviews in pairs, with two women being interviewed at a time, out of a desire for balance and mutuality between interviewee and interviewer. Having individual interviews with just one woman at a time, we felt, could potentially cause them to feel small or alone and in turn make them respond in a way they

may have thought we wanted them to respond. On the other hand, holding group interviews could have influenced the participants to adjust their responses to responses of others, instead of giving their own, personal views. In a group interview situation, it also becomes difficult to speak about difficulties within the group when so many participants are present. We therefore decided on meeting the women in pairs. The women spoke Zulu during the interviews, which meant that we had to bring a translator. The evaluations carried out in the interview were based on a methodology called “outcome mapping”. The evaluations were carried out with a Dictaphone. When I refer to what the women said at the evaluations, I therefore mark my reference in foot notes.

### **2.3.5 Outcome mapping**

In the evaluation of the pilot project we made use of a methodology called “outcome mapping” Outcomes, in this method, are defined as “changes in the behaviour, relationships, activities, or actions of the people, groups, and organizations with whom a program works directly” (Earl et al. 2001: 1). The changes do not necessarily have to directly follow the program, and are aimed at contributing to specific aspects of human well-being by providing partners with new tools, techniques, and resources to contribute to the development process. By using outcome mapping, a program is not claiming the achievement of development impacts, but focuses rather on its contributions to outcomes” (Earl et al. 2001: 1). The most successful programs are those that devolve power and responsibility to group and individual actors. While it is appropriate to look for development results, in many cases these may not occur until after the program is completed. Outcome mapping, however, can help a program in many ways; it can indicate cases of positive performance and areas for improvement, gather data on the program’s contribution to changes in its partners, establish priorities and an evaluation plan and evaluate intended and unexpected results.

The evaluation we carried out in December took place eight months after the program had begun. Everyone involved in the project (HIV U participants, researchers, translators, and facilitator) carried out the evaluation. There were basically five main topics we focused on in the evaluation. These were:



- The program framework (personal goals, desired results, to which degree HIV U fitted the respective individual's needs)
- Project strategy (aim for participating, own contribution to pursue the aim, capacity building, support networks provided)
- Positive activities
- Negative activities
- Improvements

On the one hand, the evaluation contributed to our thesis data. On the other hand, it worked as a means for the continuation of HIV U in Mpophomeni. By mapping the participant's experiences and thoughts related to the project, we also laid the foundation for self-reflection and for an evaluation of the project's potential in a southern African context.

## 2.4 Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics originally developed within the fields of philosophy and literature and focused on the interpretation of written texts. In the social sciences, however, the term is also used to refer to the process of reading and interpreting interviews and observations in the field (Fangen 2009).

After two trips to Mpophomeni, I had gained a great deal of material through field notes and evaluations. A process of interpretation, however, is necessary to turn this material into a complete analysis. Much of my material is based on different statements from my informants. In order for these statements to make sense, they need to go through three hermeneutical operations: First the statements must be translated, and then their meaning must be interpreted and arranged by being read in light of its actual correlation. Finally the statements need to be actualized in light of our own context. According to Sissel Læg Reid and Torgeir Skorgen, these are the dynamics involved in every formation of sense and meaning (Læg Reid & Skorgen 2001: 7).

When utilizing hermeneutics as a methodology of understanding, it is necessary to mention the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer. Gadamer argued that people have a 'historically effected consciousness' (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*) and that they are embedded in their particular histories and cultures. Hence, Gadamer found it necessary to work dialogically in the process of understanding. Understanding is always temporary and unfinished. Furthermore, understanding is conditioned by the interpreter's individual and historical basis: She can never step out of this circle of understanding and perceive an object

independently (Lægreid & Skorgen 2006: 223). The concept of preconception is essential to Gadamer's philosophy, and the concept includes a notion that we perceive the present on the basis of the past. Furthermore the concept implies that one is never "empty" when it comes to how one interprets, for example, a text or social setting. We can never free ourselves from our experiences; this in turn plays a part in our understanding of a setting. Preconception is not regarded as negative, but rather as the necessary means by which we become interested in a certain phenomena in the first place. When we become aware of our preconception, the opportunity to rectify it and open up towards a phenomenon arises (Lægreid & Skorgen 2006: 225).

A central aspect of hermeneutics is the relationship between the parts and the whole, and human beings' continuous move back and forth between an understanding of these concepts. Professor of ethics and philosophy of religion, Svein Aage Christoffersen, uses an example from diachonia to illustrate this process; we understand what happens at the sickbed in light of our understanding of what a hospital is, and we understand what a hospital is in light of what happens at the sickbed. The point here is that it is impossible to start from "scratch", as we will never know what came first: the parts or the whole. In this regard we always have to move back and forth between the parts and the whole and develop our understanding of the whole in light of the parts and vice versa (Christoffersen 2005: 73).

This hermeneutical perspective is also applicable in the field where I conducted my research. I met the women of HIV University with an understanding of the impact HIV has on poor women living in a South African township – in other words, I met them with a preconception. At the same time, I developed my understanding of the pandemic's effect on poor women in a South African township in light of what happened within the framework of HIV University.

In terms of my own hermeneutical reflection upon the project, the fact that I returned to the township eight months after the first trip was cardinal. This time I had a completely different preconception when I met the women again. My first stay in Mpophomeni was characterized by overwhelming impressions, and my preconception yielded to the experiences in the field. The insight that I brought back to Norway from these experiences became a part of my preconception when reading theory on HIV and women in South Africa. My preconception had thus changed, and my own hermeneutical circle had reached another level, upon my return to Mpophomeni eight months later. Reading theory in light of my experiences from the first trip to Mpophomeni made me see things from a different perspective. I regard this

process of developing a preconception through reading theory, travelling to Mpophomeni and having this preconception confirmed or rejected, returning home to read theory in light of my experiences and then travelling back for a second time, as my own hermeneutical process through which I gradually reached new levels of understanding.

## **2.5 Challenges and Limitations**

### **2.5.1 Finding my role in the field**

Shortly after the meetings started to take place, I realized the delicate position I found myself in as a researcher. Firstly, it was quite difficult not to get involved in the process of facilitating and consequently influence the outcome. As the research team from UiO laid the foundation for the project to happen, we also helped Shalini with practical matters. In the meetings with the women, however, the goal that each and every outcome shall come exclusively from the women is manifest as a slogan. It was therefore, despite my role as participant observer, important not to influence the outcome of the training. During my time with the women, I participated in every class or meeting they had, sometimes even as a student like them. In this regard it was, as mentioned, crucial to keep in mind the possibility for other participants to feel betrayed when the participant observer suddenly takes on the more distanced role of researcher.

### **2.5.2 Language**

The language aspect was certainly a challenge, both when it came to the training and in the process of collecting data. Most of the women did not speak English and we did not speak Zulu. All the information we got therefore went through our translator, and consequently a great deal of information may get lost in translation. Furthermore, the fact that we could not speak directly to each other also affected the dialogue that took place, as the dialogue did not flow freely. However, in order for a dialogue to take place without interruptions of a mediator, we often let the women speak between themselves before the translator or one of the women who spoke English gave us a summary of what had been said.

That a few of the women spoke English was an advantage to us, but a factor that also had negative repercussions. The language skills formed a distinction between the women: those who spoke English, and those who did not. The result was a split in the group that interrupted the norm of reciprocity they created through the practices they conducted together. In the evaluation that we carried out in December, one of the women noted:

Many of the women in the group went to school but we did not finish at the same level. So some women in the group had a better comprehension of English than we do. Because of that, those who have less comprehension of English seem like idiots<sup>20</sup>.

### 2.5.3 The time limit

Normally HIV University is a ten-week program where students undergo six steps:

- (1) **Timeline:** At this step the women decide for how long they want the training to be, for how long they will meet at the time etc.
- (2) **Outreach:** Making people know it is going to happen.
- (3) **Planning meetings:** These meetings provide an opportunity for people to get to know each other. Participants will be less shy about asking questions and share stories if they feel safe and supported
- (4) **Open house:** This is a social event where students and teachers can meet. It is also an opportunity for people to invite friends of family members to celebrate them “going back to school”.
- (5) **Classes:** These are held by lecturers that have been invited by the students.
- (6) **Graduation:** This is a time for the women to celebrate their accomplishments. Families can come and give support to their loved ones<sup>21</sup>

In the pilot project of implementing HIV U in Mpophomeni, some of these steps had to be left out due to the limited time we had at our disposal. The outreach prior to the meetings, as well as the open house, was left out completely. This resulted in the fact that the women did not receive the opportunity to create a sufficient support network around themselves before going out into the community and promoting public awareness. The shortened timeframe thus affected the stability of the project.

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<sup>20</sup> Evaluation December 4, 2008

<sup>21</sup> These steps are expressed in the manual Shalini Eddens worked out prior to the pilot project

## 2.6 Research ethics

As a concept, “research ethics” refers to a complex set of values, standards and institutional schemes that help constitute and regulate scientific activity. The ethical responsibilities inherent in research are partly associated with standards related to the research process. This includes a respect for the individuals and institutions being studied, as well as a responsibility regarding the use and dissemination of the research (NESH 2006: 5).

Research, whether intentionally or not, has an impact on society. Research provides the information necessary to make informed decisions in the private and public sectors, and can also uncover circumstances and structures needing further evaluation. Furthermore, research can disclose underlying power structures in the community and thus help to explore values and standards that characterize a certain community’s way of thinking. In this regard, research may, if carried out properly, benefit society and culture in the short or long term. However, while research can help promote the value of human life, it can also threaten it. Researchers must therefore show respect for human dignity in their choice of topic, in relation to their research subjects, and in reporting research results (NESH 2006: 8-11)

According to NESH’s guidelines for research ethics, “research subjects are to be given all the information they require to gain a reasonable understanding of the field of research in question, of the consequences of participating in the research project, and of the purpose of the research” (NESH 2006: 12). Carrying out field work in the area of HIV can be challenging due to the shame and stigma attached to the disease. Research in this area thus requires extra caution when it comes to informing the research subject about the consequences of participating. In the beginning stages of HIV University, we spent some time introducing ourselves. Here, I clarified my roles of student and researcher, explaining that I would observe what took place in the meetings, and furthermore write my thesis on the basis of these observations. Before we arrived, however, the women were already aware of the fact that a research team from the University of Oslo would be part of the project, along with a social worker from the United States. Even though one of the women chose not to disclose her status outside of HIV U, there were none who objected being studied.

### **2.6.1 Confidentiality**

The researcher is required to treat all personal information carefully in order to comply with the rules of confidentiality. The research material should normally be made anonymous. The requirements about confidentiality are based on principles of personal protection of those who participate in the research, and the researcher must also consider other possible unintended effects (Ingierd 2009).

During my time in Mpophomeni I also got to know the women, some better than others, outside the frames of the training. The women told me stories in confidentiality, and sometimes these stories were relevant for my research. Using such information requires extra caution when it comes to publishing and depersonalization. This includes not only a depersonalization of the names, but also finding a way to publish the stories so that they do not indicate who they come from.

This project has been reported and approved by the privacy ombudsman for research. Furthermore, intimate details which may lead back to individuals have been left out from the thesis.

# 3 The Circle as a Political and Pedagogical Principle

## 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I focus on the practices the women conducted in the first HIV U meetings. By focusing on these practices I attempt to describe and discuss the nature of the training that took place among the women. The practices I will be investigating are on the one hand those provided by the model, such as consensus-decision making and respectful speaking in an open dialogue. On the other hand, the women bring in practices from their own life such as Zulu songs and prayers. I will therefore be looking at how the women negotiate these different practices in order to constitute norms that will enable them to carry out what they have set up for themselves; to reach out and promote public awareness. In order to shed light on the particular tools that HIV U provides to facilitate this process, I briefly compare the HIV U model to Ujamaa's contextual bible interpretation program in the end of this chapter.

## 3.2 A description of a meeting with HIV University in Mpophomeni<sup>22</sup>

After thorough planning we have decided that the meetings will start at 10am. On the first day, there are already a couple of women present when we arrive. They are sitting outside the venue, waiting for everyone to arrive so that everyone can introduce themselves and the meeting can take place.

We sit down and chat with those arrived while waiting for the others to show up. We then move inside and begin to set up the chairs that are stacked at the back of the room. Nobody asks how the chairs should be placed; together we make them into a circle. For a few seconds we sit there looking at each other in anticipation; then, one of the women rises and starts to sing. The others immediately follow and I become deeply moved as they sing polyphonically in Zulu. It is obvious that for the women, this is a common way to begin a meeting, but for me, this circle of singing is a completely new experience. I try my best to sing along in Zulu,

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<sup>22</sup> This narrative is based on the first meeting with HIV University. The section where the group chooses topics and deans, however, is from the second meeting.

and when the song is over we keep standing, our eyes closed. The women fold their hands and I do the same. One of them says a prayer. Even though I do not understand the words, I understand that it is a well-known and important prayer.

We sit down again. There is a slight nervousness in the air owing to the fact that we do not know each other. Shalini breaks the ice by welcoming everyone and suggesting that each of us says a little bit about ourselves. The woman next to Shalini starts with the phrase: “My name is (...); I am HIV positive.” Then she tells us which year she tested positive, and that she has two children, both of whom are HIV negative. The other women do the same: they state their name, status, the year they tested positive and whether or not their children are positive. I find the fact that they relate their entire introductions to their status a bit uncomfortable, especially when it is my turn to introduce myself. I tell them who I am, where I am from, why I am in Mpophomeni and finally about my MA thesis. When I look at Marie, indicating that it is her turn to introduce herself, the women interject: “You forgot to tell us your status. Are you HIV positive or negative?” On the one hand I feel that the situation is creating a gap between us and them when I state my negative status. However, the women’s persistence might as well be a signal of a desire for openness, and that they do not wish for anything to be unsaid or hidden within the group.

After the presentation we hand out the confidentiality agreements we have prepared for the women to sign, in order to ensure that what is said at HIV U remains confidential. The women, however, say that this is not necessary: they want the group to be open, in order to reach out to society. “The doors should be open,” one of them asserts, “so that others can gain knowledge from what we are doing.”<sup>23</sup> There is an obvious desire among the women that their voices shall be heard; a main goal of theirs is to contribute to change. We are told that this desire stems from an ignorance which is common among Mpophomeni’s inhabitants as well as from the stigma and misconceptions related to the disease. We agree that the group can be open, in the sense that people should know about the work that is being done by the women. However, it remains confidential, meaning that what is said in the group stays within the group.

Shalini then informs the women about WORLD in general and HIV University in particular. She emphasises the training’s focus on the group, telling them that every decision has to be

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<sup>23</sup> Field notes April 8, 2008



made together, with every woman present. A decision should never be made by individuals, and especially not by the facilitator. This means that the 12 women are themselves in charge of how HIV University of Mpophomeni will take shape. The women learn that this is the first time WORLD is working outside of the United States, and that the program must be modified. For example, HIV U is normally a 10-week program, but here they only have four weeks. Shalini asks them how often they would like to meet, and the women decide that they would like to try to meet every weekday, with a few exceptions. They also agree that each meeting should last from 10am to 2pm. This way they will have time to drop their children off at preschool before the meetings.

The women, however, become concerned over the issue of food due to the length of the meetings. Because many of them are on ARVs, they have to eat regularly, and it is therefore necessary to have a healthy lunch during the meetings. Here, we are challenged not to make any suggestions concerning the food. In HIV U, the women are supposed to sort these things out themselves; it is important that the facilitator does not start to lead the group. Shalini thus asks the women, “OK, so you need food – what possibilities do you have in order to get that?” Immediately, the women put forth the money issue. They do not have any money and thus cannot provide food. Shalini then asks them what they *can* do, and they say that they can cook and prepare the meals. Together we then decide that the project will provide the money needed for food, as well as transport to Howick to do the grocery shopping. The women will set up a budget for the meals, do the shopping and then prepare and cook the food before each meeting. The dean of nutrition (see below) will have the responsibility to make sure that food is being cooked. However, the women decide that everyone should lend a hand in order to get the food on the table. Later on I realize that the food plays a more significant role than just providing nutrition. Sharing a lunch after each meeting has a uniting effect on each of us. The value of the food will be further emphasized in the thesis.

After the food issue has been sorted out it is time to choose deans. The women tend to suggest others for the positions rather than volunteering themselves, but eventually the women divide themselves into deans of nutrition, students, instructors, calendar and graduation. The next thing on the agenda is to decide the topics that the women want to learn about. Jone explains that the word “University” is derived from the latin word “Universus”, and hence it includes all that exists. Any topic is welcomed, and the women are challenged to come up with topics that will suit *them* in particular. The women become very engaged; everyone has an opinion

on topics they want included. In order to sort out all of the topics, one of the women goes up to the white board and writes down the topics. She is strict, allowing only one person to speak at a time. After all of the suggested topics are written down, each of them are discussed and taken into consideration. The final decision of which topics should remain for lectures is done by voting. These selected topics are:

- How to be a public speaker
- Religion and culture
- Social welfare development
- Rape
- Human rights

Other topics that were suggested, but not selected, were for instance teenage pregnancy, poverty, family matters, gender-based violence, nutrition and orphan care. Instead of simply voting on the suggested topics, the women discussed how topics could also be combined. They also discussed which of the suggested topics would lead them towards one of their common goals, namely how to be a peer advocate. The women told us that the only place where people speak openly about their status is at the clinic. They therefore wanted to gain knowledge in order to advocate for others, speak in public and counter ignorance.

### **3.3 What does the circle enable?**

When the women arrive at the venue in which HIV U is to be taken place, they place the chairs in a circle. In the first meeting this shape takes form organically, and the meetings that follow take the form of the circle as well. Within the circle, the women, the facilitator and the researchers attempt to create a safe space in which to carry out an open dialogue. The circle enables everyone in the room to face one another; in addition we all possess the same position in relation to each other. No one has a corner for themselves, and no one faces another direction than the rest. The first time we experience the reciprocity that shall become important for the training, it is embodied by the way we are sitting. Due to the well-known manyano movement and its employment of the form of the circle, the circle was a familiar form to the women in Mpophomeni and hence a suitable starting point for building a relationship of trust.

In this thesis I will view the circle both as the means by which the women may achieve desired moral norms and the bodily expression of these norms. Because of the circle's importance for the women's project, I term the process which took place within it "the pedagogy of the circle".

One question in the evaluation that we carried out in December was, "Which changes did you hope to see as a result of the project?" The following quotation is from one of the women, but to a large extent it covers the women's common experience:

I feel that to impact the community we need to be active as HIV [positive women] and just to be seen around in the community. [I also want] to encourage those who also are HIV positive and send them the message that you can be significant as an HIV positive person. Let people know that they are HIV positive and that they are doing something in the community. It is also to raise awareness and to unite the community (...) and say listen you are significant and you can be useful in the community<sup>24</sup>.

The women saw HIV University as a means by which the ability to unite the community and destabilise inequalities and subordination could be developed. Later in the interview, the women were asked to recount one activity that they considered particularly positive. Most of the women mentioned the days when they spoke in public, either in the dialogue with men or at the presentation at UKZN. However, beside these outreach projects, they also emphasised the importance of simply having a space to be open. As one of the women expressed:

Even though I didn't have a specific activity or event, I appreciated a space to be open and a space to communicate and express myself and for others also to be comfortable with me and my expression<sup>25</sup>.

In my analysis I attempt to see how the circle captures these two levels of goals and needs, namely the desire for outreach and the need to have a safe space to be open. The women were tired of the ignorance, stigma and prejudices related to HIV and wanted to create change in these areas. At the same time they felt a relief by having a space to be open and to communicate in a comfortable environment. I use Saba Mahmood's theory on ethical formation, seeing this "space to be open", which this woman refers to, as a space in which the women *practice* to become dignified beings in society.

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<sup>24</sup> Evaluation December 4, 2008

<sup>25</sup> Evaluation December 4, 2008

### 3.3.1 The circle as an arena for self-protection

In chapter 1, I emphasized the existing power structures in Mpophomeni. As stated, the women at HIV U are vulnerable in a society with patrilineal kinship traditions that consider the house to be the woman's domain. Inside the house the woman protects, nourishes and honours life, and usually has strong control over the place in which the family is gathered together. This way she also protects the unity of the family, as well as bringing new life into it through childbirth. Having the house as her main domain, however, does not mean that the woman is not a part of the outside world. She for instance buys food, brings her children to preschool, and goes to church. These movements in the public, however, are often related to her role as mother, wife and daughter. Even her attendance in church can be seen as a means for protecting her family. In Mpophomeni, the women are a majority in all congregations, and in this regard are also representatives for the family's church attendance, taking care also of the family's relation to God.

The narrative of the HIV U meeting I describe above, however, demonstrates a movement among the women that breaks with these traditional roles. The women move from their various ends of the township towards a place in which they gather with other women. In this case, the aim of the movement out is no longer to protect or honour their family, pacify God or ancestors – the purpose of the movement is to heal and develop themselves, and increase their visibility in society.

In the evaluation, which we carried out in December 2008, the women were asked about what changes they hoped to see as a result of the project, and how the project fitted their needs. A general answer was to raise awareness and to have a platform in which they could talk openly and get support, and from which they could reach out to the community. However, in these answers there was also a large emphasis on the self; the need to stop sitting at home doing nothing, the need for protection as a woman living with HIV, and the need to talk confidently about their status. Two of the women term their needs in these words:

[HIV U] is a platform for me to say 'listen, I am now facing HIV, but there is still a hope. We are getting together as women and we have been given a platform [from which] to work towards counselling or reconciling of everything that was broken because of HIV. [HIV U was also] a healing process and not to hurt myself for having HIV<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Evaluation December 4, 2008

I wanted to find safer ways of living with HIV and to protect myself as a person living with HIV. Because I was aware that you can live with HIV for several years, but I was not sure how and the ways to do that. The changes I was hoping for was how to live with HIV more sufficiently so to speak<sup>27</sup>.

For these two women, HIV U, besides being a platform for reaching out to the community, was a space in which to heal and protect the self. As recently mentioned, the women's goals and benefits of the training were divided into two levels: one was to have a safe space in which to talk openly and to be met with respect, support and confidentiality about their status, and the other, and probably the most frequently mentioned, was to have a platform from which to reach out to the larger community. These two levels may be regarded as inextricably linked. Before the women reach their outreach goal, it is necessary that they develop the security to stand up, the solidarity to act together as a group and the trust in the other participants to open up. These inward feelings, I suggest, may be attained through practices in the circle. In the following I attempt to understand and analyze the practices that took place within the circle and furthermore emphasize their role in enabling the women to transform their agency, as part of an ethical project of inner change.

### **3.3.2 Practices within the circle**

#### **Consensus decision-making**

The narrative above illustrates how the women made use of consensus decision-making, a concept briefly introduced in chapter 1. The principle of consensus is very old and may be found in many and diverse communities and movements. The Quaker movement is essential in this regard; the Quakers have developed a thorough and carefully worked through model of consensus that can easily be employed to secular settings. Abraham J. Muste was a Quaker leader of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) in the United States, an old interfaith peace and justice organization which became a significant force in the civil rights movement. The Quaker model of consensus has been spread widely across the United States through its influence on the civil rights movement. Resultantly, the consensus model has also been adopted by several present-day social movements, such as the women's movement of which WORLD is a representative

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<sup>27</sup> Evaluation December 5, 2008

The role of the facilitator in the Quaker model of consensus is to make easier the process of reaching a consensus decision. She can guide the group, but not lead them or influence the outcome of the process. In this regard the model is non-hierarchical and every decision is a group decision rather than a “majority against minority” decision. When the women at HIV U are for example choosing topics, deans and times to meet, they are making use of the principle of consensus decision-making. The women are not supposed to volunteer other members of the group to a dean role, but rather volunteer for the one that they would like to take on themselves. Thereby the group has to acknowledge the different deans that have been chosen. The same is the case with the selection of topics. Every woman suggested a topic, and through consensus the women found out which ones that would be most appropriate to pursue. Before they voted on the topics to take up, they had a dialogue around the themes: which topics could be covered by other superior topics? Which ones would be difficult to find lecturers for? Are there certain topics that easily could be covered by someone they knew? All of these aspects were taken into consideration and discussed together before the final decision was made by voting.

Shalini, who works as the facilitator in the consensus process, places herself within the circle together with the other women, attempting not to lead them in one direction when decisions are to be taken. The norm of consensus decision-making at HIV U is furthermore embodied within the circle, as the women face one another, listening and responding to what has been said face to face. The circle, in which the facilitator is an integrated part, can also be seen as an embodiment of democracy in which facilitator and students are equal. Authority comes from the public rather than a leader, and decisions have to be taken as a group. These decisions, if made through the practice of consensus, will furthermore lead to unity among the participants (Quaker Foundation of leadership 1994).

### **Dialogical practice**

The principle of consensus decision-making is made possible through the practice of respectful speaking in an open dialogue. In this practice, the women meet face to face, providing each other support and understanding. Everyone gets the chance to voice their opinion, which again lays the foundation for consensus to take place. Most importantly, perhaps, is the fact that the women, through the dialogue, are giving voice to their situations, needs and goals. For Paulo Freire, the dialogue itself has the power to transform the world. If

a pedagogical situation takes the form of a dialogue it will lead to liberation of those that Freire regards as oppressed. And the word, Freire maintains, is the basis for all dialogue (Freire 1993: 68). The word, however, is more than an instrument that makes the dialogue possible. Freire sees the word's constitutive elements and divides them into two dimensions: reflection and action. A true word is always at the same time a practice, and this is what forms the basis when he claims that speaking an authentic word leads to a transformation of the world. Speaking a true word is therefore at the same time a reflection over, and an influence of, reality (Freire 1993: 68).

In order to reach an authentic dialogue, both dimensions of the word have to exist when the parts are speaking it. First, there has to be a commitment to transform. Without the action part, there will be an empty word moving between the parties and no transformation will take place. On the other hand, if action is emphasized exclusively, on the expense of reflection, the word is converted into activism. This action for action's own sake negates the true practice, and makes a dialogue impossible (Freire 1993: 68-69).

It is through dialogue that people transform the world: one puts names on one's discourse, which Freire calls "to name the world" (Freire 1993: 69). It is thus through this naming, that the dialogue imposes itself as the way by which people achieve significance as human beings. Dialogue is therefore an existential necessity, in which humans are addressed to the world and where they furthermore become transformed and humanized (Freire 1993: 69-70).

In his terminology, Freire operates with the dichotomy oppressed/oppressor. One of the problems for Freire's oppressed, as well as for the women in Mpophomeni, which in Freirian terminology would be regarded as oppressed, is that they have been brought to silence as the oppressors have stolen their words (Freire 1993: 115). When the words of the oppressed are stolen, their behaviors become prescribed. The oppressed person internalizes the role she has been given by the oppressor, namely weak, unworthy, and sick. In the case of Mpophomeni and the women at HIV U, this would mean that the women to a large extent have internalized the hierarchic relationship between men and women, the stigmatizing prejudices related to HIV and the Zulu tradition's derogatory view of single mothers. Through dialogue, however, the oppressed gets the opportunity to actually "name her world", a process in which she on the one hand becomes aware of her situation, and on the other hand possesses the ability to transform it.

## **Song and prayer**

The first practice of the meeting was to organize ourselves into the form of a circle. Thereafter the song and the prayer arose. Both the prayer and the song were in Zulu, and both contained old Zulu traditions for worship, as well as Christian elements. Through prayer, the women use their religion to seek blessing and power before the training. Their song brings them together. Singing polyphonically is a common Zulu practice, and the singing in different keys symbolizes, to me, how the women supplement each other. The women always sang in Zulu and in this way they were carrying their traditions, language and common roots into the space of the (western) HIV University.

Singing is utilized consciously as a means to growth in social movements. Grundtvig has explicitly reflected upon the importance of songs in the Folk High Schools, and represents thus a tradition which has been inherited to present day social movements, including WORLD. Grundtvig believed that singing in unison was an effective way of inspiring people and bringing them closer together (Horton 1983: 27).

The fact that the women start their meetings at HIV U with Zulu songs and prayers while standing in a circle can be seen as an establishment of a connection between their own cultural history and the new training they are standing on the threshold to and through which they seek to become new agents in society. Maintained as a beginning of every meeting, these practices may be seen as separation rite through which the women separate themselves from their roles as mothers and protectors of the family, in order to integrate in the circle to heal and protect themselves. This way they find strength in what unites them as a group before they together take a step forward. By utilizing the Zulu tradition on the entrance to a training program based on American public health principles, the women gently combine the new with the old.

## **Sharing Food**

In HIV University we shared a meal after every meeting. The food was a result of cooperation between everyone participating in the process. The meal was in many ways the highlight of the meetings. The women took turns handing out food and dividing it into equal portions, and they made the meals become a time for genuine cheerfulness. The practice of sharing food sometimes took other forms than the circle, as we sat down wherever we felt like. Someone



went out to sit in the sun; others were walking around with their plate in order to talk to the other people. Others again made sure the leftovers were shared equally between the women. This way the mutual respect that emerged from the dialogue in the circle was maintained through the meals, but the practice of sharing food was also embodied in other forms than the circle.

The meals became the bodily expression of sharing. It was a result of common responsibility and it was a time for sharing something everyone in the group appreciated. In order to have a uniting effect, the food depended on being equally divided between the participants, thus representing the non-hierarchy in the group. The meals, however, also became a source of conflict due their highly importance and, as I will show in chapter 5, symbolic value. Such conflicts were, for instance, whether those who had arrived very late to the meetings should be served food like the others. Also when women had visitors, it became an issue whether or not these guests should be served the same food as the group. During the training the food became the means by which to demonstrate borders. The women utilized the food to include and comprise, but also to demonstrate a border between themselves and others. I will emphasize the latter in chapter 4 and 5.

## **3.4 The Circle as an arena for ethical formation**

### **3.4.1 Saba Mahmood's theory on ethical formation**

In chapter 1 I introduced my analytical perspective, showing how I regarded the women's project of becoming empowered as an ethical project through which moral norms are secured. In this thesis I discuss this process in light of Mahmood's renegotiation of the Aristotelian concept of habitus. I thus regard the practices described above as the means by which the women may achieve the moral norms needed in order to become empowered and further, to promote public awareness.

Mahmood refers to Aristotle's concept of habitus in her explanation of Muslim women and the donning of the veil. Mahmood sees the veil not simply as a signal of women's subordination and their lack of ability to make decisions about their bodies and their lives. With references to conversations with the women of the mosque movement, she observed that the decision to wear the veil posits an "ineluctable relationship between the norm (modesty)

and the bodily form it takes (the veil) such that the veiled body becomes the necessary means through which the virtue of modesty is both created *and* expressed” (Mahmood 2005: 20). The background for this statement is to be found in a conversation with Amal, one of the women in the mosque movement who was quite outspoken and confident. According to Amal, the virtue of modesty was something she had to create within herself in order to become a pious Muslim, and from this creation came the desire of donning the veil. With time, Amal claims, your inside learns to feel shy and uncomfortable without the veil (Mahmood 2005: 156).

Mahmood suggests that Amal’s internal struggle to become more modest should be understood in other terms than an internalization of standards of effeminate behavior. If one thinks of agency not as a synonym for resistance to social norms, but as a modality of action, Amal’s example illustrates that one’s practices and actions determine one’s desires and emotions. This means that through the practice of donning the veil, Amal creates the virtue of modesty within herself. In order for this virtue to become an integral part of her sense of self, however, the outward practice of donning the veil needs to be coordinated with an inward disposition of shyness (Mahmood 2005: 136). Mahmood claims that Amal’s struggle to become shy is an expression of her agency. Seeing agency this way, action does not issue forth from natural feelings but rather *creates* these feelings (Mahmood 2005: 157). The discussion is interesting regarding Mahmood’s claim that it is through our bodily acts that we train our memory, desire and intellect to behave according to established standards of conduct.

Mahmood’s fieldwork, as well as her theorization of the habitus concept, shows that action cannot merely be seen as being caused or issued forth from emotions. For example, the emotion of fear of God does not only propel one to act, but is also considered to be integral to action. Thus, fear is an element internal to the very structures of a pious act. In order to become pious Muslims, the women therefore have to create spaces in which to inculcate and realize virtuous fear. Such a space could for example be the ritual act of prayer. Weeping in prayer, states Mahmood, is an expression of virtuous fear as much as a means of its acquisition (Mahmood 2005: 145). In the process of acquiring new moral norms, one therefore has to generate the emotions that constitute these norms, and this is done through performative acts.

### 3.4.2 Ethical formation in HIV University

Mahmood makes use of the mosque movement to illustrate the relationship between a norm (modesty) and the bodily form that it takes (the veil) as well as between virtuous emotions (fear) and practices of piety (prayer). An echo of the findings of her field work is that moral norms are created through a coordination of inward feelings with outward practices. The norm, in turn, may come to leave a permanent mark on the character of the person, which means that the norm becomes an integrated part of her sense of self. This permanent mark can also be visible and bodily, such as the veil. In the following I look at the practices described above in light of Mahmood's theory of ethical formation.

The women in the mosque movement practice to feel afraid in order to be able to fear God, and they want to fear God in order to be and act morally correct. Where the goal of the mosque participants is to become pious Muslims, the goal for the HIV U participants is to become empowered. In this regard, the HIV U model seeks for the women to gain the inward norms that they need for rising up and claiming their visibility and dignity. As I regard the project of becoming empowered as such an ethical project theorized by Mahmood, the inward norms that the HIV U model seeks to foster in the women, such as reciprocity, trust and dignity, need to be performed through a coordination of outward behavior with inward disposition. This process, I suggest, happens when the women conduct practices together in the circle.

The women at HIV U sat in a circle, and the circle enabled different practices to take form. According to Mahmood, inward feelings are constitutive elements of the practices. Such a connection between outward practice and inward disposition could also be observed at HIV U. The practice of opening up to each other in a dialogue may entailed a feeling of vulnerability. Singing and praying together as well as sharing food may be followed by a feeling of being united with the others in the group. By having their opinions listened to and valued in consensus decision making, the women felt respected. At the same time, vulnerability, unity and respect were necessary in order for the practices to evolve in the first place. This way the women seemingly coordinated inward dispositions with outward behavior. Through this coordination, a moral norm constitutive for the group could be acquired (Mahmood 2005: 136).

By conducting practices this way, the women apparently created norms of reciprocity, trust and dignity. I observed these norms among the women when they managed to stand equal despite their different life stories, and when they respectfully listened to each other's opinions in consensus decision-making. Furthermore, a relationship of trust and reciprocity could be observed when the women sang and prayed together and thus appeared as united. By letting these norms be constitutive for the group, the women could open up without being afraid of being judged. And through a repeated practice of opening up, the women literary practiced to raise their voice which is a necessary means on their way to approach society with their message and thus contribute to a societal change.

When the women leave their houses in order to attend the HIV U meetings, they do so, as explained above, in order to take control over their own lives – to heal themselves. They create a safe space, embodied in the circle shape of the chairs. In the circle, all the women are facing each other, which is a precondition for a mutual dialogue to take place. The one who is speaking can be listened to by all the others, no one is sitting more in the front or more in the back in relation to what is taking place. The norms of dignity, trust and reciprocity are thus embodied in the form of the circle. Besides being the bodily expression of the norm, the circle simultaneously works as the very means through which practices can be conducted and, furthermore, norms be constituted. The norm of reciprocity becomes especially evident when we, as researchers from Norway, become very included in the group. It is absolutely necessary that we disclose our status in the first meeting. It is never a question whether or not we should be a part of different voting. Furthermore we receive dean roles just like the other women. The prayers that begin each meeting are always lead by one of the women, and the strongest feeling of being included I experienced when I was one day asked to lead this prayer. Hence, even though we never became the same – we were always researchers and visitors – it was accepted to be different, and the reciprocity existed despite the diversity within the group. The openness that the practices demanded made us vulnerable. And in this vulnerability the moral norm of reciprocity evolved as a result of a conscious effort of practices.

### 3.5 The circle as a meeting point between habitus and dialogical pedagogy

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire (1993) operates with a dichotomy between the oppressed and the oppressor in which the goal is liberation of both. His work has been especially appreciated in the developing world, in which he sees a necessity for total transformation of the social structures in order for the oppressed to be liberated.

At first glance, the thoughts of Freire seem contrary to those of Mahmood. Freire emphasizes subversion and liberation as the political ideal for the oppressed, ideals that Mahmood seeks to problematize. However, before Freire's ideal of a total transformation of social structures can take place, he emphasizes the need for the oppressed to undergo the process of "conscientization". This process can be seen in relation to the ethical project of habitus, and gives a perspective on the women's practices described above. According to Paulo Freire,

[c]onscientization refers to the process in which men, not as recipients, but as knowing subjects achieve a deepening awareness both of the sociocultural reality that shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality (Freire 1985: 93).

The process of conscientization is related to the term "conscious", which to Freire includes a comprehension of human as a being who exists *with* the world together with other humans. Human beings can fulfill the necessary condition of being *with* the world because they are able to gain objective distance from it (Freire 1985: 68).

It is crucial to Freire that those he calls "the oppressed" are such from having been treated more as objects rather than human beings; he refers to the process by which human beings are regarded as objects as "dehumanization". In order to become agents in their own lives, the process of conscientization is therefore necessary. Through conscientization, the oppressed will begin to reflect upon their situation as oppressed, thus laying the foundation for their liberation. In this regard it is important that liberation is not seen as an "integration" of a marginalized group. "The interests of the oppressors lie in 'changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them'<sup>28</sup>; for the more easily they can adapt to that situation, the more easily they can get dominated" (Freire 1993: 55). Those marginalized and oppressed need to be integrated and incorporated into the healthy society that they have "forsaken". But, says Freire, the solution for the oppressed is not to be integrated into the

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<sup>28</sup> Simone de Beauvoir cited in Freire 1993: 55

structures of oppression, but to transform those structures so that they can become “beings for themselves<sup>29</sup>” (Freire 1993: 55). This transformation takes place as the oppressed go through the process of conscientization. This process is enabled by a liberatory dialogue in which the oppressed holds an active role. This conscious activity is necessary because nobody can teach a human how to become conscious, just as teaching not can be taking place as a transfer of knowledge. One does not seek to make the oppressed a *possessor of a consciousness*, but rather a *conscious being* (Freire 1993: 56). This means that it is practice, or the action and reflection of men and women upon the world, that is necessary in order to transform the world (Freire 1993: 60).

Through conscientization, the oppressed constructs an identity as a human “for herself”. It is after this process has taken form that the individual can undergo total transformation. “We cannot enter the struggle as objects in order later to become subjects”, Freire claims, and refers to the difficulty of constructing identity in resistance (Freire cited in hooks 1994: 46). Through pedagogy of liberation, which takes place as a dialogue, the oppressed becomes conscious and critical about her situation. Consequently, when the conscientization reaches its peak, a total transformation of both oppressor and oppressed may take place. Thus the process of conscientization can be seen in relation to the ethical transformation which takes place in the process of habitus, as both processes seek a transformation in the character of the person. For Freire, this transformation entails becoming conscious and critical about one’s own situation as oppressed. For Aristotle and Mahmood, on the other hand, the process includes the conscious achievement of moral norms that in turn enable the subject to act according to specific standards of conduct. However, the superior goal is the same; namely to consciously transform one’s ethical system, which will lead to a formation of a new identity.

### **3.6 Bible interpretation in the circle**

In the introductory chapter I mentioned the class held in the spirit of Ujamaa’s contextual bible interpretation. Through consensus the women decided that they wanted one of the five topics to be religion and culture, and they contacted Bongzi Zengele, one of Ujamaa’s acknowledged staff members, to come and teach them. In the following I describe the class,

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<sup>29</sup> Freire suggests that the oppressed become “beings for themselves” when they become conscious of their own position as oppressed.

thereby comparing the tools the two models, HIV U and contextual bible interpretation, bring to facilitate a process of empowerment or, in Ujamaa's terminology, liberation.

### **3.6.1 Description of the section**

Before the class starts reading the text that Bongi has chosen, she tells us about contextual bible interpretation that supports the situation for marginalized groups. She emphasizes the nature of Jesus, and how he sympathized with the poor, and the importance of being open and to acknowledge the influence of the HIV disease in the churches in South Africa.

The text that the class is going to read is Mark 3:1-8, which is about how Jesus upset the Pharisees by performing an act of healing on the Sabbath. The women are asked to show how, in this text, Jesus challenges religion through his work, and they suggest that this happens when Jesus breaks with the Mosaic Law in order to save the sick man. Through a follow-up dialogue facilitated by Bongi, the women discover that the fact that Jesus breaks with traditions liberates us to act independently and follow our hearts. This means that Jesus, through his act, may open people's eyes so that they do not blindly follow traditions, but look into their hearts to understand what is right. The women instantly bring up polygamy as an example of a topic where this idea is important.

The next task in the class is to reflect on how this story is relevant in the present day HIV/AIDS context. The women bring up the idea that even though the church slowly has started to acknowledge individuals with HIV as being a part of the church community, the event still occurs where sick people do not feel welcomed due to the understanding that sickness is a punishment from God. We then discuss how Jesus challenges the stigma in the church and how these women can get to a point where they can lift their heads and tell their community that "we are more than the virus in our bodies". Bongi then reminds us that if Jesus had been present in the group today, he would have been the first to say: "Show me the house where the sick ones are. I want to die with them".

After having discussed the text from the gospel of Mark, we move on to the next part of the lecture where we are to reflect upon the following questions, first on our own and then within small groups:

1. What is stigma, denial and discrimination?  
What is religion? What is culture?  
Why is it important to defeat stigma?  
What are you preventing by the act of denial?
2. Describe three experiences or stories from church or local community proving that both stigma and discrimination associated with HIV and AIDS are still prevalent.
3. What steps can be made by the people of your religion and culture in order to prevent stigma, denial and discrimination?
4. Identify three misconceptions/myths associated with people living with HIV and AIDS, and suggest ways of how these misconceptions/myths can be unmade.
5. Name three senior top religious leaders and traditional leaders in Mpophomeni you know as being very supportive of people infected/affected by the HIV virus.

In the following dialogue, the women discuss how the church may create arenas where people can talk openly and positively about HIV without being judged. They emphasize that HIV should be treated like any other disease both within the church and in society in general, because they now have reached the understanding that having HIV does not make you a bad person. Today, it is a myth that HIV is tied together with death and promiscuity, they say, and this myth could be put to sleep with openness and the correct information.

### **3.6.2 Reflections on the contextual bible interpretation program and its relation to the pedagogy of the circle**

The women chose this lecture on religion and culture because of the important role religion played in their lives. They were all frequent church goers who had experienced the stigma still at large in their religious setting. Hence, through this lecture, they wanted to learn more about the potential for the church to contribute, rather than be passive, in the fight against HIV/AIDS related stigma. The bible was utilized in order to discover how their religion may contribute to liberation rather than shame and oppression in their lives. Then, in light of the women's situation, the gospel was read out loud, with the class focusing on the effects of the communications with the gospel.

In both HIV U and contextual bible interpretation, the students play an active role, continuously participating in the dialogue, whereas the facilitator supposes a slightly different



role in the two learning models. In contextual bible interpretation, Zengele guides the women through thoroughly prepared sessions and takes on an active role in the women's project of discovering the gospel as a liberating entity. On the contrary, WORLD's facilitator, Shalini Eddens, is much more reserved, actively stepping back from the leading role in the class. Sometimes she sets an agenda for the meeting, but the women are themselves in charge of making things happen during the meeting. She continuously refuses to take part in the decision making process, and to make suggestions for the group, and always places herself somewhere in the circle together with the participants. Hence, the role, and the level of authority of the facilitator, differs profoundly in the two models.

The form of the class carried out in the spirit of Ujamaa shared many similarities with the early HIV U meetings: The women sat in a circle and conducted a dialogue, and the words floated relatively freely among the participants. However, one aspect of the bible interpretation class sets it apart from the other meetings. The pedagogy of the circle presupposes merely that women gather in reciprocity and trust, believing that something inherent and good will unfold and blossom in this gathering. The HIV U model does not provide a specific curriculum, but a facilitator and the norms of consensus decision-making and respectful speaking. The women therefore have to create a relationship based on these norms through opening up to each other. In a group of bible interpretation women meet on the basis of something they have in common, namely the bible. The norm of participation consequently relies on a Christian belief system. According to Gerald West, the process of contextual Bible study is constituted by the following commitments:

- (1) A commitment to read the bible from the perspective set by the South African context, particularly from the perspective of the organized poor and oppressed.
- (2) A commitment to read the bible in community with others.
- (3) A commitment to read the bible critically.
- (4) A commitment to individual and societal transformation through contextual bible interpretation (West 1995: 220)

In the second commitment, community with others is emphasized; in the contextual bible interpretation group, the community exists prior to the meeting, and the community is based on a commitment to the bible. At this point I believe that HIV U represents a very different model, as the process of the HIV U training to a large extent lies in *building community*. The women build a community among themselves through the practices conducted in the circle. It

is this community building, rather than the topics taught in the classes, which is regarded as the necessary means by which the women become empowered.

### **3.7 Final reflections**

This chapter has sought to illustrate how the women conducted practices in a circle, in turn enabling moral norms to become constitutive for the group. The women negotiated practices suggested by the model, such as consensus decision making and respectful speaking in an open dialogue with practices they brought from their own lives, such as Zulu songs and prayers. Seemingly, norms of trust, dignity and reciprocity were manifested in the form the training took among the women. The norms the women constituted through their practices were on the one hand manifested in the relationship between them; it was necessary that they created a community among themselves based on these particular norms. On the other hand they were manifested in the relationship between the women and the facilitator. Shalini, as a facilitator, consciously stepped back in the women's process of change, and this way the created norm evolved as a result of the women's own effort. The facilitator, however, was not invisible. She constantly arranged for situations to take place and from which the women could learn. By placing herself in the circle together with the women, a relationship based on equality was established between facilitator and participants.

# **4 Leaving the circle to promote public awareness**

## **4.1 Introduction**

So far I have looked at the practices the women conducted in order to create a relationship of trust and reciprocity among themselves. I have shown how the women negotiated empowering practices brought by the model with practices they brought themselves in order to achieve a sense of empowerment. This negotiation of practices was, according to goals set out by the model, supposed to lay the foundation for a community outreach. Such an outreach was also expressed as a goal by the women through their desire to promote public awareness and impact society. Twice during the training, the women left Zenzeleni and the circle in order to meet respectively with a group of men and a group of professors at UKZN. In this chapter I see if the women carry with them the norms constituted by the practices in the circle when they reach out to promote public awareness, or if they create something new in their community outreach. Hence I study the form the community outreach took among the women, and how this form was congruent with the model's norms and ideology. The goal set out by the model is that the norms created in the circle shall work as the foundation for the community outreach. I will therefore study if this is an idea consistent with what the women seek for themselves.

Before these outreach meetings, the women utilized the circle to practice and prepare for these two important events. To that regard I will put emphasis on how existing social structures in Mphohomeni enable the women to conduct local practices that in turn will lead to societal change.

## **4.2 The women's community outreach**

### **4.2.1 Preparations and practicing**

Three days before the women are to conduct a dialogue with the men, we have a meeting at Zenzeleni in order to prepare for the day. As has become normal procedure, we sit down in a circle, and one of the women steps up to the white board in order to go through the agenda. The women are concerned that they do not have the necessary authority to have an impact on

the men, and one of them states that it would be much more helpful for men to learn about condom use and domestic violence from other men who they respect. Despite this concern, however, the women are positive to conduct a dialogue in which they can talk openly with the men, as long as they themselves are in majority. “We have to have more power than them,” one of the women states, “because this is our space, and it is *our* university.”<sup>30</sup> We all laugh, although understanding that there is truth to her statement. It is a common opinion among the women that including men in the training would take away the freedom of speech from the women, and hence they appreciate the fact that HIV University is only for women. They are, however, intrigued by the possibility of affecting the existing relationship between men and women in their community.

The women want to prepare well before the dialogue; if not the men will “run over them”. They spend time sorting out the questions they want to ask the men, thereby, through consensus, they divide the questions among them so that all the women can ask one question each. They then choose a facilitator who will make sure that no one is “run over” through the dialogue.

The women arrange for the same kind of preparation before they are supposed to hold a speech at the University of KwaZulu Natal, an event that took place one week after the meeting with the men. Through consensus, the women come up with the following issues they want to share with the staff at UKZN:

- Many youth are now going for HIV testing
- Things have changed for the last years. Many of those who have tested positive have accepted it
- Many young people are no longer scared of HIV. They treat it like any other disease, and they know that being HIV + does not mean that you have to die. You can live for many years
- Tell them that we facilitated a dialogue with men. Here we learned that also men have a lot of information about HIV and AIDS
- Many people in Mpophomeni have vegetable gardens and some do crocheting to help themselves

Furthermore they wanted to talk about what they had learned from HIV University in particular:

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<sup>30</sup> Field notes April 11 2008

- HIV U has taught women to come together and to learn about different issues, and also to teach other women who are in the same situation
- As women we have learned that we can stand on our own and not just depend on others
- The good thing with HIV U is that when we come together we sit down to discuss and interact with each other. It is not just someone talking to you
- We have learned about the responsibility of individuals. Each and every person is responsible to do something.
- Got information on how to take care of ourselves and how to live as HIV positive
- How it started in the United States.
- We want it to grow in the future and have more people joining it<sup>31</sup>

After having decided the issues for presentation, the women sort out the areas of responsibility they will have to share. They decide that only two of them will give the presentation based on the topics above. Four of them will type out handouts, five will make a poster with pictures, two will pass out the handouts and one will give an introduction before the other two give their presentation.

The women who want to hold a speech have their names written down on the white board. Then we vote in order to reach the final decision about the speakers. Those of us who are researchers, as well as Shalini, refuse to attend the voting, as we feel that it should be a decision among them. However, the women stand firm that we are a part of the group, and subsequently we will have to take part in decisions like this.

After the speakers are chosen, the women sort out how they will prepare for the “University day”. Those who are supposed to speak for the professors decide that they will meet in the evening in one of the women’s houses to practice their speeches. However, there are several other things to be sorted out such as transport, food and clothes. The women stand firm that they want to travel together in a hired taxi, as it is important to them to arrive as a group. Consequently, they refuse when it is suggested that some of them travel with us in separate cars. For the same reason, they do not want to travel with public transport together with several other people. Fortunately, one of the women knows a man who owns a taxi and who can offer them a good price to Pietermaritzburg. The women are also concerned about what they will do in regards to food on the day. They are told that there will be tea and coffee served; they, however, will have to bring lunch. The dean of nutrition volunteers to bake,

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<sup>31</sup> This list is quoted after the handouts the women made prior to the meeting at UKZN

provided that some of the other women will help her with the cooking, and that we help her with the grocery shopping.

#### **4.2.2 The first reach out meeting: dialogue with men**

The first reach out meeting is to have a dialogue with men. On the actual day, all the women are well-prepared and everyone arrives on time. The fact that the meeting takes place at the library in Mpophomeni makes the event a bit more formal as the library provides a conference room that may be used free of charge. The women find their seats around the table and attend to the last bit of preparations. However, the men who have been invited are late for the meeting, and show up one by one between 30 and 45 minutes after schedule. Time is then spent sorting out practical matters related to the format of the meeting. The men question the format that the women have prepared, and come with suggestions on other ways to carry out the meeting. After some discussion, however, everyone agrees that the women will ask questions one by one, and that each of the men will give their answers in turn.

Before we begin, we utilize tools from the Quaker model of consensus by selecting a timekeeper and a vibe watcher who will make sure that nobody in the meeting makes others feel uncomfortable. The facilitator, a cardinal figure in this model, has been chosen in advance. When the questioning starts, the women face certain challenges: for example, the men often fail to answer the questions the women ask, and instead talk about random subjects. Some of the women take on more of a leader role by interrupting the men in order to get answers to the questions put forth. The differences between the women in the group become visible, as others remain silent after they have asked their question.

As the dialogue touches sensible topics, the atmosphere gradually gets quite tempered and the dialogue turns into a loud discussion. The women, however, have prepared food that they share with their guests. As the group sits down to eat, the tensions calm down.

#### **4.2.3 The second reach out meeting: presentation UKZN**

The second time the women reached out to society was when they held a presentation at UKZN. On the day of the presentation, the women meet up early at Zenzeleni in order to fix the last preparations before departure. The hired taxi is on time and picks everyone up at

Zenzeleni. The women bring their food, manuscripts, handouts and photo collage and step inside the car. When we meet them at the university half an hour later, they look elegant and move with an air of self-confidence. Most of the women have their WORLD T-shirts on. Shalini gave the T-shirts out earlier in the program; they are imprinted with the slogan “You are not alone”.

Gerald West and the Ujamaa centre have invited the women to the University. Several times a month the School of Religion and Theology at UKZN arrange a theological café, a lunch meeting to discuss issues important in their field. Gerald West starts the meeting by giving an introduction and welcoming everybody who has shown up. He then gives the floor to the women.

The two women who have been chosen to do the presentation share the responsibility so that one discusses what they have been doing during the training and about the model in general, while the other concentrates on what they have learnt from participating. The women have decided to do the presentation in Zulu, which makes them more comfortable. Fortunately there are several bilingual people present, making it simpler for us to get everything translated into English. After the presentation, approximately 20 minutes are set aside for questions and further discussion. Some of the professors ask quite critical complex questions, but with some help from Shalini and Jone the women manage to answer all of the questions.

The women have brought delicious cakes with them to the presentation. However, the food is meant only for them, and they get offended when one of the staff members helps himself to a piece. They do not want to share the food that they have brought, and take seats next to each other in the back of the room. The professors, on the other hand, sit around a table in the middle of the room.

#### **4.2.4 The circle as an arena to prepare and practice**

Michel Foucault characterizes ethics as “the kind of relationship you ought to have with yourself, (...) and which determines how the individual is supposed to constitute himself as a moral subject of his own actions” (Foucault 2003a: 111). Mahmood is inspired by this philosophy and sees ethics as a way of transforming oneself through a repeated coordination

between inward feelings and outward practices (Mahmood 2005). Consequently, in order for an ethical formation to be achieved, there is a need for repeated practice.

The narratives above illustrate how the women practiced before the meetings with the men and the professors of theology. A main goal for the women was to impact society, and these two meetings were important for them in relation to achieving this goal. They therefore spent significant time practicing to ensure that they would get their message across. Furthermore, they practiced in order to prevent the men from “running over them”. Through practice they prepared themselves for possible challenges, and through preparation they managed to meet these challenges with greater self-confidence. Hence, when the women prepare and practice before the meetings, they simultaneously make use of – in Foucault’s terminology – techniques and discourses to achieve a particular state of being (Foucault 2003a, 2003b).

### **4.3 Individual training as a means to societal change**

The ethical formation that HIV University seeks to foster in its participants may be seen as a means to eventually create change on a systemic level. The model’s emphasis on ethical formation on an individual level implies an understanding of systemic change as a process that starts locally and individually rather than by governments. One therefore sees the potential to change as intrinsic in local practices. An overall goal is to create change in community and society, but the model starts with fostering empowerment in the individuals. This approach is demonstrated by WORLD’s three goals:

- Provide support and information to women with HIV/AIDS and their friends, family & loved ones
- Educate and inspire women with HIV/AIDS to advocate for themselves, one another and their communities
- Promote public awareness of women’s HIV/AIDS issues and a compassionate response for all people with HIV/AIDS (WORLD 2007)

The goals above follow a certain pattern. They start with “support”, followed by education, and finally, public awareness. In HIV U these goals come into practice. The training started by the women creating a safe space in a circle, participating in different lectures, and finally going out and speaking to the public community. Through this pattern, the HIV U pedagogy was facilitated in such a way that made the women approach a social problem by starting with



themselves. After building the confidence to stand together as a group and the necessary skills for reaching out, the model facilitated a meeting with respectively men and professors in order to promote public awareness of HIV.

Sociology professor Mark Juergensmeyer terms this kind of non-violent conflict resolution “Gandhi’s way”, and refers to the tenets of solving conflicts in a way that includes the best features of both sides and then fight in a way that incorporates the solution into the struggle itself (Juergensmeyer 2005: ix). An obvious example of this method would thus be to act and fight peacefully in order to achieve peace in society. Gandhi’s method is called “Satyagraha”, and includes tenets which can be applied to any kind of conflict, including rivalries among social groups and ideological schisms that tear national and global societies apart (Juergensmeyer 2005: ix-xi). Gandhi’s approach to fighting involves an idea of redirecting the focus of a fight from persons to principles. Normally when people fight they grapple with the person who represents a position without struggling with the position itself. This, to Gandhi, leaves a conflict unresolved, and ready to boil over on another occasion (Juergensmeyer 2005: 3).

It is crucial to Gandhi’s way that one uses the goal as a means, and the means as a goal (Juergensmeyer 2005: 43). This is the same principle that we find in the Aristotelian notion of habitus. Just as one becomes a builder by building houses, one attains peace by acting peacefully. However, Gandhi’s view of truth differs slightly from what I have emphasized in relation to Aristotle, Foucault and Mahmood. Whereas Mahmood sees the subject as captured within a certain discourse – in which truth is formed by this specific discourse – Gandhi claims the existence of a universal truth. To Gandhi, moral reality is as certain as physical reality (Juergensmeyer 2005: 19). Mahmood, however, suggests detaching the notion of liberal politics and feminist movements that regard the desire for freedom as universal to all human beings. Moral reality, to Mahmood, is historical and contextual.

Gandhi’s way, satyagraha, provides an analytical tool for understanding the movements that the women from HIV University are taking into the public sphere. The women do not attack the men in the dialogue; they do not blame the white, male professors at the university for the oppressive conditions that blacks still live under in South Africa. Rather than attacking the persons who represent a system, they go to the principles in order to create a change in the system. They do this by presenting their lives, waiting for responses, answering questions, and challenging the opinions of their opponents. The principle that the women grasp in their

reach out meeting is first and foremost the dignity of all human beings. They fight to attain the same dignity as the HIV negative, the white, the man, the academic. They do not claim to have a reason for claiming this dignity, as it is seen, in Gandhian language, as a *principle*.

For Gandhi, “fighting for one’s rights” is an art that must be learned. He stressed that non-violent fighting in particular required “training of a different kind”. The belief that fighting and the search for a peaceful solution can be compatible is, according to Gandhi, to find oneself at the doorway to satyagraha (Jurgensmeyer 2005: 17). The same philosophy can be found in HIV U’s pedagogy: In order for the women to be confident to face society with their message, they prepare, practice and sort out ways to make that meeting as safe and comfortable as possible for themselves. This way they conduct what to Gandhi was a “training of a different kind”. First, they search for safety and dignity both among themselves and *within* themselves. The women gather, write manuscripts, create photo collages with photos of them as a group together, and sort out topics to discuss and present *together*. Through these preparations, the women become stronger and more confident, and are enabled to fight a peaceful war for what they believe in.

#### **4.4 Non-violent action enabled by tradition and existing power structures**

Mahmood is critical towards the notion of many liberal feminists that agency is synonymous to resistance to relations of domination. She suggests, rather, that agency should be understood in terms of a “capacity for action that specific relations of *subordination* create and enable” (Mahmood 2005: 18). As an ethical project for transforming agency, the women I worked with conducted practices in the circle which in turn enabled norms of reciprocity, dignity and trust to take form. According to Mahmood’s quote referred to above, such practices are enabled by specific power relations in society. Hence, the same structures that secure the women’s subordination are also the means by which they become self-conscious agents (Mahmood 2005: 17). Utilizing Mahmood’s theory as a basis for understanding the practices that the women in Mpophomeni conducted, I regard the social structures of Mpophomeni as means that enable the women to conduct practices together.

According to Foucault, human relationships exist of a whole range of power relations that may come into play among individuals, within families, in pedagogical relationships, political

life and so on (Foucault 2003b: 27). Within these power relations there is necessarily possibility of resistance because if not there would be no power relations at all (Foucault 2003b: 34). In this regard one is never solely a victim of other people's power, but is always also oneself the point from which power is practiced back to existing structures. According to this philosophy, the HIV positive woman in Mpophomeni is thus herself a point from which power is practiced back to the existing structures of Mpophomeni. Therefore, despite the women's situation as subordinated and marginalized, they must be regarded as agents and in possession of the power needed to undertake particular kinds of moral actions.

In Chapter 1, I emphasized the existing power structures in Mpophomeni that put the HIV positive unmarried woman in a vulnerable position in society. Despite being a large group in Mpophomeni, they are nevertheless subordinate to men, to the married and to the HIV negative. The social structures the HIV positive women live under in Mpophomeni are to a large extent constituted in the Zulu tradition which I briefly discussed in Chapter 1. Although it legitimizes oppressive structures, tradition, however, can also be seen as enabling the subject to reflect upon the past. This reflection becomes the constitutive condition for the understanding and reformulation of the present and future. Hence, tradition is not just a set of symbols that justify present practices (for instance discrimination and stigmatization). Rather tradition may be seen as the very ground through which the subjectivity and self-understanding of a tradition's adherents are constituted" (Mahmood 2005: 115).

If looking at tradition in this way, the existing power structures of Mpophomeni - based in the Zulu tradition – enable the women to reflect upon the past and thus conduct practices that seek to transform the same structures. This means furthermore that the present appears as comprehensible because of historically transferred practices and forms of reasoning that are learned through processes of pedagogy, training and argumentation (Mahmood 2005: 115-116).

HIV University may be seen as a space in which reflections upon tradition can take place, and where these reflections can become the very means that influence tradition. When the women gather in a circle of respect and reciprocity and reflect upon what and from whom they need to learn, they create for themselves a space in which they can become agents influential to society. HIV U facilitates and supports a peaceful outreach where the women meet with men at the library and professors at UKZN. The women themselves, however, build the dignity

they need in order to reach out, through sharing stories and speaking respectfully to each other.

I will in the following demonstrate the connection between the norms that the women created in the circle and their outreach to the meetings both with the men and professors at UKZN.

## **4.5 Safety and strength**

Through the practices the women conducted in the circle, they created a safe space in which moral norms constitutive for the group could develop. During my fieldwork in Mpophomeni, I noticed that when the women reached out to the community, they sought to maintain the sense of safety they had established through their practices. This sense of safety furthermore enabled them to stand united in new settings such as the library and UKZN where the meetings with the men and professors respectively took place. When the women reached out, they continued to create a safe space amongst themselves. The sense of safety they brought, however, was no longer embodied in a circle, and the norm of reciprocity that had been fundamental in the circle seemingly changed when the women started to make themselves strong as a group.

When the women left Zenzeleni to reach out, new practices developed. This can be observed, for instance, in the practice of sharing food. When we had meetings in the circle, food became the embodiment of sharing, and sharing united the group across differences. At the meeting at UKZN, food continued to play a symbolic role, but in a different way than it had in the circle. The food the women brought continued to create solidarity among them, but they also used their food to create a distance between themselves and the professors they met with. Instead of being used to unite, the food thus became a demarcation of borders. The food maintained the women's solidarity, but instead of embodying the norms of sharing and reciprocity, represented their strength as a group.

The desire to appear as united and strong became visible also through the way the women travelled to UKZN. By travelling together as a group, the women maintained the solidarity and safety they had worked to achieve in the circle, while also making them appear powerful and united. It was also worth noting that the women dressed in similar outfits in the meeting with the professors. They wore their WORLD T-shirts, imprinted with the slogan "You are

not alone”, that they had received from Shalini earlier in the training, with black jackets overtop. They therefore appeared as a strong and united group, and the choice of the color black radiated a strength that I had not previously observed. In addition, by bringing their own food, manuscripts, photo collages and handouts, the women simultaneously carried with them, or even extended, the safe space that they established in the circle.

In this extension of their safe space, however, something seemed to happen with the norm of reciprocity that characterized the meetings in the circle. The circle included everyone, and despite a few conflicts that came about during the process, reciprocity and openness were the norms. Nothing was to be hidden, and neither researchers nor facilitators could refuse to take part in the practices because they had different roles in the group. We all had to disclose our status, and we all had to participate in voting. In this regard we were all vulnerable when facing each other, but this vulnerability made the norm of reciprocity essential to the survival of the group. When the women reached out, however, a shift of norms, from reciprocity to making strong, could gradually be observed.

The first reach out meeting for the women was the dialogue with the men. The library is situated just a few meters away from Zenzeleni and is thus a part of the women’s local community. The norm of reciprocity continued to a certain extent in the meeting with the men. The women offered to share their lunch with the men, everyone sat together around the table, and the men participated in the norms that the people had set out for the meeting, such as the rule that only one person could speak at a time, and that everybody must pay attention to the person speaking. However, before the meeting took place, the women began to make themselves strong as a group. They wrote manuscripts, divided the questions amongst themselves, planned the order of the questions, and made sure that they were in a strong majority to ensure that the men would not be able to take control. As one woman asserted, “We have to have more power than them, because this is our university!”<sup>32</sup>

The second meeting took place in Pietermaritzburg, meaning that the women had to leave the township and travel for half an hour to their destination. Through the practices that they conducted both before and throughout the meeting, the reciprocity they had created, and which had made them vulnerable, was gradually replaced with something new. By making photo collages, writing manuscripts, travelling together in a hired taxi, dressing in similar

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<sup>32</sup> Field notes April 11, 2008

outfits and eating their own food, the women in a way consolidated themselves into “one body”. They were no longer individuals opening up with their different stories. The feeling of safety that was created through their vulnerability in the circle was now maintained through practices that made them strong as a group. The food which previously had been the symbol of the group’s reciprocity by uniting researchers, facilitator and students, became utilized to create distance between them as a group, and the others present in the meeting.

The HIV U model seeks for the women to utilize tradition and their present lives to create a space for reflection upon their situation. This way the women make use of tools provided by the model to build a community of consensus and reciprocity, partly enabled by the roles they hold within the social structures in their community. When the women reach out, however, they find their own form in order to get their message across, and the form the community outreach takes is constituted by a norm of making strong. This constitution may be interpreted as something different from what the model sought to facilitate for the women, as the model seeks for the women to let the project started in the circle lay the foundation for their community outreach. I will explain the new norm the women constituted in their community outreach in the following.

## **4.6 From reciprocity to making strong**

Where the circle was characterized by a focus on the inner project of the women – their feelings, vulnerability and reciprocity – the movements into society were characterized by a focus on their exterior, in the form of their clothing, food and transport. Through these physical markings, they consolidated themselves into one body that also spoke with one collective voice in order to get their message across. The focus was on similarity and cohesion, and they marked the norm of strength by differentiating themselves from the others at the university. At first glance, this strategy seemed successful. The women were respected and listened to, and were treated as people who possessed the knowledge and skills to answer the questions the academics posed. But in order for this to happen, the women used physical marks to create a distance between themselves and those they were to meet. Simultaneously they made themselves strong as a group. This led to, as I have deemed, that the norm which united the women changed from reciprocity to making strong.

According to Paulo Freire, this perception of oneself as the opposite of the Other<sup>33</sup> does not signify engagement in a struggle to overcome the conflict in existing social forces. Such a polarization of oneself aspires not to liberation, but to identification with the opposite pole (Freire 1993: 27-28), which in the case of UKZN was the opposite pole of an academic discourse. When the women arrive at the university they bring with them manuscripts written in a language similar to academic rhetoric. To this regard, Freire states that “because of their [the oppressed] identification with the oppressor, they have no consciousness of themselves as persons or as members of an oppressed class” (Freire 1993: 28). Hence, the world of the oppressed – of which Freire seeks a total transformation – remains unaffected. The women succeed in conveying their message. However, in order for this to happen, they must adhere to the discourse of those they were to meet.

A goal of the HIV University training was that the outreach to society should function as the accomplishment of the ethical formation started in the circle. Instead of accomplishing the goal set out and begun in the circle, however, the outreach to society appeared as something different, performed by different practices and constituted by different norms. Despite the change in norm and their identification with the opposite pole of the academic discourse, however, a mutual respect between the women and the professors was maintained during the meeting. The women re-created their safe space in order to appear strong enough to meet the system that they desired to change. As a group, they changed from being vulnerable individuals, into a strong group or “one body”, equal to the others present. Despite representing something different from what HIV U aimed to facilitate, this strength was the women’s way of fight non-violently for their goal of becoming visible and heard in society.

The pedagogy of HIV U aims to foster empowerment or a deep inner change in the women who participate. Fostering this inner change, however, is time-consuming and depends on a repeated coordination of inward dispositions with outward practices. The women set out many goals at the beginning of the training such as getting a job or becoming peer advocates. The women clearly wanted to see concrete results from the four-week program. What the model brought, however, was a facilitator and a norm of consensus and respectful speaking in

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<sup>33</sup> Freire uses the terminology “oppressed/oppressor”. As I do not regard the people that the women meet in their outreach as their “oppressors” I have chosen to use the term “the Other” instead. However, despite this omission of the term “oppressor”, Freire’s theory is still relevant. The men at the library represent for the women the other pole of the gender structures that they are a part of. The academic milieu at the university represents the other pole of structures of race and poverty in South Africa.

a dialogue, which in turn was meant to facilitate a process of inner change. As these tools require time, as well as focusing on changes that may happen gradually, a disparity could be observed between the model's tools and the women's desires. The women's community outreach which they accomplished by making themselves strong as a group became an indication of such a disparity.

## **4.7 Focusing on inner change in a time of crisis**

The disparity between the women's goals and the tools the model provided should not be regarded as impossible to close. The pedagogy of HIV U seeks to foster change both in the individual and society. However, the method the model uses involves fostering deep inner change before an outer change can take place. Normally, the HIV U model takes about ten or more weeks to complete. Much time is therefore spent on building dignity, confidence and reciprocity before one reaches out, or before "physical" changes take place.

In Mpophomeni, we only had four weeks to carry out the training. The project of inner change begun in the circle may therefore have not received the amount of time necessary to become realized and leave a permanent mark on the characters of the participants. I believe that because the process of community building in the circle did not receive the sufficient amount of time to be carried out completely and to create a deep inner change in the women, the women came to maintain the safety they sought through outer practices. This means that because the model did not completely succeed in building a sense of inner safety, the women created safety by appearing strong as a group. By dressing in similar outfits, writing manuscripts, eating their own food and arriving together in a taxi, the women maintained their safety through outer practices that constituted them as one strong body.

Because of the discouraging situation the women in Mpophomeni found themselves in, they uttered a desire for concrete results that others in their society would notice. They wanted to have what the people with power had, for example a house, a computer and other equipments. Their desire for outer change is certainly understandable. Possessing inner confidence is of little use if one cannot afford to provide education or even dinner for one's children. Hence, when it comes to empowerment, there exists a fine balance between the participants' need to gain the inner confidence that will help them create change for themselves, and the frustration and need for radical change.



## 4.8 Final reflections

I have shown in this chapter that there is a difference between being strong in terms of daring to open up to other individuals, and being strong as a group in the meeting with another group. Being strong as an individual opening up requires norms of reciprocity, trust and dignity. When the women appeared strong as a group, however, they consolidated themselves into one body. I have briefly deemed that this shift of norms may be interpreted as a break with HIV U's ideology. This does not mean, however, that the event in itself was negatively loaded. The narratives above show that the women left Mpophomeni for UKZN with pride and self-confidence. Also in the evaluations carried out eight months after these events, the women mentioned the community outreach as particularly positive, as they were to meet with what they considered as "important people and people with power"<sup>34</sup>. Despite having a positive effect on the women, however, these two events did not really appear as an elongation, or fulfillment, of the process started out in the circle and facilitated by the model. Rather, the women found their own form to the events, by which they appeared strong as a group.

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<sup>34</sup> Evaluation December 6, 2008



# **5 Incorporation back to society**

## **5.1 Introduction**

In this final chapter of analysis, I start by discussing the women's celebration of the HIV U project. The women had looked forward to this party throughout the entire training, and it took place as a graduation ceremony at Zenzeleni after the training was completed. In the previous chapter I showed how the project underwent a change when the women reached out to both men in their community, and professors at UKZN. The circle was characterized by a focus on the women's inner project of achieving norms, and the reciprocity between them set the conditions for this inner growth to take place. As there was not sufficient time set aside for this process before the women started to reach out to the community, a change from interiority to exteriority and from reciprocity to making strong could be observed when the women left the circle. The community outreach thus did not really become a fulfillment of the circle pedagogy, but something more distinct from it. Consequently I do not regard the women's project of inner change as completed when they held the celebration.

In this chapter I also put emphasis on the house the women received at the end of the training and the central role the house held for the continuation of the women's project. Putting emphasis on the graduation and the role of the house, is an attempt to shed light on how the women negotiated the tools provided by the model into forms that that fitted their needs and desires.

## **5.2 A description of the graduation ceremony**

Before the graduation the women decide that they can invite two people each. This decision is related to the budget, and the fact that they want to ensure that they have enough food for everyone. Three days before the celebration, the women have a meeting to decide on how to spend the money they have at their disposal through the method of consensus decision-making. The price of every vegetable and plastic cup is carefully worked through, and after working out the budget they share between themselves the responsibility of grocery shopping and cooking.

The women have decided that the graduation should start at 10 am. However, when we arrive at Zenzeleni we soon realize that it will begin late. A few women have arrived, but are not completely sure about what to do because they do not have all of the equipment to start the preparations. I can see, however, that they are excited, and have brought their finest clothes with them for the ceremony, kept in a bag so that everything stays clean until the party starts. When the others fail to show up, we go to the house of the dean of nutrition where we find her and two of the other participants making a huge pan of rice and vegetables for the guests. The women have also ordered to have meat slaughtered by the butcher in Mpophomeni. The meat, however, is only for them, the HIV U participants. Despite the delay, it seems like the women have things under control, and give Shalini, Marie and me orders about what to do, which includes driving people, equipment and food back and forth from Zenzeleni.

When the women finish the preparations they get themselves ready. They put on fashionable dresses associated with white culture, wigs and a lot of colorful makeup. Nobody wears their traditional Zulu outfits. On the stereo they play American pop music. With their remarkable sense of rhythm, they dance like the pop stars do in the music videos on television. The women had invited a group of employees from important organizations in their community, but none of these people show up. Their friends and family, however, have come to show their support.

The party starts with one of the female guests reciting an evocative prayer. The prayer is not translated into English from Zulu, but I do not feel this necessary as the atmosphere created by the prayer is translation enough. Lucy, our translator, is the master of ceremonies; she wishes everyone welcome and outlines the program to the guests. I am impressed by Lucy's ability to get everyone's attention by using humor, as well as frequently referring to "the name of Jesus Christ". When she is finished, everyone in the room sings a beautiful song in Zulu. I understand one word that constantly comes up – Jesus. When the song is finished, one of the women holds a speech. The other women sing for her as she walks to the stage. Her shyness is becoming, and she reaches the hearts of the audience with a mix of impressive maturity and nervous chuckling. She starts her speech with:

I hope you are all having a pleasant day. My name is (...). It is nice to see you all, and thank you for your time since you are all here today. To you all who live in Mpophomeni, and to our three sisters from overseas. A big thank to them for the job they have been doing<sup>35</sup>.

She continues by telling the guests about the HIV U model and what they have learned from the project. When she is finished, another participant rises up and starts to sing with intense power in her voice. The other women rise up as well and take part in the singing.

After the impressive singing, one of the other women says a few words about the training. She tells the guests what they have been doing at HIV U, and that they are now celebrating the end of the four-week training. She then informs everyone that their work will not end here. “In the future”, she says, “we are going to use these skills we have learned to the best for our community. Today we show ourselves to you”<sup>36</sup>.

After this speech it is time for the certificates to be handed out. This is the portion that the women have been looking forward to the most, and when the music starts the women dance, clap their hands and sing along to the music. It is an impressive show. All the women are dressed in extravagant dresses. When they are called up to the stage they do not appear to walk, but rather seem to float up to the stage to receive their certificates and a bag with WORLD’s logo printed on it. There is loud applause and cheering with each certificate handed out. When everybody has received their certificates, the women go up to the stage together and sing a powerful song for their guests.

Next, one of the women gives a speech of thanks, and then some other two recite a poem in both English and Zulu that one of the women has written. It is a touching poem about being excluded from community due to their HIV positive status, but also encourages the individual to continue living with dignity despite the virus. The poem is about being abused and left by men. Each verse starts with “this is my word of wisdom”, and is followed by a description of the lack of place for women, and the feeling of hopelessness related to being a woman in general, and an HIV positive woman in particular. The poem ends with one of the women saying that “sometimes we have to stop and look at ourselves and our situation to see how we can make a change”

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<sup>35</sup> Field notes April 28, 2008. At this point Jone had left for Norway, so there were only three of us left.

<sup>36</sup> Field notes April 28, 2008

When it is time to eat, the women serve the vegetarian food they have prepared for their guests while they themselves eat meat from the grill. Everything goes smoothly until the girls who have been responsible for the music are to be served. The DJ's are one of the HIV U participants' niece and her friends. When this particular participant serves the girls – her acquaintances – meat, the other women get very upset. It turns into a quite loud argument between the women, but after some time it appears as though they manage to work out this issue. However after less than an hour of eating, dancing and small talk, the women suddenly break up the party. They ask their guests to leave because, they say, they are to have an important meeting. The meeting they refer to is an evaluation that we have requested, but had not intended to carry out so quickly after the party. The guests, however, do as they have been told. They collect their things and leave the venue.

When we sit down to do the evaluation, there is some tension in the air. Those from the group who are shyer do not get a place around the table, and must sit around their own table in the back. It is quite hard to get the conversation going. Many of the women refuse to say anything at all. Shalini suggests that we take a round in which everyone mentions one positive thing about the training. After this, we take a new round on negative aspects, or what they think could have been done differently. Regarding the positive aspects, the women mention the fact that they were able to choose their topics themselves. They also express their gratefulness for having received the opportunity to teach others in the community due to the new knowledge they have learned and can pass on to their neighbors. Above all, however, they are grateful for having got an office in which they can meet from now on so that HIV University can continue. In terms of the negative aspects, one thing is mentioned by all of the women: the budget. The women feel that they were promised more than they received, and that there had been some unpleasant disagreements regarding money. However, they say that they now feel that this has been sorted out, and that they no longer have any negative feelings about the training. They note, however, that there are some tensions between participants within the group, and see it necessary to rid the group of these tensions before everything can be regarded as purely positive.

### 5.3 A marking of inner change?

The graduation ceremony is a central tool that the HIV U model utilizes to bring about inner change in its participants. By giving them the opportunity to be exposed to their local community through this event, the model seeks for the women to take pride in their lives and, furthermore, promote public awareness. The facilitator guide the women through the process of planning, but the women themselves are in charge of the entire celebration. Here they find themselves in an arena that gives them an opportunity to show their acquaintances what they have learned, which is a way for the women to raise their social status. The certificate received by the women in Mpophomeni at the graduation ceremony functioned as a physical evidence of the new knowledge they had gained as well as the sense of dignity they had acquired throughout the training. In the evaluation carried out in December, one woman mentioned the certificate as the most positive aspect of the entire training:

Especially when we got the certificates because it was something to show the next person and say: look, this is what I got and this is to show that I have gained something. (...) It was important because it was showing me that I knew more than I had known already. Even though I have not reached the final stage of knowing, I can now walk up to somebody, the next person and say: this is how we handle HIV and AIDS. If you have HIV, this is the steps you can take towards helping you. For me it [the certificate] was the symbol of that knowledge<sup>37</sup>.

As mentioned earlier, a moral norm acquired through a coordination of outward behaviour with inward disposition has a potential to leave a permanent mark on the character of a person (Mahmood 2005). This permanent mark implies that such a norm becomes an integrated part of the person's identity, enabling her to act according to a specific desired conduct. The permanent mark can furthermore become visible by a physical form symbolizing the acquired ethical formation. For the woman quoted above, the certificate had the symbolic value of embodying the knowledge she had gained through the training, and which again gave her the self confidence necessary to approach others in the community about issues regarding HIV.

The graduation ceremony as a whole serves as a mark of the steps the women have taken in their fight against HIV/AIDS discrimination and silence. The awarding of certificates was a physical expression of their new experiences, skills and knowledge, as well as being the physical evidence of their raised social status. As Chapter 4 has shown, however, a change of norm and practice seemingly took place among the women when they reached out to the

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<sup>37</sup> Evaluation December 6, 2008

community. The HIV U training therefore did not happen as a continuous process, but was rather clustered around two different events. The graduation ceremony was supposed to be the tangible, concrete manifestation of inner change, but because the project of inner change was disturbed, the graduation came to have a different meaning.

It is worth noting that at the graduation, the women continue their tendency towards the new norm of making themselves strong as a group in relation to other people present. This display of strength is apparent in how they distanced themselves by eating differently from their guests, and also in the way they dressed. Furthermore, the women made the graduation ceremony very western in style, the only Zulu element being present in the lyrics and music of the songs they sang. The style of the other music played being western. Nobody chose to wear their traditional Zulu outfit, and the women's make-up did not show any sign of Zulu culture. In this way, by identifying with western culture, the women create a distance from their guests as well as from Zulu tradition. In the following I attempt to analyze and understand why to women created this distance to their guests at the graduation.

## **5.4 What goes wrong at the celebration?**

The narrative above shows precursors to conflicts that suddenly erupted during the party. First, the women got into an argument over who was to be served meat, and who was not. In Zulu tradition, meat is used as a means to distinguish people according to gender and age. According to Jone Salomonsen, traditional Zulu culture was organized according to gender and age groups; when an animal was sacrificed, each group had a right to a particular pre-determined share of the meat (Salomonsen 2009). The meat of the sacrificed animal was therefore used to demarcate borders between gendered social groups. In the graduation ceremony the women utilize the norm related to meat to mark a difference. The women had plenty of meat on the grill, more than they would be able to eat themselves. Yet, it turned into a large issue when the DJ's were offered a small piece each. It seemed as if by being served meat, the DJ's could be considered as holding the same social status as the HIV U participants and as "one of them". As the graduation ceremony was supposed to be a marking of the women's incorporation back to society with increased social status, they became upset when one participant served meat to her own family, and thus including them in the marking of this raised social status.



After the argument had calmed down, the women, without any warning, suddenly asked their guests to leave. At the subsequent meeting there was not enough space for all the women around the table, which meant that some of them had to sit outside of the circle. The women asked their guests to leave specifically in order to have the meeting, but when it took place it was difficult to get the conversation going. The reciprocity and openness that had characterized the dialogue in the circle earlier in the week was now difficult to recall. Their outer appearances had changed. As mentioned, they wore opulent dresses, wigs and a lot of make-up which made them look different from how they normally appeared, including in the early circle meetings. The atmosphere was also different. As researchers we were no longer as included as in the beginning of the project. The women spoke amongst themselves in Zulu, and even those who knew English well approached our translator instead of us during the evaluation.

When the women reached out to the community, they made themselves into “one body” with a voice that was powerful enough to be listened to by the men and the academics. Here, when celebrating their new knowledge and skills, they made the celebration into a marking of differences between women by dressing differently from their guests and eating different and more exclusive food. *Vis-à-vis* their female guests the HIV U women thus took on the performative script and position of men. In traditional Zulu culture the men has the right to the most valued share of the meat, while women eat the parts that are less valued<sup>38</sup>. In the graduation, the women thus create new rules in terms of food, giving themselves the gendered and societal position that is normally held by men.

When the women create power structures in the celebration between themselves and their guests, they act contrary to the values that they earlier expressed, which included a longing for equality between themselves and also in their community. In the evaluations carried out eight months later, the women expressed their dissatisfaction by the power structures that developed within the group. Their desire to have a flat structure and the importance of not “putting oneself above others” were expressed by one of the women as following:

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<sup>38</sup> In traditional Zulu culture, a sacrificed animal is the living body of the ancestors. In this regard, the heart and the head are reserved for men, while women eat the thighs and stomach. The ancestors descend into the body of the sacrificed animal and this way the animal becomes inclusive and representative of the total community present (Salomonsen 2009).

You find that when somebody is put in charge in a way, or instructed to lead, you find that the rest of the group members, because she comes from them, they will look down upon her because she is trying to be better than all the others. So they undermine that sort of leadership and authority if someone within the group was to take over. But if someone external figure were to lead them, it would be different. There is a respect for external authority and also people are not very educated and they are not aware of these things<sup>39</sup>.

Accordingly, the women desire a non-hierarchical structure for the group. The fact that they in the graduation ceremony create a difference between themselves and the others present may therefore indicate an understanding of themselves as permanent different from their acquaintances and a desire to mark this difference. According to the statement above, it is culturally not acceptable to mark oneself as a leader among 'one's own'. A leadership role is accepted, however, if one is an external figure. Consequently, the new power structures the women created can be interpreted as a desire to mark themselves as holding a higher social rank than the others present.

The narrative from the graduation shows how the women negotiate a tool provided by the model, the graduation ceremony, to consolidate themselves as a strong group. The fact that the women let the graduation take form by marking themselves as different from the others present results in a conflict. As stated, the strength that can be observed by the group represents something distinct from the sense of empowerment the model seeks to foster in the individuals. The fact that the circle pedagogy and its norm of reciprocity has been set aside in the graduation is furthermore symbolically illustrated when four women have to sit at a separate table due to the fact that there is not enough space for everyone at the bigger table. Furthermore, the individual inner strength to open up to other people in a dialogue was hard to recall in the evaluation meeting. The meeting thus had to take form by the women being given the word one by one, which runs contrary to an open dialogue in which the word floats freely.

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<sup>39</sup> Evaluation December 6, 2008

## 5.5 The value of owning a house

HIV U does not provide physical or economic tools, such as a locale and equipments, for its participants. The model seeks to foster an inner change in the women, which in turn will make the women visible and significant in society. The women are to use their inner sense of empowerment and new skills to stay together as a group. The attained empowerment and skills shall furthermore enable the women to contact organizations or private persons who will possibly lend them space in which they can meet. The lack of financial support from the model became a concern for the women; they wanted to be visible and have their own house that people would know about and to which other women could come and learn from them. The women were therefore very happy when a trusted white male, engaged in different kinds of social work in Mpophomeni, offered them an office in a house that they could employ as their own. A few weeks after we had left Mpophomeni, however, we received an e-mail from the women informing us that the house had been sold, and that they no longer had a place to meet. The e-mail was sent some time after the actual sale, and the women who wrote it also informed us that they did not meet anymore due to the fact that they no longer had a place of their own in which they could meet.

The sale of the house made our tentative plan of coming back to Mpophomeni a reality. In December we returned to observe that, together with the sale of the house, the whole spirit of HIV University had disappeared. Some of the women had continued working on their own; one had for example started an agricultural business, and another, a crocheting business while yet another two had got proper jobs. The other women, however, had reverted to the lives they led before HIV U – namely, just taking care of the household. These women expressed their dissatisfaction with the situation, but felt that they could not continue if they did not have a place to meet. As one woman stated,

When you guys were here in the country as facilitators, we were provided with everything that we needed, but after you left everything seemed to fall apart. The owner of the house suddenly decided that he was going to sell the house. Then we would have to rent a place, but we obviously did not have the money for that. We needed to have a place to call the participants to. For me that was a problem because if we have a meeting – where are we going to meet? Even though the place was given to us, but... everything was easy when you guys were here, but when you left, everything fell apart and we did not know what to do.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Evaluation December 6, 2008

In the evaluations carried out in December 2008, all of the women strongly emphasized the house that they received and subsequently lost. According to the women, the goals that they had set out for themselves became embodied in the house. They felt that the house worked as the platform they needed in order to reach out to society, and were furthermore in need of a safe space where they could talk openly about concerns related to their status. In this manner the house, according to the women, had a function both as a gateway for reaching out to, and being heard by, the larger community, as well as being a space for protecting and healing themselves.

The house clearly carries with it the possibilities referred to above. The house could function as a safe space in which a continuation or reintroduction of the self-protection created in the circle could take place. The deep desire to own something, however, could also be seen as a continuation of the focus on exteriority that characterized the women's community outreach as well as their graduation. In this regard, the house could become another "thing" to demarcate the women's borders, as well as another embodiment of the norm of making strong.

The role that the house holds for the women illustrates a disparity between the HIV U model and its tools on the one hand, and the women's needs and desires on the other hand. I have earlier characterized WORLD (and with that also HIV U) as a social movement. The term "movement" indicates something which is in motion, contrary to something established in one particular house. WORLD is indeed constituted in an office, but the organization does not have a house of their own in which people can come and stay. Similarly, HIV U is a program that has moved across the United States and been constituted in countless forms. The women's deep desire to constitute their project in a house of their own therefore runs contrary to HIV U's ideology and the way the program normally operates.

In the Zulu culture, however, a house holds a different role than it does for the HIV U program, as the Zulu culture's cosmology may be found as re-represented in the house. It is not my aim to analyze the Zulu cosmology in this thesis. However, regarding the vital role the house played for the women, it is necessary to look briefly into the house's symbolic structure and its relation to social practice and terms of dominance. This is necessary to understand the vulnerability of HIV U in Mpophomeni, and speaks both to the tools the model provides, and how these tools fit into the southern African context in which the model was implemented.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, Zulu culture is patrilineal. This includes, among other things, that the house belongs to the male head of the family. The young girl lives in her father's house until marriage, when she moves to her husband's house. This means that the woman always lives on a territory belonging to someone else – a male head - even though she has particular rooms that she controls. In "The Berber House", Pierre Bourdieu emphasizes the existence of a close connection between physical space, body, culture and social relations. Based on ethnographic research among the Kabyles in Algeria, Bourdieu reveals how the placing of tools, animals, and inner space in the traditional Berber house are structured in accordance with homologous antagonisms: man/woman, light/darkness, dry/wet, outside/inside. According to Bourdieu, these oppositions are "the centre of a whole cluster of parallel oppositions"<sup>41</sup> (Bourdieu 2003: 132). It is crucial to Bourdieu's philosophy that the binary oppositions that structure the house and its inner life simultaneously structure the relation between the house as a whole and the surrounding world. This means, to Bourdieu, that the house may be regarded as a microcosm:

As a microcosm organized according to the same oppositions which govern all the universe, the house maintains a relation with the rest of the universe which is that of a homology: but from another point of view, the world of the house taken as a whole in relation with the rest of the world which is one of opposition, and the principles of which are none other than those which govern the organization of the internal space of the house as much as they do the rest of the world and, more generally, all the areas of existence (Bourdieu 2003: 136).

In Zulu culture, the house is also socially constructed and constitutive. The house gains its value on the basis of social relations, and social relations can be found re-represented in the house. The male head of the family owns the house, and his wife and daughters take care of the inside of the house. Should the male head of the house die; the house will not go to his wife, but rather to those who are his family by blood, for instance his brothers or parents. These family members, who are the widow's in-laws, are free to throw her out, as she is only a guest, although a permanent one, in her husband's line of descent, as well as in his house.

The poem read by the two women in the graduation ceremony pointed out the difficulties of being a woman in general in Mpophomeni; the women, in this poem, showed concern related to their worth in society. According to Jone Salomonsen, "Zulu authorities in the province -

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<sup>41</sup> Bourdieu is regarded as a structuralist. Structuralism is a philosophical trend believing that space, body, mind and social structures are organized after the same underlying "code" or "schema". Despite the fact that this philosophy has been accused for being ahistorical and too rigid, Bourdieu's concepts are fruitful to discuss the symbolic value of the house for the women.

whether it be the state, counselors, husbands, families, tends to treat them [women] as minors and non-subjects” (Salomonsen 2009)<sup>42</sup>. This means that the woman is a subordinate figure also in the house among her family. Here she is on territory belonging to her father and, after marriage, her husband. Hence, when the women at HIV U receive a house of their own, this house may be embraced as a material and visible expression of change. In this house the women are no longer guests. As owners of a house, the women invert the binary oppositions that constitute the gendered roles related to the house.

In traditional culture, according to Bourdieu, there is continuity between cosmology and sociality, meaning that the same schema that structures the house also structures the surrounding world. Hence, even though modernity to some extent has split open this symbolic coherence between the house and the society, taking a new role in the house can be interpreted as not only inverting the binary opposition of the house and its family roles, but also the structures of society. If regarding the house as a microcosm, such as Bourdieu claims is the case for many traditional societies, the fact that women own a house represents a small step towards changing the social relations that threatens the women’s livelihoods.

The strong desire to own a house may, as mentioned above, be interpreted as a break with HIV U’s ideology. In this perspective, the women’s desire for a house can be interpreted as a continuation of the change of norm from reciprocity to being strong that resulted in a focus on exterior marking of power. However, the manifestation of the project in a house could also be seen as an expression of women’s agency and of their conscious effort to invert social structures that make them subordinate figures. This way, the women make the HIV U training to their own project by letting it take the form necessary for them in order to lead to a change.

## **5.6 The graduation from a theoretical viewpoint**

The concept of habitus provides a way of understanding the process of attaining moral values that in turn may lead to inner growth. It is worth noting, however, that the process of habitus also may produce moral norms that are destructive. Mahmood’s renegotiation of the Aristotelian concept of habitus provides a way to understand a process through which moral

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<sup>42</sup> Salomonsen refers to a report filed by the Gender and AIDS Forum in August 2005, based on data collected in townships near Pietermaritzburg

norms are achieved, but does not say anything about the outcome of these norms. Hence, there is a need to examine the conditions necessary in order for habitus to lead to inner growth and further improvement of the conditions in which the women live. The HIV U model brings about such conditions through its norm of consensus decision-making and respectful speaking. Furthermore, by searching their local cultural roots and taking pride in their lives through an open dialogue, the women stimulate the habitus process leading to personal growth and a heightened sense of dignity.

A main principle of the HIV University model is for students to seek out the resources they need during the training in their local communities. The students are to find lecturers themselves, and utilize their own skills to create an HIV university that suits *them* as a group. The women experience personal growth and attain new skills and knowledge by looking at their traditions as well as other elements from their lives. By combining the new provided by the model with their tradition and present lives, the women can thus allow their present lives and their needs to permeate the model and the tools it provides.

During HIV University in Mpophomeni, the women gradually distanced themselves from Zulu culture, a process which reached its peak at the graduation ceremony. N.F.S. Grundtvig claims that education must rest on tradition if it shall lead to growth. The education and activities of the Folk High Schools should encompass the past, present, and dream of the future, as well as the merging of the spiritual and physical, the intellectual and emotional. This is what Grundtvig refers to when he emphasizes the importance of an education by the Living Word (Horton 1983: 27). In order to lead to personal growth and development among the students, the Living Word must therefore include some element of local tradition. This way, education by the Living Word will lead to an awakening and spiritual growth (Grundtvig 1838: 233).

In the graduation ceremony, the opposite of Grundtvig's ideal seemingly took place. The women created a distance from the Zulu culture and made the celebration entire western. According to Musa Dube (2006), the fact that HIV has been addressed without taking into consideration the traditional African world view has been a contributing factor to the proportions the AIDS crisis has reached. She stresses the importance of including tradition in the healing process of HIV "particularly because the African world view remains the framework that informs the response toward the pandemic in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa" (Dube 2006: 133). Mpophomeni is no exception. Zulu culture permeates the society

and lays the foundation for existing power relations in the township. Hence, according to Grundtvig's, as well as Dube's, philosophy, the women act contrary to the conditions necessary for growth and self healing when they create a distance to the Zulu culture in their graduation.

Also Paulo Freire stresses the necessity of tradition and of using one's life stories as a basis to bring about inner change and, furthermore, social transformation. Freire's theory is in particular concerned with the problem of adaption to an alien cultural discourse. As mentioned in chapter 3, Freire's concept of dehumanization relates to both those whose humanity has been taken away, as well as those who have stolen this humanity.

Dehumanization is a result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, and which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed. In order for the oppressed to regain their humanity, they must not become oppressors of the oppressor, but rather restorers of humanity of both themselves and their oppressors (Freire 1993: 25-26). The liberation of the oppressed involves a total transformation of social structures and a re-instatement of humanity in both the oppressor and the oppressed. During the initial stage of the struggle, however, the majority of the oppressed tend to turn into sub-oppressors, as opposed to individuals who strive for liberation (Freire 1993: 27).

When the women dress in western clothes, eat different food than their guests and dance to American pop music, the women are, if interpreting these acts in light of Freire's theory, in this way locked into their role as objects, as "adaption represent[s] at most a weak form of self-defense" (Freire 1974: 4). Furthermore, Freire states that people will, if incapable of changing reality itself, instead adapt themselves to this reality. Adaption in this regard is symptomatic to dehumanization (Freire 1974: 4). The fact that the women adapt to a western discourse, however, should not simply be regarded as an act of maintenance of their status as objects of a western cultural discourse. First, the women show several signs of a heightened sense of agency and personal growth by exposing themselves to the community, through creating a big event for themselves and their acquaintances. Secondly, the women's behavior at the graduation, clearly springing out of their new norm of being strong as a group, may be interpreted as a creative performance through which they seek to challenge their prescribed roles as subordinate figures. Such behavior, performing to be something that one seeks to become, can serve as a critically important instrument to self-formation (Mahmood 2005: 128). In the following I attempt to problematize the comprehension of the women's



identification with a western culture at the graduation as a maintenance of their role as objects. I accomplish this problematization by bringing a post-colonial perspective to the analysis.

Homi Bhabha is an Indian post-colonial theorist claiming that binary oppositions between colonized countries and the west need to be deconstructed. In *The Location of Culture* Bhabha (2005) emphasizes that cultures can be understood to interact, transgress and transform each other in a much more complex manner than the traditional binary oppositions can allow. Bhabha makes use of the term mimicry to show how the post-colonial subject destabilizes a colonial discourse through an ironic compromise through which she becomes *almost the same, but not quite* (Bhabha 2005: 122). According to Bhabha, “[t]he menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority” (Bhabha 2005: 126). Hence, the women identifying with western culture at the graduation ceremony, their striking change when speaking at UKZN, and their deep pull towards ownership over, for instance a house and a computer, may be a result of mimicry through which the women actuality destabilize a colonial discourse that for years have made them subaltern figures. Such a perspective runs contrary to Freire’s focus on adaption as maintenance of objectivity. Hence, applying Bhabha’s post-colonial perspective to Freire’s it becomes clear that by making themselves more western, the women were carrying out an ambiguous imitation. Their imitation is not merely an expression of a western hegemony, making them objects; in their imitation of western culture the women also undermine the border on which the colonial execution of power rests: the border between “us and them” (Leander 2009: 191).

## **5.7 Ritual performance and its possible failure**

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, this thesis holds a ritualized structure following Van Gennep’s tripartition of ritualized movements which includes separation, transition and incorporation. In chapter 3 I showed how the women separated from their traditional roles in the house and stepped into a place in which a self-healing can take place. This separation was marked when the women gently combined the new with the old; they conducted Zulu songs and prayers before they sat down to participate in a model which was unfamiliar to them. Chapter 4 illustrated the women’s phase of transition. At this stage the individual is situated

on the threshold to a re-incorporation as a new agent. The goal for such a ritualized movement is for the subject to cross the threshold and be incorporated back to society as a new agent with a raised social status. In this chapter I have emphasized the last phase of the women's ritualized movement, namely their incorporation. As the women's project was halted due to the limited time frame the project had at its disposal, however, the incorporation was disturbed by some kind of failure.

None of the representatives from local organizations that the women had invited to their graduation ceremony showed up. These people represented the stage at which the women sought to arrive, and their presence at the graduation ceremony would have had great symbolic value representing those who receive and welcome the women on the other side of the threshold they were to cross. The absence of these people was obviously a disappointment to the women, and may have taken away some of the spirit to continue. During the evaluations in December, one of the women expressed her disappointment as following:

(...) It would be nice to see people from welfare and social welfare. We were expecting them to come, but they did not come<sup>43</sup>

The limited time frame for the women's ethical project of achieving norms, as well as the absence of representatives from "the other side of the threshold" may have caused the women's need to take on a performative role and thus radiate strength through exterior symbols. It is, as I have explained above, possible to regard this performance as a break with HIV U's ideology. However, according to Mahmood, ritualized behavior can also be regarded as a set of practices serving as critical instruments to self-formation (Mahmood 2005: 128). Seeing ritual performance this way, the women's practices at the graduation may be regarded as a way to establish norms that in turn will increase their social status. In this view, ritual performance is regarded as creative; the women create inner norms through outward ritual practices. By performing acts through which they radiate strength, the women may thus in fact build inner norms of individual strength, consistent with HIV U's aim to instigate an inner sense of empowerment among the women. The failure is thus, in this view, not primarily related to the fact that the women create differences and consolidate themselves into one body. Rather, the failure lies in the fact that the performance ended in a conflict in the graduation and a split of the group afterwards. In the following I stress the necessity of

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<sup>43</sup> Evaluation December 6, 2008

returning to Mpophomeni in order to restore the project that fell apart shortly after our departure in April 2008.

### **5.7.1 The necessity of a follow-up**

In Chapter 2, I emphasized the six steps HIV U normally follows. I also mentioned that a few of these steps were left out due to our limited time frame in Mpophomeni. The result was that the women had not developed a sufficient support network by the time we left, causing them stand more or less on their own.

Richard Schechner (1993) compares the crossing of thresholds, or ritualized movements, with plays. Like rituals, plays often involve notions of disengagement from social control. A play does not only consist of the actual performance enacted in front of an audience, but also the preparatory and complementary work, for instance the rigging of the stage and cleanup required afterward. It is a process in which all phases are integral for the actual performance to succeed. Because of the disengagement from social control a play involves, it is also dangerous, and hence, people need to feel secure in order to begin playing (Schechner 1993: 24-26). According to Schechner, when a play is in the phase of workshop-rehearsal, it needs protection, isolation and a well-defined safety-net. But when the performance is finished it “can move from place to place on tour, overcome many particular distractions heaped on it by audiences, and in general ‘take care of itself’” (Schechner 1993: 27).

Because of the disturbances and mistakes that occurred during the HIV U process in Mpophomeni, the project did not yet overcome the phase of workshop-rehearsal. When we left Mpophomeni after the graduation, the women were still in need of protection and a safety-net that could help them on their way forward to standing on their own. HIV U seeks to create an ongoing support network for its participants, often found, for example, in local NGOs. These representatives did not show up to the women’s graduation ceremony, leaving the women in an unsafe phase during their performance. As a result, upon our departure the project was not yet ready to “take care of itself”. As soon as the performance (the graduation) was over, the women went to their new house, also a place for protection. When the house was sold, they were not “ready to move from place to place”, but went their separate ways back into their own separate homes.

Another crucial aspect of a play is that in addition to actors, it also involves directors, spectators, and commentators (Schechner 1993: 27). Keeping to Schechner's metaphor of play, one can observe all of these roles in the process of piloting HIV U in Mpophomeni: WORLD's facilitator (director), the research team (commentators) and the women's acquaintances and guests at the graduations (spectators). The failure that happened did not only concern the women, but the team as a whole. In order to complete the project as well as make it safe and ready to "take care of itself", we found it necessary to return to the township. The solution we found most appropriate was to connect the women with a local facilitator and community worker who could meet with the women over a longer period of time. The women's process of getting ready to take care of themselves could therefore happen gradually.

## **5.8 Final reflections**

This chapter has illustrated a ceremony that was meant to mark the women's process of ethical formation, through which they were supposed to become empowered and take on the roles of agents of change in society. The graduation ceremony is in fact an important tool the HIV U model provide in order to instigate a sense of empowerment in its participants. Along with the certificate, the graduation ceremony is the tangible evidence of the completion of the training through which students gain a set of new skills and a sense of inner safety. As I have shown, however, the graduation came to have a different meaning due to the shift of norms from reciprocity to being strong. This shift of norms made the process revolve around two different events rather than happening as a continuous process.

There are several aspects about the training pointing to a direction that the project of instigating inner change in the women, by facilitating a process through which they will achieve inner norms of reciprocity, dignity and trust, was not completed when we left the women in April. The split of the group indicated that their relationship was unstable and not completely ready to continue on its own. However, there are aspects about the training that may have been carried by the women also after the split of the group. The model seeks for empowerment to be manifested in trust, reciprocity and dignity. These qualities are difficult to measure, and their achievement can happen gradually. The women's willingness to continue

the project eight months after the pilot project points to the direction that these norms had not completely failed to appear among the women.



# **6 The ambiguity of inner growth: final reflections upon the HIV U pedagogy**

## **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter starts with an account of the thesis and its main finds, thus concentrating the focus of the analysis towards the research questions posed in the introductory chapter. Thereby I put emphasis on the connection between HIV University and the educational and political ideas of the Danish theologian N.F.S. Grundtvig, showing how WORLD carries a pedagogical and political heritage to which Grundtvig has contributed. Furthermore, bringing in Grundtvig's ideas is an attempt to shed light on the theological and pedagogical relevance of the work I have conducted. In this chapter I also summarize my material in order to discuss possible new directions to go with the research I have conducted.

## **6.2 A brief account of the thesis and its finds**

The focus of this thesis has been to describe and analyze HIV University's aim to facilitate a deep inner change among its participants; the model terms this process of inner change "to become empowered". I have laid emphasis on the model's built-in comprehension of empowerment, seeing how this idea met the women's needs and desires in terms of their understanding of empowerment. In order to shed light on the meeting point between these two comprehensions of empowerment, respectively the model's built-in comprehension and the women's, I have described and analyzed the form the training took among the women. Furthermore, I have sought to find out to what extent this form and the tools generated in the Mpophomeni context were consistent with the model's intention, or if the women created a form that represented something distinct from what HIV U aimed to facilitate.

In order to accomplish this analysis, I have focused on three particular narratives that gave form and structure to the project as it gradually evolved among the women. I have furthermore applied analytical perspectives to this process, and this way discussed the women's process in light of different theoretical positions. The first narrative showed how the women began their training by creating moral norms of dignity, trust and reciprocity in a circle. Thereby, I looked at the women's community outreach with a particular focus on how

this movement out to the public depended on the moral norms created in the circle. The final narrative illustrated the women's celebration of their ethical project, through which they were to be re-incorporated into society as new agents. In relation to the women's community outreach, I showed that a shift of norms, from reciprocity to being strong, seemingly took place in these events. This shift, I have suggested, represented a turning point in the training – and did in turn lead to its fragility. In the graduation ceremony this shift of norms became visible through the conflicts that appeared among the women and the power structures that were created.

The break-up of the group that resulted from the sale of the house the women had received, illustrated the vulnerability of the project. In this regard, I have put emphasis on our limited time frame that did not allow all the stages necessary to ensure a high success rate for the project to be developed. However, going back to Mpophomeni eight months after the pilot ended and once again being able to work with these women, functioned both as a closure for the project initiated in April, as well as a new start with new goals. Consequently, the thesis has shown that in order for a training program like HIV U to be successful, there are several steps that need to be reached, as each step depends upon the other in order to lead to growth and change. If one or more steps are rushed through or left out entirely, whatever has been built up by the training becomes fragile.

In this thesis I have termed the pedagogy utilized in HIV University as “a pedagogy of the circle”, as the circle worked both as the means by which the women created a moral norms and as the bodily expression of these particular norms. In this regard the circle became the necessary means through which the women, with assistance from a facilitator, could undergo a process individual growth, in turn leading to societal change. An essential aspect of the circle pedagogy is that it starts with the participants only. This means that the model does not provide a curriculum or a structured program as a starting point for the training. The training revolves around whatever it is the students bring to the circle, and takes form as the women gather, in trust and reciprocity, around their own life stories. This way the women make the circle a place in which their stories could be told and their burdens relieved, and thereby allowing for growth and a transformation to take place. The circle holds a non-hierarchal fashion, thus enabling the women to share from their lives as equals. The women themselves referred to the sharing and openness in the circle as a process of “healing the self”.



In this thesis I have analyzed the process of becoming empowered as an ethical project that will reach its excellence when desired moral norms, fostered by repeated practice, becomes an integrated part of the women's sense of self. The HIV U program seeks for the women to become agents of change in their community, encouraged by their felt empowerment.

Consequently, I have put major emphasis on the necessity for the women to build inner moral norms prior to reaching out to the public. According to the model, the norms created in the circle will lay the foundation for the women's community outreach. In this regard I have emphasized the difference between being strong as an individual daring to open up to other individuals on the one hand, and to be strong as a group on the other hand. When the women made themselves strong as a group in their community outreach, I emphasized that this act could be interpreted as a break with the HIV U model's emphasis on the individual's dignity.

I have made use of Mahmood's theory and her renegotiation of the Aristotelian concept of habitus in order to analyze the women's ethical project. Central to this concept is the preconception that moral virtues are something that has to be learned, through repeated practices, in turn implying that they do not exist innately in us. This perspective has been fruitful, as also HIV U adapt to an ethical project through which moral norms are achieved, terming it "to become empowered".

Mahmood's theory is concerned with a close relationship between moral norms and the bodily forms that these norms take. Making use of this theory I have shown how the openness in the circle radiated norms of reciprocity and trust, while the community outreach, when the women consolidated themselves into one body, radiated a norm of being strong. This analytical perspective, however, is to a certain extent characterized by ambiguity. It stems from Mahmood's non-expressive interpretation of habitus and her claim that among Islamic women in Cairo, one particular norm is constituted through one particular bodily form. As briefly discussed in chapter 5, however, this is not entirely the case in Mpophomeni. The forms made use of by the women in order to accomplish their project were reasoned variously. Also, the norms the model seeks to instigate in the women will obviously take different forms in different contexts, which makes the achievement of these norms difficult to measure theoretically. Additionally, even though the norm of reciprocity did not clearly come to expression in the women's community outreach and the graduation, the achievement of these norms may still be under process and come to expression, or rather, take form over time.

The analytical perspective developed by Mahmood thus requires an open attitude to the embedded ambiguity of an ethical project in order to be fruitful.

The HIV U model presupposes that something inherently good will unfold and blossom when practices are conducted among the women, in their coming together in trust and reciprocity. Hence, even though the virtues do not exist innately in human beings, they will unfold in the meeting with the Other<sup>44</sup>. This means that building dignity in the individual is a process that takes place in interaction with others. The HIV U model's idea that societal change starts by building trust and dignity within, through a process of interaction with others, is an idea that follows a pedagogical and political heritage to which, among others, N.F.S. Grundtvig has been a contributor. This far in my thesis I have briefly emphasized the relation between WORLD and Grundtvig's ideas, and in the following I go more thoroughly into this relation.

### **6.3 Grundtvig and HIV University**

Grundtvig lived during a particularly significant period in Danish history. The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw Denmark go from monarchy to democracy. It was also, however, a period of social and economic decline. Denmark, for example, lost its Norwegian territory to Sweden in 1814, and fell to German aggression later in the century. Grundtvig provided a different solution to this devastation of hope and prosperity: "What we have lost externally, we must regain internally" (Spicer 2000). Education became a response to the need and struggle of the common people, and was to help build identity and a love of life.

This idea was brought from the Danish Folk High Schools to Highlander Folk School in USA, together with the idea of an education by the Living Word (Horton 1983: 27). As a central contributor to the civil rights movement, Highlander's negotiation of the Living Word can be rediscovered in contemporary social movements, including the women's movement of which WORLD is a representative. The concept includes, as I have shown, that education must be

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<sup>44</sup> This is a common concept in the philosophy surrounding dialogue. In *Between Man and Man*, Martin Buber (2006) discusses the meeting with the Other with focus on the "sphere of between" that may be created in this meeting. According to Buber, the individual is a fact of existence insofar as he steps into a living relation with other individuals. Individuals communicate in a sphere which is common to them but which reaches out beyond the special sphere of each. This sphere of between thus becomes the bearer of their relationship and a means for both to grow (Buber 2006: 240-241).

modeled to encompass the past, the present and the dream of the future (Horton 1983: 27). Highlander furthermore makes use of the circle, which has become a symbol of the educational process at this school (Horton 1983: 25). The form holds a non-hierarchical principle, and by gathering in a circle, students and teachers can share as equals. The circle as a political and pedagogical principle at HIV U may thus be seen in light of the political heritage springing back to, among others, N.F.S. Grundtvig.

The HIV University training does not provide a set curriculum, but a facilitator and the norms of decision-making and respectful speaking. Therefore, the spoken word becomes central to their training, as it is through this dialogue that the women express their concerns, desires and goals, along with opening up to each other and creating a relationship of trust. This dialogue makes them vulnerable, but through their common vulnerability they achieve a sense of becoming equals. Spoken words in the form of song and prayer also work to build solidarity in the group. Hence, the women's process of growing as human beings rests, to a large extent, on the word in their dialogue.

Grundtvig's theology is centered on the Living Word, which is clearly displayed in many of his well known psalms. One of them is "Give da Gud, at hvor vi bo" (1836). The last phrase in this psalm reads "Ordet kun helliger huset", literally meaning that it is the word spoken in the house that makes the house sacred, not the other way around. Consequently, the church building itself has value as a sacred room only if the word spoken in it meets the people and enters into a living interaction with their lives. Grundtvig's philosophy thus implies the notion that the house gets its value and its meaning on the basis of the Living Word. The same idea can be found in the HIV U model. What happens between, and within, the participants, defines the space in which the training takes place. The word carries the potential for inner change to take place, and when this change occurs, the room itself may gain symbolic value as a sacred, spiritual, or representative space.

To the women in Mpophomeni, a house, as I have shown, has a value in itself through its symbolic and material representation of the Zulu cosmology. In my analysis I discussed if the women's desire to own a house and their increased identification with western culture represented a break with HIV U's ideology and, furthermore, contributed to the vulnerable position the project was in after the researchers and the facilitator had left Mpophomeni. Emphasizing Bourdieu's theorization of the continuity between cosmology and sociality in

traditional societies, however, helped me illustrate that the house, to the women, represents much more than a desire among the women to constitute themselves strong as a group.

Grundtvig reminds us of the necessity of a love for life in order for human beings to grow. As a result, a human being will have to take pride in their present lives, rather than longing for the life beyond. HIV U carries this idea and asks the women to accept and take pride in their lives as HIV positive, thereby using this dignity to promote a change. The women's identification with western culture and their tendency to appear strong as a group is thus seemingly a break with HIV U's ideology. I have shown, however, that such an interpretation is problematic. Western culture is in fact a significant part of the women's everyday life. This means that for the women to love life also includes a conditional love for modernity and for some western aspects of their lives, not only for their Zulu heritage. This is another example of how ambiguous the women's responses to the HIV U pilot project are, opening up for a variety of results.

The concept of Folk High Schools has been transferred both to the U.S. and Southern Africa (Ozumba 1993). Because HIV U builds upon a political heritage to which Grundtvig is a contributor, the analysis of HIV U's implementation in Mpophomeni also speaks to the potential of Grundtvig's ideas in the context of HIV and AIDS work in South Africa. Grundtvig's work stems from early 19th century Denmark, so naturally there is a gap both in time and space between his school of thought and the field that I have been working in. Despite this gap, however, there are aspects of his philosophy that are relevant to contemporary South Africa. When Grundtvig developed his theological and pedagogical theories, Denmark had just started on a slow process towards democracy. His emphasis on the identity of the people in its diversity made Grundtvig a precursor to the democratic movement in Scandinavia, his thoughts contributing to the democratization process and to the sovereignty of the Danish people.

South Africa's apartheid regime was abolished in 1994, and universal suffrage introduced. Therefore, despite the gap in time and space between Grundtvig's context and present day South Africa, Grundtvig's work towards democracy and recognition of the history of the people can lend its value to the social and political circumstances of contemporary South Africa. South Africa's democratic constitution is very young, and the country is still undergoing a process of building dignity in the black population and equality between all citizens. Grundtvig's emphasis on the value of, and the need to focus on, the life stories of all

people in order to discover a common good, is therefore highly resonant in the context of present-day South Africa.

## **6.4 Possible further work and research**

In order to describe and analyze the process the women underwent in HIV U, I have consciously let the dynamics of the women's project determine my analysis. In order to shed light on my observations from various angles and accomplish the analysis, I have, as mentioned in the introductory chapter, made use of various theoretical perspectives. An alternative to my choice would obviously be to view the women's project from one specific analytical perspective only, and to dwell with deeper layers. In the following I suggest three perspectives from which I suggest that fruitful analysis's of such a project I have studied could be accomplished. My primary emphasis will be on the ambiguity inherent in any ethical project like the one I have studied.

The configuration of my thesis holds a ritualized structure. I have pointed out that the movement towards becoming agents of change in society may be divided into three phases, which in van Gennep's terminology are initiation, transition and incorporation. Van Gennep's tripartition of movements through which the social status of people are raised, gave the idea to how this thesis could be realized, but has not been playing a significant role in my analysis. I believe, however, that ritual theory bears potential to understand processes by which people raise and transform their social status. By going deeper into the ritualization of movements, the creative aspect of rituals would be of particular interest. In a time of crisis, such as the AIDS pandemic in South Africa, rituals are often utilized as a medium of cultural change. This means that people's ritual performances are actually a way of challenging the social structures that put them at risk. In the case of HIV U in Mpophomeni, the circle itself was a ritualized project through which the women separated from their traditional roles with which they were regarded as subordinate human beings. For a deeper analysis of the process of raising social status, it would therefore be interesting to look deeper into the ritualization of such a project.

The project I have participated in is a cooperation between three different countries; as Norwegian researchers we participated in implementing an American empowerment model in

order to promote empowerment and ultimately change in a South African township. Consequently, I have dedicated a part of my thesis to illustrate the ideology found in HIV University and its connection to the Norwegian and the South African cultural context, to which the ideas of Grundtvig have been central. My thesis concentrates on the transferability of HIV U to Mpophomeni Township, with the possibilities and the obstacles such an implementation includes. It would, however, be interesting with a broader comparative analysis of the transferability of ideas and practices between these three cultural contexts.

The tools HIV U brought to facilitate a change for the women were for instance the norm of consensus and respectful dialogical speaking. In this thesis I have analyzed this dialogue in light of Paulo Freire's *pedagogy of the oppressed*. The goal of an emancipatory dialogue is that the participants will reach a higher level of consciousness regarding their situation and furthermore, in Freire's terminology, become liberated. However, this process of liberation also involves an increased responsibility among the women towards each other. I will now describe this challenge, which an emancipatory dialogue includes, before suggesting a deeper analysis of the relation between freedom and self-empowerment as a continuation of the work I have conducted.

In Mpophomeni, the unfolding and blossoming of something inherently good takes place when the women share; they share food, they share their life stories, and they share a common vulnerability. They become united through their sharing and the sharing enables them to create norm of dignity, trust and reciprocity which brings the group together. However, to share also includes an increased responsibility. The more they give of themselves, the more they depend on the others in the group and their trust. Hence, when the women grow and become conscious through their sharing, their responsibility towards each other also increases. Their own emancipation, which develops through the dialogue, must therefore continuously be balanced towards the emancipation of the Other. This struggle for balance, I regard as the ambiguity of the women's ethical project of inner growth.

According to Simone de Beauvoir, existence in itself includes a fundamental ambiguity. The sovereignty of human beings is their ability to reflect upon the past which no longer is, and the future which has not yet come to pass. This privilege of being a unique and sovereign individual, however, is what a human shares with all other humans, in turn making her an object of others. This fact may lead to a subject's self-awareness as being nothing more than an individual in the community on which she depends (de Beauvoir 1976: 7). A human

being's freedom to reflect upon, and choose, her life freely is therefore also her solitude. If not using her freedom to choose her ends to communicate with others, this freedom is realized only as an act of separation from others (de Beauvoir 1976: 65).

This ambiguity entails the idea that our freedom must be used to create relationships and community, in turn involving a responsibility for the freedom of the Other. This idea is not foreign to South African wisdom traditions (Ubuntu), rather the opposite. During the HIV U pilot project, conflicts arose among the women, for instance in relation to food. Also when some of the women took on leadership roles, tensions arose. For a deeper analysis than the one I have conducted, it would be fruitful to use a perspective including the ambiguity of a project that seeks liberation, or empowerment, for its participants. The ethics of ambiguity worked out by French existentialists, such as de Beauvoir, helps to understand the ambiguity of the women's individual responses to the project. By undertaking such a perspective, the conflicts among the women could have been explained in relation to their increased awareness and liberation, thus providing a deeper understanding of these responses.

In Mpophomeni, the women's ethical formation on the threshold to a raised social was characterized by their negotiation of the tools provided by the model and the needs and desires the women set out for themselves. I have shown in this thesis that studying the women's responses to the pilot project requires an openness for the various forms such responses may take.





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# Appendix: Evaluation worksheet

## Evaluation

### Outcome mapping HIV-U intervention in Mpophomeni

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<b>Worksheet 1. Program framework</b>
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What are your thoughts on what the HIV U project set out to accomplish?	
Which changes did you hope to see as a result of the project? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Personal level</li><li>- Community level</li></ul>	
In which ways does the HIV U fit your needs and the needs of your group?	
Can you name individuals, groups or organization with which you interact that you believe have the power to support, block or otherwise influence the outcome of the project?	

## Worksheet 2 Project strategy

What was your aim for participating in the project?	
What did you do to pursue this aim?	
Did you seek or were you provided with any form of capacity building, training etc in order to achieve your aim?	
What kind of support networks were established in accordance for you to achieving your aim?	
What kind of support network do you think should have been established during the pilot project?	

## Worksheet 3 : Positive Activities

Choose activities that you think were particularly positive or successful and contributed well to your HIV-U aim.

Describe the activities or events?

Can you describe how these activities and events affected you personally and/ or the group?

#### **Worksheet 4 : Negative Activities**

Choose activities that you think were particularly negative or destructive to the HIV –U aim.

Describe the activities or events?

#### **Worksheet 5: Improvements**

How do you think the HIV University pilot project could have been more successful?	
Who should have been involved in the HIV University pilot project in order to make it more successful?	
What do you think is needed to make the continuing of HIV University in Mpophomeni successful?	

