

# Applied Drama/Theatre as Social Intervention in Conflict and Post-Conflict Contexts



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Edited by

Hazel Barnes and Marié-Heleen Coetzee

**CAMBRIDGE  
SCHOLARS**

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P U B L I S H I N G

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In memory of Lynn Dalrymple and Yvonne Banning  
Pioneers of applied drama and theatre in South Africa



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all our contributors who participated in the 5th Drama for Life Africa Research Conference in 2012, hosted by the University of Pretoria's Drama Department, from which the chapters in this book developed. This conference, with its emphasis on drama/theatre in conflict and post-conflict contexts, found an appropriate home in Pretoria as two prominent national symbols of 'conflict' and 'post-conflict' are situated across from each other just outside the city. These are the Voortrekker Monument and Freedom Park. The Voortrekker Monument commemorates the Great Trek where Afrikaner families fled the oppression of British rule and the monument became symbolic of the subsequent rise of Afrikaner nationalism with its associated implications. Freedom Park is a monument/memorial to the values of human dignity, human rights, freedom and reconciliation, established by the post-apartheid constitution. It commemorates the diverging and often contrasting influences that brought about democracy in South Africa. Both monuments stand testimony to a conflicted history/histories that shaped South Africa's political, cultural, social and economic landscape. From the vantage point of our current context, they allow us to re-imagine the relationship between histories, values and symbols, as well as our position in relation to these notions. Today, South Africa is faced with the dangerous escalation of conflict that speaks to the shadow of trauma, a shadow inherited from the past and now reinvented by the exacerbation of poverty, senseless crime, political and economic corruption, and shameful inequalities. Art has the capacity to witness, reveal, speak back to, and transform the way we engage with, reflect upon, and make meaning of conflict. Arts activists, development facilitators, educators and therapists have an even more significant role and responsibility to play in relation to conflict. Drama and theatre encourage changes in understanding and consciousness that broaden perceptions and experiences of ourselves and of the wor(l)ds around us. The chapters, collected here, reflect the ideals of democracy and social transformation made manifest through drama and theatre. They speak to the possibilities of transformation, of responsible social engagement with our wor(l)ds and in doing so, become a celebration of humanity. Drawing on the praxis and writings of delegates from the African continent and across the world these chapters explore innovative

approaches and interrogate important ethical implications for applied drama/theatre researchers and practitioners in conflict and post-conflict contexts. Through them we hope to enliven, enhance and vision a way forward for the arts to create cultures of dialogue, negotiation, healing and social transformation.

Drama for Life (established in 2008) is an academic, research and community engagement centre based at the University of the Witwatersrand. It aims to develop an African centre for the professional training of Applied Drama/Theatre, Drama in Education and Drama Therapy practitioners, educators, therapists and researchers; to generate an African network for artists in applied terrains using the arts for social transformation with specific reference to HIV/AIDS; Human Rights and Social Justice; Conflict Management and Peace Building; and Environmental Awareness. Drama for Life further actively advocates for the professional recognition of facilitators, educators, therapists and researchers in Applied Drama/Theatre, Drama in Education and Drama Therapy across the African continent. A special word of thanks goes to Warren Nebe, the Director and founder of Drama for Life as well as the Africa Research Conferences from which a number of prior publications have stemmed. These conferences actively support the development of praxis and scholarly engagement in the field of Applied Drama/Theatre, drama therapy and related arts. This book is an extension of that project and is aimed at scholars in the academic community.

We would like to acknowledge insights from the keynote speakers, namely Dr Mshai Mwangola from Kenya who is a performance scholar, storyteller, oratorist and chairperson of the Governing Council of the Kenya Cultural Centre, as well as James Thompson, Professor of Applied and Social Theatre at the University of Manchester and Director of the Centre for Applied Theatre Research from the UK.

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—Hazel Barnes and Marié-Heleen Coetzee

## FOREWORD

### **This is how you heal**

This is how you heal  
Slowly  
Honestly  
You waste no time  
Asking why you  
Why this wound exists  
Instead  
Courageously  
Gently  
You ask its name  
You listen for resonance  
With any place  
Your heart has been before  
You open wider  
Give permission  
To tears, rage, shame  
Allow their salt  
To purify the site  
And in the slightly numb  
Subsequent calm  
You ask the real questions:  
Why did I draw *this* into my life story?  
Where are similar roots, patterns in my history?  
What did I learn or gain back then?  
What do I need to do, say, try...again?  
Once more, be still  
Gentle  
Listen deeply  
Now the silence will offer  
Its ultimate service  
And with certainty you will know  
How this very wound  
Could help you grow

What you are still clinging to  
Follow that ache and burn  
Repeat this process  
Until the lightness in your chest  
The turbulent ocean of your mind  
Washes you up to a new shore  
Now rest.

Honour your conquest  
Your transcendence  
Of ego-games, of fear  
Wrap yourself  
And the changing wound  
In gratitude  
Tie a ribbon around the part  
That belongs in the past  
Keep your light focussed  
On where your pain has led you to  
The soil is fertile by now  
Observe where new life has begun  
Stay alert for life's clues and cues  
Along your path  
Stay in the haven of your heart  
Keep its doors open  
To avoid suffocation or blame  
Sway, dance, play  
To the rhythm of its music  
There is always a song  
Composing itself in there  
Remember  
To know the myriad faces of love  
Is the sole, unmistakeable reason  
You are here.

—Malika Ndlovu 19 December 2012

## INTRODUCTION

### WHY THESE STORIES? – OR SINGING THE SONGS OF FREEDOM?

JAMES THOMPSON

I would like to thank the editors of *Applied Drama/Theatre As Social Intervention in Conflict And Post-Conflict Contexts* for inviting me to write a foreword to the edition. I heard a number of these chapters in paper form at the Drama for Life Africa Research Conference at the Drama Department of the University of Pretoria in November 2012 and it has been a privilege to read them again now. The collection here represents an important example of the debates that preoccupy the writing and practice of that broad field known variously as applied theatre, participatory theatre or educational theatre. It offers an insight to many of the concerns of practitioners and the breadth covered—in form of theatre addressed, context of the practice, the different participants or community's represented and, finally, the range of theoretical approaches used—is impressive. In the pages that follow, different writers account for theatre work connected to Augusto Boal's "Theatre of the Oppressed", verbatim theatre based on interview transcripts, forms of documentary, perhaps Epic, theatre and then varieties of popular and participatory performance. The work exists in correctional settings, in secondary schools, primary schools, in rural villages—and of course on campuses and in theatres. The chapters relate work with and by individuals who have suffered from traumatic experiences—whether the xenophobic violence in South Africa, or abuse in New Zealand—with female prisoners debating issues of sexuality; with villagers coping with environmental degradation; with school pupils struggling with notions of difference, or the impact of war on individuals lives; with primary-aged children finding a voice to tell stories and therapists and clients discovering new ways of representing the narratives of their collective encounters. The writing is informed by theories emanating from education, psychology, trauma studies and performance studies. This diversity, one might assume, could produce a



somewhat over-differentiated reading experience—but I would argue that there are strong cross cutting themes that tie this group of articles together. In her chapter on “retellings” of narrative therapy that took place at Rhodes Drama Department, Alexandra Sutherland asks the crucial question ‘Why these stories?’ and in many ways this is the guiding question for the whole book. And it is in the different authors’ interrogations of this question that the links across the work emerge.

I want to use this introduction to retell a slightly different story that I hope connects with the ones here, and in a small way is my response to the *why these stories* question. In 2010 I had the fortune to be invited to work with the UK NGO Children in Crisis with their partners Ebenezer Ministries International in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. I was tasked with conducting some participatory theatre training for community animators who in turn were working within their different villages to create performances about the barriers faced by girls who sought access to education. This was in a region of South Kivu province that had minimal investment in its school system, had suffered appallingly during the Congolese wars and where prioritising female children’s education was not the norm. This work links with the chapters here by Ofonime Inyang and Patrick Ebewo because of the use of a broadly Boalian set of techniques but also to the account of work in Westville Female Correctional Centre by Miranda Young-Jahangeer, which focuses on African popular performance forms. Of course, in presenting scenes of young girls trying to overcome family members’ resistance to their education, this practice also chimes with Kennedy Chinyowa’s provocation that we need to be exploring a *theatre of the oppressor* if we are not to let certain individuals and groups off the hook. In many ways the sketches and scenes that were developed in this High Plateau region of South Kivu were consistently addressed at the adults who did in fact have the power to permit young girls to attend local schools. It, perhaps, was taking up Chinyowa’s proposal without realising it.

The context of this project echoes the work illustrated here by the chapters based on school and university theatre work—by Glynnis Moore, by Marié-Heleen Coetzee, Tamar Meskin and Tanya van der Walt, and then by Paula Kingwill. What I note from these chapters is that the theatre work is shaped by the possibilities and problems of each setting—and could only be meaningful in the sensitivity they showed to their varying contexts. All chapters in this edition demonstrate how the context is not like a touring venue where you present finished work fashioned elsewhere,

but it is the dynamic determinant of the very shape and feel of the performance work that is done. It is the crucible not the backcloth. In DRC, the costs of schooling, the role of parents and fathers in particular, the distance to schools, the work children must undertake to support the home, were all important factors in determining both who could perform and what could be said. The chapter by Miranda Young-Jahangeer demonstrates strongly how the director or facilitator respectfully negotiates the cultural mores of their context—and how this might trouble one's prior assumptions. Similarly in DRC, in a strongly Pentecostal environment where all performances took place in church on Sundays (the only place and time of collective assembly), the content and style of the performances required careful negotiation. And this is not simply a tolerance of the context for its "restrictions" but a deep willingness to learn from the possibilities that this created. This edition expertly illustrates how setting and participants—while at times challenging—are what makes this practice dynamic and powerful.

While conducting workshops and watching performances about girls' rights to education, I was lucky to meet a group of widows who were interested in the arts and performance. In a region from which much of the insurrection that led to the eventual overthrow of President Mobutu started, there were a huge number of female-headed households, in a community where female employment was extremely rare. This group of women clearly had suffered in diverse ways—echoing the experiences reported in Hilary Halba and Stuart Young's chapter on the play "Hush" and the loss experienced by the interviewees who informed the play examined in Gina Shmuker's chapter on "Trauma and theatre making". I conducted a short workshop with this group to prepare a piece they were to perform for a huge meeting of a regional widows' association. How to deal with their experiences, what could or should be said in the theatre, and who determines the parameters of the performance, are questions raised by many of the authors in this book. The difficulties faced by myself as an outside facilitator during this work in DRC relate in a small way to the struggle expertly related by Paula Kingwill in her chapter "There's a hole in my bucket"—and similarly, I searched for the most appropriate theatrical container, "bucket" in Kingwill's words, for the work I did with this group. We created a piece that in a simple series of images illustrated the impact of war on a group of women and their children—focusing as Marié-Heleen Coetzee and her colleagues did in their "Theatre of Humanity" on the smaller stories of war's impact. For me however, on the day of their performance, it was not the short sketch that

moved me most—but the resort to song at the end of their piece. In South Kivu there is a network of choirs, and this widow's group were also a choir. While theatre might seek to represent, retell or provide a respectful witness to people's experiences, often communities *sing their songs of freedom*. In her account of the performance at Rhodes Alexandra Sutherland notes a question from a colleague who asked "Where is the fool in this?" Perhaps it is not the fool we are searching for, but the space for stories to be transformed—so that the art form itself enables people to be liberated from certain narratives frequently destructive hold on people's lives.

In working on Boal-esque workshops in DRC and seeing the performances that sort to communicate the theme of girls rights or even those narratives of the effects of war on a group of widows—in the end DRC most impressed me for how, using Yael Fisher's words, quoted by Hilary Halba and Stuart Young here, "hearing and being heard" can be done in stories and narratives, but might also be done in glorious sung harmony. Applied theatre—as illustrated in this edition—welcomes diverse forms of practice and we need to argue for that diversity. Accounts of different contexts and participants ensure we keep the field open to varying possibilities of how performance enables people to learn and live through their experiences—good and bad. This book reminded me of the complexity and range of artistic practice that make up this field—and reminded me how whether Theatre of the Oppressed in rural villages, collaborative devising in schools or witnessing a verbatim performance—or singing beautifully on a plateau in DRC—theatre and the arts are a vital means for community's to make sense of their lives.



**PART ONE:**

**APPLIED DRAMA/THEATRE INTERVENTIONS**

# CHAPTER ONE

## RE-IMAGINING BOAL THROUGH THE THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSOR

KENNEDY CHINYOWA

### **1. Introduction**

Marc Weinblatt and Cheryl Harrison argue that, “all of us are culpable and responsible for uprooting social injustice, not just the oppressed” (2011, 22). The two theatre activists proceed to elaborate on what they call “systematic oppression” where people in positions of privilege may, consciously or unconsciously, become party to oppression through subtle means based on the values of the dominant culture. Through covert or overt display of personal and collective assumptions, biases and prejudices, all people can be both agents (oppressors/perpetrators) and targets (oppressed/victims) of different forms of oppression. Thus while Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed calls for a “rehearsal of the revolution” on behalf of the oppressed, it must also be possible to make a call for a Theatre of the Oppressor that allows both sides to be agents of liberation. Taking Boal’s classic image of the man who has his foot on the chest of another man lying on the ground, rather than have the fallen man remove the other man’s foot from his chest, how much easier could it be if the oppressor removed his foot from the chest of the man lying on the ground?

This chapter argues for the need for a Theatre of the Oppressor where agents of oppression (oppressors) can also be turned into allies in the act of liberation. Rather than remain perpetrators (of oppression), such agents can exercise their privilege for the sake of freedom, peace and justice. The chapter rests on the axiom that those who are part of the problem are also part of the solution. It therefore calls for the adaptation of Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed in a manner that attempts to discard the boundaries between the oppressor and the oppressed. Drawing illustrations from forum theatre workshops that were carried out by the Acting Against

Conflict Project at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, the chapter will show the “reality” of those who cannot see the subtle power of their privilege. The challenge of working on one’s own privilege, of removing one’s foot from someone’s chest and of learning how not to be an agent of oppression will be the subject of the Theatre of the Oppressor.

## **2. Constraints in Boal’s poetics of the oppressed**

The Brazilian adult educator, Paulo Freire argued for liberatory pedagogy as the panacea for the humanization of both the oppressor and the oppressed (Freire 1970). To recover their lost humanity, the oppressed need to affirm the virtues of freedom, justice, hope and peace. The oppressor too needs to discard the fear of freedom, the unwillingness to come to terms with the new reality. Augusto Boal later adapted Freirian pedagogy to the theatre space in a bid to revolutionalise “the poetics of the oppressed” by giving them a more practical orientation (Boal 1979). Basing his views on Freire’s idea of dialogue and praxis, Boal believed that if the oppressed can perform an action, rather than the artist in their place, the performance of that action in theatrical fiction will enable them to activate themselves to perform similar actions in real life (Boal 1979).

However, while Freire and Boal sought to transform unequal relations of power in favour of the oppressed, the philosophical principles that underpin both the Pedagogy of the Oppressed and the Theatre of the Oppressed tend to ignore the contradictions inherent in the divide between the “oppressor” and “oppressed”. As Bruce Burton points out with reference to the need for what he calls “enhanced forum theatre”, the limitations of forum theatre lie in the over-riding imperative to solve the oppression rather than exploring it in depth (Burton 2006). This structural shortcoming means that even the most complex forms of oppression are treated rather superficially without an exploration of the historical context of the issue at hand. The audience-turned-spect-actors can only intervene as protagonists even though they may not be the best characters capable of solving the oppression.

To an extent, Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed tends to perpetuate oppressive power relations and social inequalities by virtue of being a theatre *of* the oppressed rather than *of* the oppressor. It appears to construct the “world” as divided between black and white (race), male and female (gender), rich and poor (class), straight and queer (sexuality) and self and

other (ethnicity). The result is to gloss over more complex relations of power in which these binary categories are fluid rather than fixed.

Perhaps Elizabeth Ellsworth poses the most serious challenge to dealing with oppression when she regards terms such as “empowerment”, “participation”, “dialogue” and “consciousness” as repressive myths (Ellsworth 1989). She explains that when participants want to put these terms into practice, they often find themselves perpetuating the same relations of domination they are fighting against. Ellsworth argues that narratives of oppression are partial, incomplete and limited in the sense that they project the interests of one side (the oppressed) over others (the oppressors) (Ellsworth 1989). Participants are made to equate an understanding of the social construction of reality by dominant groups with transformation. For this reason, strategies deployed in the name of giving voice to the marginalized often create the illusion of liberation while they reinforce, or even worsen, the oppressive power structures.

### **3. The necessity for a poetics of the oppressor**

Paulo Freire has argued that one needs to go beyond the strict duality between the oppressor and the oppressed in order to fully understand systems of oppression (Freire 1970). He ascribes the reasons for this duality to the complex nature of both the oppressor and the oppressed. Within the category of oppressors can also be found groups of people whose deviation from normative power structures renders them “oppressed”, and the same is true for the oppressed. The oppressed are equally capable of perpetuating oppressive systems of privilege as much as the oppressors. As Michael Dumlaoui points out, the movement between oppressor and oppressed is too fluid to allow for a strict binary to be drawn between the two complex relationships (Dumlaoui 2003). For instance, oppressors can be oppressed, liberators can turn into oppressors while the oppressed are often complicit in their own oppression.

Perhaps the binary division between the oppressor and the oppressed becomes more complex when one considers Frantz Fanon’s argument on “the pitfalls of nationalist consciousness” (Fanon 1967). In *The Wretched of the Earth*, arguably one of the leading texts on African nationalism, Fanon, a psychiatrist who originally came from Martinique in the Caribbean, and later joined the Algerian revolution against French colonialism, prescribes violence as a cleansing force for the oppressed. In his own words, “violence frees the native from his inferiority complex and



from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his dignity and self-respect” (Fanon 1967, 31). But while Fanon embraces violence as a therapy for the oppressed, he also notes that the same internal struggle within the colonized creates a dichotomy in which each oppressed person’s perennial dream is to become the oppressor. If the oppressed can eventually turn into oppressors, the need for a Theatre of the Oppressor becomes even more urgent in order to fill the gaps in the Theatre of the Oppressed. Moreover, Freire’s argument about the “false generosity” of the oppressor, which is manifested through acts of charity, patronage and dependency on the part of the oppressor, would equally apply to the oppressed-turned-oppressor (Freire 1970). Thus, as potential oppressors, the oppressed need to be conscious of being culpable of practising false generosity.

Like Freire, Boal also appears to have become aware of the complex relationships between the oppressor and the oppressed when he devised Legislative Theatre and the Rainbow of Desire techniques. In his book, *Legislative Theatre* (1998), Boal describes one workshop experience where he began to question the existence of genuine dialogue in his arsenal of the Theatre of the Oppressed. In his own words, Boal poses the following rhetorical questions:

In reality, does dialogue exist, ever? Or is the contrary the case, that what we think is dialogue never actually goes beyond parallel or overlapping monologues? Monologues between countries, social classes, races, ... in the home or in school ... (Boal 1998, 4)

The apparent absence of true dialogue between the oppressor and the oppressed led Boal to come up with a new form of democratized Theatre of the Oppressed that focuses on direct participation by those responsible for making laws in parliament, that is Legislative Theatre. The shift towards Legislative Theatre had actually begun with Boal’s discovery of the Rainbow of Desire (Boal 1995) while he was living in exile in Europe and North America. In the Rainbow of Desire, Boal had realized that there were people other than oppressed peasants and workers who, though they belonged to a privileged class, racial or ethnic group, still suffered from internalized oppressions, what he came to call “cops in the head”. It was therefore not enough to continue categorizing such people into binary divisions as suggested by terms such as “oppressor” and “oppressed”. There was therefore need to pay equal attention to either the internal or external liberation of the oppressor.

What then can be done to liberate not just the oppressed, as Boal has meticulously done through the “poetics of the oppressed”, but also the oppressor? (Boal 1979). Marc Weinblatt offers an example of himself as a straight, able-bodied, middle-class and privileged white male raised in the United States who has opted to be an ally in the anti-oppression struggle by advocating for a “poetics of the oppressor” (Weinblatt 2011). In his own words, he explains:

Our work does not point a finger, nor does it attempt to oversimplify human beings into the binary of either oppressed or oppressor. People are inevitably complex in ways that are impossible to define with labels (Weinblatt 2011, 23).

Weinblatt asserts that all people are agents and targets of different forms of oppression if one regards oppression as a social construct that manifests itself through access to power, privilege and resources (Weinblatt 2011). He adapts Leticia Nieto’s systematic oppression theory to show how roles of agents (perpetrators) and targets (victims) of oppression can be identified as follows (Neito 2010):

**Table 1-1 Adaptation of Nieto’s Systematic Oppression Table**

Category	Agents	Targets
Age	Adults (21 – 59)	Children, youth, elderly
Disability	Able bodied	Disabled
Religion	Christians	Non-Christians
Race	Whites	Non-whites
Class	Upper or middle class	Peasants, Workers
Gender	Males	Females
Sexual orientation	Heterosexuals	Gays, lesbians, bisexuals
Ethnicity	Citizens or indigenous	Non-citizens or non-indigenous

In this table, agents represent members of the dominant social group with access to power, privilege and resources and targets are members of marginalized, victimized and disadvantaged groups who lack access to equal privileges and opportunities. Such binaries tend to focus more on the differences rather than the similarities. A pedagogy based on one category of society, for instance the oppressed, can only serve to perpetuate the

same binary divisions. A poetics of the oppressor will help to bridge the gap between the categories of agents and targets by making them allies in the process of liberation.

In Boal's example of the man who has his foot on the chest of another man lying on the ground, when the oppressed man was asked to create an ideal image of the oppression, he simply removed the oppressor's foot from his chest but remained lying on the ground. Hence, the self-empowerment of the oppressed cannot be complete without the collaboration of the oppressor who may be inadvertently unconscious of his oppression of the other. According to Arnold Mindell, it must be possible for perpetrators of oppression to re-invent themselves as agents of liberation, to use their privilege for social justice and equality (Mindell 1995). Far from being "magic", the term used by Boal to describe the act where a spect-actor's intervention may be challenged by other audience members if they believe that it's improbable and unrealistic, those who are part of the problem are better placed to be part of the solution. Perhaps in reality, no one would want to be viewed as part of the problem, especially those who are slow to recognize the subtle nature of their power. In effect, the advantage of a poetics of the oppressor lies in working with privilege, making oppressors aware that they may be putting their feet on other people's chests, "unlearning" historical patterns of dominance and learning to be agents of liberation. As Weinblatt concludes, the theatre of the oppressed can be adapted to serve the needs of a theatre of the oppressor (Weinblatt 2011).

#### **4. Re-imagining Boal in practice**

In essence, the theatre of the oppressor seeks to adapt Boal's poetics of the oppressed but operates from a different perspective. Taking forum theatre as a point of reference, the theatre of the oppressor does not necessarily preoccupy itself with replacing the most oppressed character but treats both the oppressed and the oppressor as potential allies in the process of liberation. While it is important for the oppressed to reclaim their power from the oppressor, Theatre of the Oppressed leaves behind a world in which the oppressor remains in perpetual dominance. As Weinblatt further argues, the theatre of the oppressor allows everyone to be protagonists with equal responsibility in dealing with systems of oppression. The idea behind such theatre being that, "We learn more about ourselves by playing the characters we do not want to be, perhaps because, in part, we are those characters" (Weinblatt 2011, 27).

To illustrate the potential of the theatre of the oppressor, I will examine two applied drama workshops that were carried out by the Acting Against Conflict project with students at the University of the Witwatersrand. Both workshops made use of Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed strategies to create aesthetic spaces for students to engage with conflicts relating to racial prejudice. For illustrative purposes, I have selected workshops that were undertaken in March 2011 and August, 2012 as part of an ongoing collaboration between the Division of Social Work located in the School of Human and Community Development and the Acting Against Conflict project. Students taking a course on Psychosocial Approaches to Human Rights taught by Linda Smith and Peace Kiguwa were the participants for both workshops. From my email correspondence with Peace Kiguwa, she explained that the course aims to challenge students to think critically about human rights within the broader context of the political struggle for social justice (Kiguwa 2011). To do this, students are exposed to theorists from the critical pedagogy movement such as Frantz Fanon, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal. The workshop was meant to enable the students to not only bridge the gap between theory and practice, but also to act out the "human rights" themselves. Daniel Banks points out that performance interventions can alter participants' perception of previously articulated identities (Banks 2006). What emerges can be the substitution of a re-imagined sense of identity for previously inscribed identities.

Each workshop began with preliminary warm-up games and exercises to allow participants to break away from familiarity and build belief in the fictional world. The project facilitators proceeded to instruct the student participants to create images based on their experiences or observations of racial conflict in South Africa. The process of making the body expressive through images helps to mediate between the self and the other thereby acting as a means of knowing and searching for meaning (Linds and Goulet, 2008). Both workshops ended up with forum theatre performances that I will use to illustrate the need for a theatre of the oppressor. I will focus on two of the sub-themes that emerged from the workshops to show how Theatre of the Oppressed tends to enhance the dual consciousness of the oppressed at the expense of balancing the shared vulnerability of both the oppressor and the oppressed.

#### 4.1 The double consciousness of the oppressed

In his classic work, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Freire shows how the oppressed suffer from an “internalized oppressor complex” that inhibits them from moving towards true freedom. Firstly, the oppressor imposes his/her values on the oppressed, “who internalize his shape and become ambiguous beings ‘housing’ another” (Freire, 1970, 138). In turn the oppressed, having been deprived of access to power, aspires to become more like the oppressor. Rather than strive for liberation, and because they will have internalized the qualities of the oppressor, the oppressed are gripped by the “fear of freedom” and begin to identify with the consciousness of the oppressor. Miguel Morin asserts that an oppressed person who has been promoted to a position of authority often becomes more oppressive than the original oppressor (Morin 2010). The dilemma of the oppressed therefore, lies in having the double consciousness of being themselves and the oppressor at the same time.

Taking examples from the workshop held in March, 2011, students performed a story involving two black children seated on a bench in a chemist shop. The children were queuing for medication when a white woman arrived on the scene. The white woman (Woman 1) orders the children to move to the back of the queue. Two black women enter the shop and one of them asks the two children if they are in the queue. In line with Boal’s anti-model play in forum theatre, the play proceeds to demonstrate how the racial conflict between “whiteness”, represented by Woman 1, and “blackness”, represented by one of the black women (Woman 2), has continued to affect the post-apartheid generation of white and black students in South Africa. The anti-model play dramatizes the politics informing “whiteness” as an ideology of supremacy that advocated for the separation of races during the apartheid period. In contrast, “blackness” was equated with enslavement, exploitation and oppression. As Bernard Magubane has argued, the idea of white superiority and black inferiority has continued to be re-created and actualized in contemporary South Africa (Magubane 2007). Thus the scene illustrates not only the burden of whiteness and blackness but also how the binary opposition of “oppressors” and “oppressed” has been extended into the post-apartheid period.

Using Boal’s spect-acting technique, the facilitators invited the student audience to replace Woman 2, the black woman acting as the oppressed character, in order to change the outcome of the forum scene. The forum intervention would create an aesthetic space for changing the racial

conflict by allowing students to debate and experiment with alternatives. To this end, one black student (Participant 1) came onto the stage to replace the protagonist in a bid to transform the image of “whiteness” displayed by Woman 1 representing the oppressor. The spect-actor’s (Participant 1) intervention was aggressive and violent as follows :

*(Participant goes onto the stage. The facilitator explains to the actors that they’re going to run the scene again. The participant-turned-actor takes the place of the black woman)*

**Woman 1:** I’m sorry to interrupt but I have already told these kids to move back earlier. Ah! Blacks are blacks and they will always be incompetent.

**Participant 1:** What? What do you mean black? Hey, these are kids!

**Woman 1:** Well, in my 27 years of experience in the medical field ...

**Participant 1:** You just stop right there *(she physically approaches Woman 1)*. Who the hell do you think you are? *(pointing and prodding Woman 1’s chest)*. You don’t have the right to say that to me or anyone! In fact just get out of my face *(she continues to push Woman 1)*

**Woman 1:** Excuse me? *(getting flustered and pushing backwards)*

*(Extract from video clip)*

The participant’s intervention clearly exposes the dialogical pretenses of what Ellsworth calls “repressive myths” that appear to be operating within the Theatre of the Oppressed (Ellsworth 1989). The world remains torn between “oppressors” and “oppressed”, “perpetrators” and “victims”, and, in this case, between “whiteness” and “blackness”. The intervention of the black student on behalf of the oppressed could be likened to the resistance of the colonized against Europe’s colonising project. Because colonialism imposed a new order of time through violent conquest, the colonized sought to replace it with violent resistance in order to create their own order of time. As Frantz Fanon argues in *The Wretched of the Earth*, while violence frees the oppressed from their inferiority complex, the perennial dream of the oppressed is, “to become the persecutor” (Fanon 1967,41). Freire adds that as long as the oppressed live in the duality in which to be is to be like the oppressor, the journey towards authentic freedom remains an illusion (Freire 1970).

Likewise, while the black student’s intervention could be likened to an affirmation of his humanity, his aggression reflects an apparent extension of colonial violence. If the ultimate goal of forum theatre is to stimulate a theatrical debate, to turn spectators into protagonists who can change oppression into liberation, the black student’s intervention was a clear negation of dialogue as a process of conscientisation, empowerment and transformation. One wonders how much of such “repressive myths” are